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ASSESSMENT OF UNIL RECTORATE STRATEGIC INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CENTRES (IRCS)

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUALS LEADING THE PROCESS IN STRATEGIC INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CENTRES

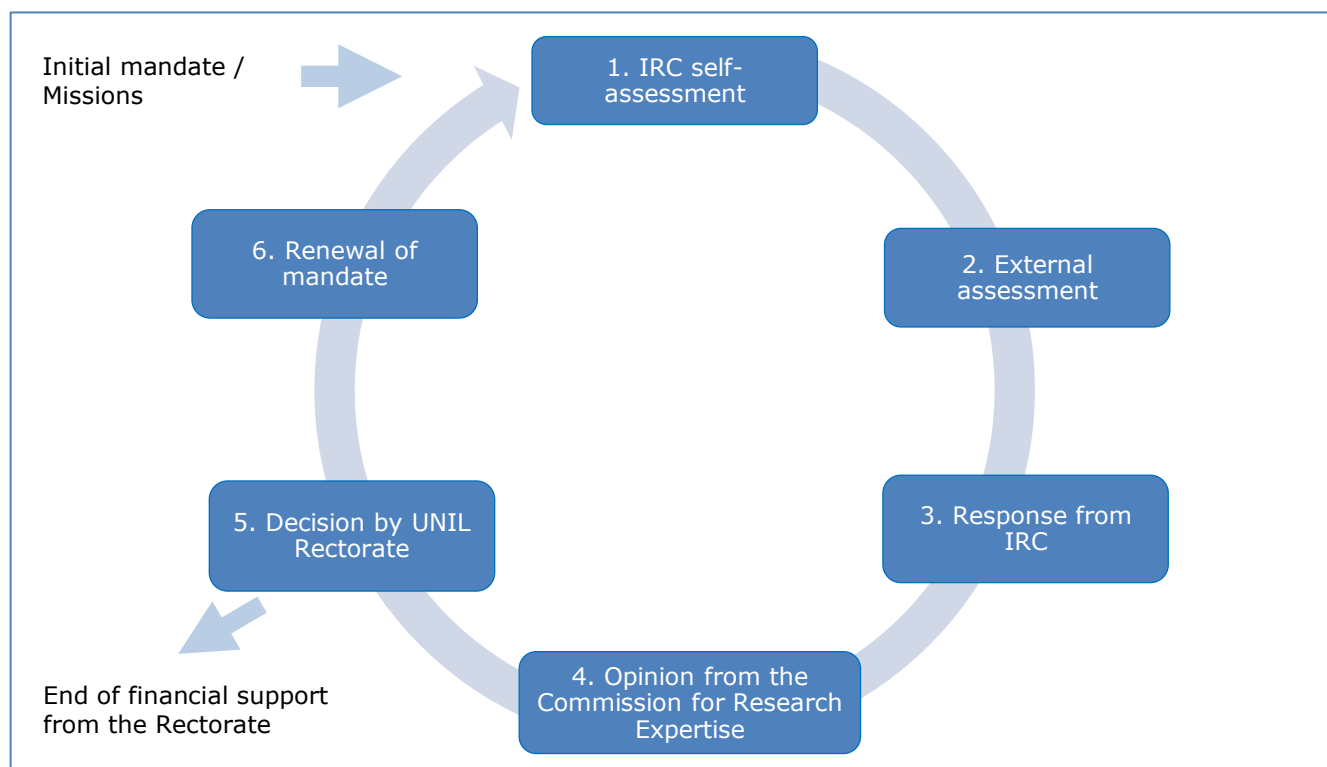
This document sets out the assessment procedure for the UNIL Rectorate's Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Centres (IRCS), including the practical arrangements and timetable.

CONTEXT

- The UNIL Rectorate decided to encourage the creation of IRCS in 2016 and to provide short-term funding.
- By definition, the IRCS are designed to work cross-faculty, bring in key actors from outside UNIL and build relationships with civil society.
- The main objective of the IRCS is to be a focal point for expertise around topical themes of importance to contemporary society and which align with the UNIL Rectorate's statement of intent and the interests of the host Faculty.
- The IRCS are not long-term structures. They receive a mandate from the UNIL Rectorate and funding for a defined period ranging from two to four years.
- They are subject to assessment as they approach the end of this period. This forms the basis for the UNIL Rectorate's decision on any renewal of their mandate.
- The IRC assessment process is in line with the values that underpin all processes that form part of the UNIL Quality Assurance system and is inspired by them (<https://www.unil.ch/culture-qualite/qualite>).



STAGES AND KEY PLAYERS IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS



The assessment process is coordinated and supported by the Quality Unit.

- The self-assessment phase is led by the IRC's Director.
- The external assessment phase is led by two external experts and then by the Commission for Research Expertise (CxR-UNIL).
- The decision to renew the IRC's mandate is taken by the UNIL Rectorate on the basis of the documents produced during the process.
- The renewal phase of the IRC's mandate is coordinated by the Research Department.

ORGANISATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS, COORDINATED BY THE QUALITY UNIT

1. Self-assessment, led by the IRC's Director

1.1. Development of overall review

1.1.1. Identification of all stakeholders

- employees
- partners / representatives
- host Faculty
- strategic advisers or members' meeting

1.1.2. Identification of questions and issues necessary for reviewing the current situation in relation to:

- missions, operation, activities and achievements;

- the added value created by the IRC;
- its alignment with the objectives
 - of the host Faculty,
 - external partners and the interests of society,
 - the UNIL Rectorate statement of intent.

1.1.3. Data collection to respond to questions

Selection of relevant data to consider and key people to include in the self-assessment, as well as the type of consultation.

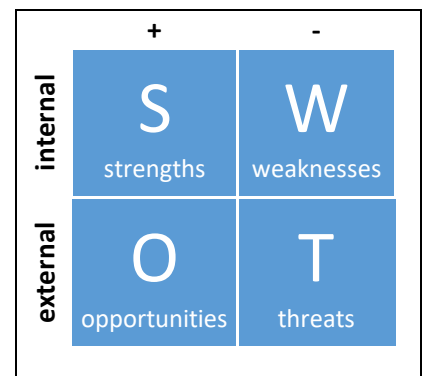
As an example, this section might include aspects of:

- Governance: a review of its organisation and decision-making processes, and how these help to achieve the centre’s missions, with the possibility of tackling certain cross-cutting aspects, etc.
 - Research: collaboration strategy, programmes available, collaborations outside the IRC, general policy on the next generation of academics, etc.
 - Resources: distribution and breakdown of resources, strategy for encouraging project development (seed money), mandates, etc.
 - Communication: distribution of scientific outputs, joint publications, organisation of conferences, workshops or round tables, value generation from research activities, technology and knowledge or skills transfer to the economy and civil society, etc.

1.1.4. Data analysis and initial assessment

Data analysis to produce an initial assessment, which will serve as the basis for a SWOT analysis. This analysis can be overarching or broken down into each aspect identified in the 1.1.3 previous point. More specifically, the IRC will need to answer the following questions for its SWOT analysis:

- What are the IRC’s strengths, successes and sources of satisfaction, and how do they contribute to fulfilling its missions and achieving its objectives?
- What are the IRC’s weaknesses, failures and sources of dissatisfaction, and how do they hinder it from fulfilling its missions and achieving its objectives?
- What are the external factors that could contribute to the IRC’s development, the fulfilment of its missions and the achievement of its objectives (opportunities)?
- What are the external factors that could harm the IRC’s development, the fulfilment of its missions and the achievement of its objectives (threats)?



1.2. Strategic reflection on the period of the next mandate

- Definition of strategic objectives to help consolidate the centre’s main strengths and take advantage of the opportunities identified.
- Definition of strategic objectives that will help minimise the consequences of the weaknesses and threats identified.

- Possible verification of the alignment between the objectives identified and those of the host Faculty and the UNIL Rectorate’s statement of intent.
- Identification of the added value created by the IRC compared with the research conducted elsewhere in UNIL.
- Selection of indicators that can be used to monitor progress towards the establishment of concrete objectives, in terms of both the day-to-day running of activities in the interdisciplinary centre and through its annual reports.
- Identification of actions and resources (human, logistical and financial) that will enable the centre to achieve its objectives.

1.3. Self-assessment report

- The report (maximum 10 pages) should include the points outlined below. Annual reports and any other documents should be attached.
- The report should be written in English for preference, so that it can be read more easily by external experts who do not speak French. As an exception, the report can be written in French, in which case it must be accompanied by an extended summary in English.
- The report is submitted to the Quality Unit, which will forward it to the external experts.

Report plan (10 pages maximum)	
1. Preface by the IRC Director	The Director should describe the organisational arrangements adopted for conducting the self-assessment (e.g. distribution of tasks for data collection and analysis, employee involvement, surveys, etc.)
2. IRC profile	Budget, number of employees, organisation, institutional affiliation, etc.
3. IRC missions and objectives	Description.
4. Activities / services	Description with explicit reference to the interdisciplinary strategy adopted.
5. Achievement indicators	Description and analysis.
6. Overall assessment	SWOT analysis / analyses
7. Outline development plan	Strategic objectives, indicators, actions, resources, timetable.

2. External assessment

2.1. Appointment of external experts

- A list of the names of three expert researchers in the IRC’s field of activity from outside UNIL, with reasons for selecting them, is proposed by the IRC Director to the Quality Unit, which forwards it to the UNIL Rectorate. The UNIL Rectorate, via the Research

Directorate, selects a second person with experience in the field of interdisciplinarity, who will work in partnership with one of the people on the Director's list.

- The Quality Unit sends the experts a contract, which sets out their duties and the remuneration they will receive after submitting their report to the Quality Unit.
- The experts carry out an analysis based on the self-assessment report, which they supplement by holding a meeting with the IRC during a one-day on-site visit.
- The Quality Unit is responsible for organising the experts' stay in Lausanne and covering its costs. The Research Directorate or a member of the UNIL Rectorate should, in principle, be present to welcome or meet the experts during their visit and answer their questions.
- Following their visit, the experts draft a brief joint report, which will be submitted to the Quality Unit.

3. Response from IRC

- The IRC Director has two weeks to respond to the external experts' report in the form of a letter addressed to the Research Directorate and sent to the Quality Unit, which:
 - expresses its view on the content of the report;
 - points out any factual errors;
 - explains why some or all of the experts' recommendations have not been implemented.

4. Opinion from the Commission for Research Expertise

- The self-assessment report, the external experts' report and the IRC's response are sent by the Quality Unit to the CxR-UNIL for a preliminary opinion. In principle, three members of the CxR produce an individual preliminary opinion, which will be discussed in a plenary session. A summary of the discussions and the agreed preliminary opinion of the CxR is sent to the Quality Unit. All the documents are sent to the Research Directorate by the Quality Unit.

5. Decision by UNIL Rectorate

- The UNIL Rectorate and the Dean's offices of the faculties concerned familiarise themselves with all the documentation.
- They then meet with the IRC's Director.
- The UNIL Rectorate then considers all the evidence and decides whether or not to renew its financial support for the IRC.
 - If the Rectorate ends its funding, a letter is sent to the Director of the IRC, with a copy to the Dean's offices of the faculties concerned. If it is interested, a faculty can decide to take on all or some of the IRC's activities.
 - If the UNIL Rectorate decides to renew its financial support, the IRC Director and the Dean's offices of the faculties concerned are informed in writing by the Research Directorate about the arrangements for the extension, including the period of extension of the mandate, its end date and the amount of financial support.
- A copy of the letter confirming the Rectorate's decision to renew support for the IRC, or not, is sent to the Research Department and the Quality Unit.

6. Renewal of mandate

6.1. New mandate

- A new mandate is issued by the Rectorate for up to four years.

6.2. Agreement

- If there is an existing agreement between faculties concerning the IRC, it is renewed after any changes have been made.
- If there is no agreement in place, it will be drawn up and signed by the faculties and institutions involved.
- The IRC and the faculties concerned are responsible for drafting the agreement with the support of the Legal Department and the participation of the Research Department.
- The agreement is sent to the UNIL Rectorate for signature. A copy will be sent to the Research Department and the Quality Unit.

6.3. Development plan

- The IRC produces a full development plan, based on the new mandate and the missions set out in it.
- This is sent to the Research Department for information within the first six months of the new mandate.

6.4. Annual monitoring

- An activity report is sent to the Research Department once a year.
- The Quality Unit informs the Director of the IRC of the timetable for the following assessment a minimum of 12 months before the end of the mandate.

TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Tasks	Responsibility
Coordinates and supports the entire assessment process. Organises a preparatory meeting with the head of the IRC and other people they wish to involve in the process.	Quality Unit
Maintains permanent contact with the IRC outside the assessment phase.	Research Department
Launches the process and ensures it runs smoothly, according to the specific characteristics of the IRC and the expectations of the UNIL Rectorate.	Quality Unit
Approves the list of external experts proposed by the IRC.	UNIL Rectorate
Organises the visit by two external experts.	Quality Unit
Forwards the experts' report to the IRC so that it can respond.	Quality Unit
Then forwards the documentation to the Commission for Research Expertise (CxR-UNIL) for a preliminary opinion.	Quality Unit
Sends all the documentation to the Research Directorate.	Quality Unit

Tasks	Responsibility
<p>Sends all the documentation to the UNIL Rectorate, as well as to the Dean's office of the host Faculty and to the Dean's offices that have signed the agreement setting out the missions and operation of the IRC, if one exists. The documentation includes the self-assessment report with an outline development plan, the experts' report, the IRC's response and the preliminary opinion from the CxR- UNIL.</p>	<p>Research Directorate</p>
<p>Organises an interview between the Director of the IRC, the Deans of the faculties concerned and the UNIL Rectorate.</p>	<p>Research Directorate</p>
<p>During its weekly meeting, the UNIL Rectorate decides whether or not to renew the IRC.</p>	<p>UNIL Rectorate</p>
<p>Informs the IRC and the Dean's offices concerned of the UNIL Rectorate's decision. In the case of renewal, sends a new mandate to the IRC, including any recommendations.</p>	<p>Research Directorate</p>
<p>Produces the new agreement in conjunction with the Legal Department and the other faculties involved.</p>	<p>Host Faculty</p>
<p>Coordinates the establishment of the new phase of the IRC's activity.</p>	<p>Research Department</p>
<p>Receives a copy of the signed agreement, the full development plan and the annual reports.</p>	<p>Research Department</p>

UNIL Rectorate Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Centre

- The person who heads up the IRC is responsible for implementing the assessment process. They:
 - are in charge of the self-assessment phase;
 - ensure that all IRC employees, partners, members of the Strategy Board and representatives of the host Faculty have a chance to express their view at each stage of the process;
 - ensure they also gather the views of external representatives or partners, either by conducting interviews, or by distributing questionnaires or surveys.
 - propose a list of three external experts, with reasons for their selection, in conjunction with employees and partners.
- The person who heads up the IRC is responsible for producing the IRC's response to the external experts' report, in the form of a letter.
- If the IRC is renewed, its leader ensures that the Dean's office of the host Faculty submits a new agreement to the UNIL Rectorate and has it signed by the other faculties or organisations involved.

External assessment

The external experts:

- provide an external, critical view of the content of the self-assessment report and the process followed. Their on-site visit enables them to:
 - ensure that IRC employees have contributed to the discussion,
 - assess whether the strengths and weaknesses highlighted in the self-assessment report are pertinent and reflect the views of IRC employees during the visit,
 - ensure that the outline development plan aligns with the elements identified in the self-assessment and is sufficiently detailed for the plan to be implemented,
- give their view of the relevance of the activities or developments planned by the IRC,
- make any other observations or recommendations that will be useful for the development of the IRC,
- summarise the above in a brief report.

The Commission for Research Expertise (CxR-UNIL):

- reviews the IRC self-assessment report, the experts' report and the IRC's response;
- gives its opinion to the UNIL Rectorate and the Dean's offices of the faculties concerned on the appropriateness of renewing the IRC's mandate on the basis of its integration, added value and development prospects both within the institution and outside.

UNIL Rectorate

The UNIL Rectorate:

- approves the proposed list of experts;
- reviews the documents produced;
- meets the Director of the IRC at the interview organised by the Research Directorate;
- decides whether or not to renew the mandate of the IRC; the Research Directorate then informs the stakeholders involved;
- defines the length of the new mandate, its end date and the amount of short-term support allocated;
- approves the new agreement between the faculties and the institutions involved.

RETROPLANNING FOR THE END-OF-MANDATE ASSESSMENT PRODUCED BY THE QUALITY

Action	Number of months before the end of the current mandate
Decision whether or not to renew the IRC by the UNIL Rectorate	4 months
Meeting between the Rectorate, the Dean's offices concerned and the IRC	4.5 months
Forwarding of the CxR-UNIL's opinion and reports to the Rectorate and the Dean's offices concerned	5 months
CxR-UNIL meeting	5.5 months
IRC's response to the experts' report	6 months
Receipt of experts' report	6.5 months
Experts' visit	7 months
Receipt of self-assessment report by the Quality Unit	7.5 months
Launch of self-assessment procedure	12 months

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