

SFI Centres for Research Training: Governance and Management Guidance

Introduction

Good governance arrangements are essential to ensure best management practices, effective stakeholder engagement and positive outcomes and performance for the Centres for Research Training (CRTs). SFI is providing a guidance for the management and reporting structures of the CRTs, and encourages CRTs to establish governance structures that they see fit for the success of their CRTs. Guided by best practices reported by the CRTs, SFI Research Centres and international models of cohort-based studentships, the governance structure (Figure 1a and 1b) is proposed. This structure centres on the “cohort model”, “external partnership” and “research environment” at the heart of the CRT and illustrates how the various communication channels and areas of governance can be effectively managed. It is envisaged that this guidance will be used along with existing guidelines on best practices and quality assurance of doctoral education in Ireland^{1,2,3}.

Overview of Structures

The proposed structure comprises of the following management bodies:

- i. **Governance Committee:** ensure appropriate governance and management structures are adhered to and support the strategic development and performance of the CRTs. The Governance Committee include representatives from the participating Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), the external partners as well as the student body. SFI mandates presence of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) oversight within this committee.
- ii. **Advisory Board:** as a channel that engages with internal and external stakeholders to provide timely advice to the Governance Committee. While representatives of international expertise, from participating partners and external scientific experts are the expected members of this Board, SFI would also recommend including experts on cohort-based PhD programmes.
- iii. **Executive Management Committee (EMC):** is responsible for the day-to-day management and execution of the CRT’s vision with oversight of the allocations and available resources to the CRT. This would centre on effectively managing the areas of governance and facilitating sharing of best practices within the CRT, either directly by the EMC or through the appointment of sub-committees.
- iv. **Sub-committees:** formed at the discretion of the CRT’s EMC.

A minimum of 30% gender balance is mandated within all management committees. Additionally, with all committee members, steps should be taken to assess and manage conflicts of interests.

¹ https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/04/national_framework_for_doctoral_education_0.pdf

² <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Research%20Degree%20Programmes%20QA%20Guidelines.pdf>

³ <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Ireland%E2%80%99s%20Framework%20of%20Good%20Practice%20Research%20Degree%20Programmes.pdf>

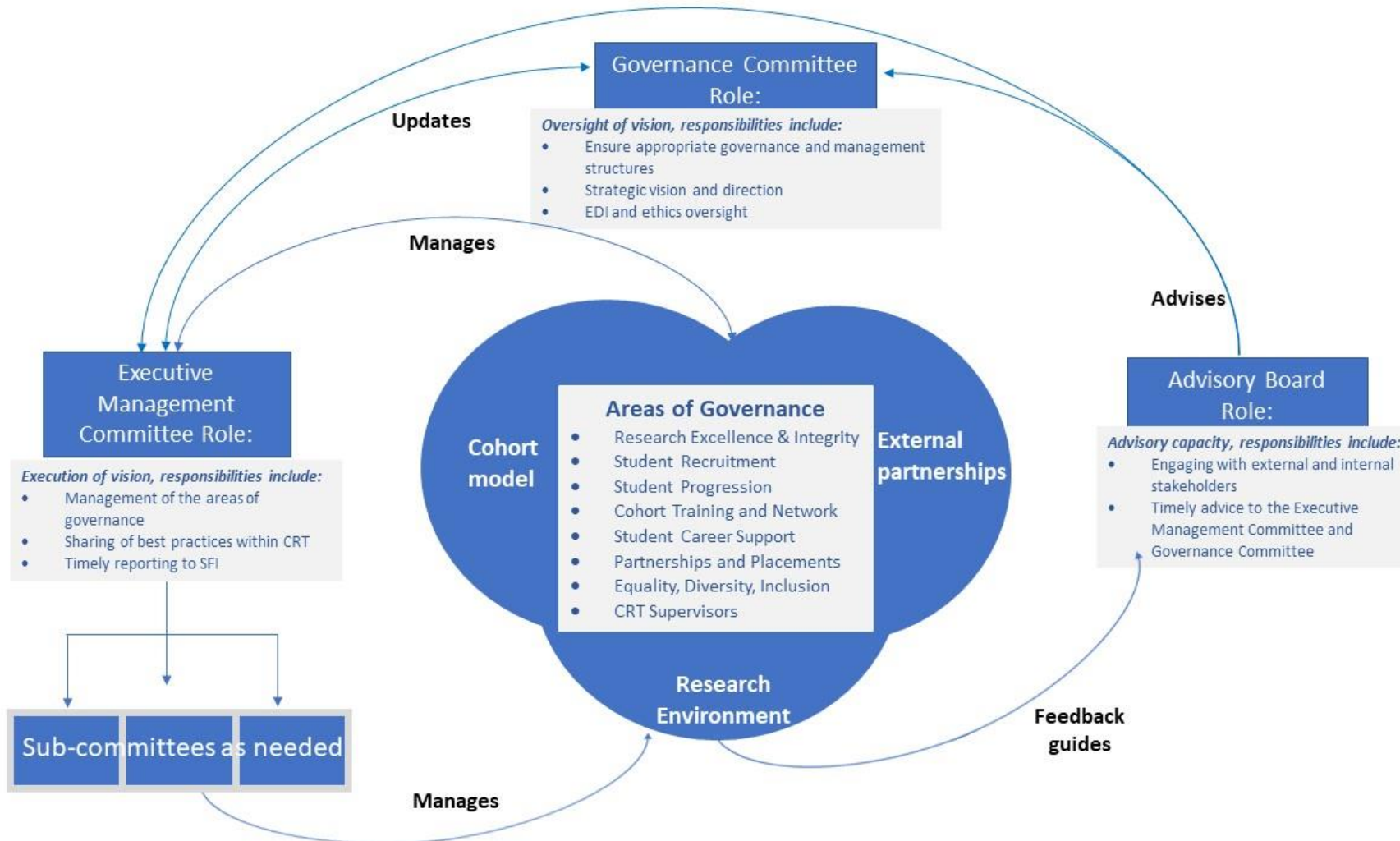


Figure 1a. Schematic of the Governance and Management Structures and their associated responsibilities

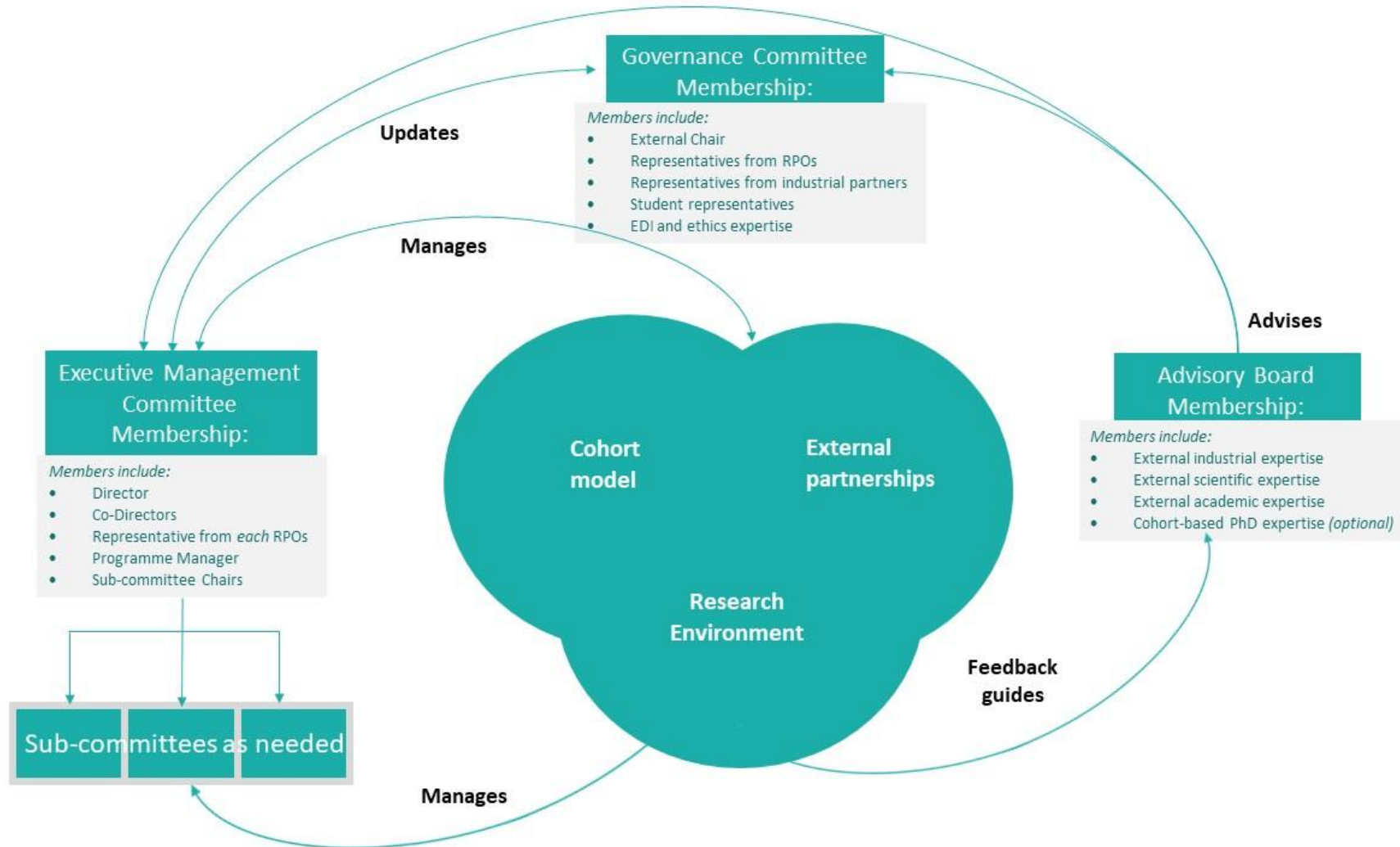


Figure 1b. Schematic of the Governance and Management Structures and the members of each management body

Governance Committee

The Governance Committee is expected to ensure appropriate governance practices are established and adopted, while supporting the strategic vision of the CRT. It is SFI's expectation that the Governance Committee will guide the CRTs to manage risks and to adapt to changing research and industry landscape. The scope of responsibilities for the Governance Committee include:

- Oversight of the vision and mission of the CRT and ensuring the direction of the CRT stays relevant and comparable to international cohort-based PhD programmes;
- Strategic direction of the ongoing research and training at the CRT, taking into account advice from the Advisory Board and guidelines for best practices in doctoral education;
- Strategic direction of external engagements and collaboration, taking into account advice from the Advisory Board and evolving data and ICT environment;
- Ensuring strategies for EDI are in place for the CRT and proactively updated to keep up with current best practices.

Membership and Meetings:

It is SFI's expectation that the Governance Committee would meet at a minimum of twice a year, typically during the first half and second half of the year, to address issues on a timely basis. The Governance Committee would comprise of a maximum of ten members, that include representatives of those most closely involved and intrinsic to the CRT, as well as members external to the CRT and the RPOs. These include the following:

- Director of the CRT;
- Representatives of the participating RPOs (ideally the Vice President for Research);
- Representatives of the partner organisations;
- Senior independent figures of international expertise, who are external to the CRT;
- Student representative(s) at the Governance Committee is encouraged to promote an inclusive community where students participate actively. The process of selecting the student representative(s) should be at the discretion of the students through an independently managed student body;
- A member to the Governance Committee with expertise and specific responsibility on EDI, to ensure best practices are embedded within the CRT's vision and strategy.

Members of the committee should include a broad range of collective expertise in areas relevant to the CRT's mission, to oversee the strategic development and performance of the CRT. Any changes in the composition of the Governance Committee must be advised in writing to SFI.

Governance Chair

A Governance Chair is responsible for ensuring the Governance Committee meets at a minimum of twice a year and fulfils the responsibilities to the CRT. The Chair will also meet regularly with the CRT Director to assist in driving the implementation of the vision and strategy of the CRT.

The selection of the Governance Chair should be agreed between the CRT Director and RPO President/Provost. Appointment or proposed changes to the chairmanship of the Governance Committee must be requested in writing to SFI for approval, accompanied by the nominated Chair's CV and biography. SFI's Science for Society Directorate will review the nomination and SFI reserves the right to refuse to sanction the appointment of the nominated candidate, should it determine that he/she is inappropriate for the role. SFI expects the nominated Chair to support the CRT by embodying the following:

- Offering independent adjudication, as an external member to the CRT, i.e. non-member of participating RPOs, and partner organisations;
- Being a strong advocate for the CRT, with proficient expertise in the CRT's thematic field;
- Extending and expanding the CRT's academic, scientific and industrial network, nationally and internationally.

Advisory Board

An Advisory Board with members of industry, academic and scientific expertise; however, CRTs may choose to form separate Industry Advisory Board and Scientific Advisory Board. It is at the discretion of the CRT Director and Governance Committee on whether to establish a single all-encompassing Advisory Board, or two separate Advisory Boards that address the scientific and the industrial interests separately.

Membership and Meetings:

Members of the Advisory Board provide the CRT with the collective skills and networks to stay relevant in their respective thematic fields, and comparable to international cohort-based PhD programmes. The CRT Director will, in consultation with the Governance Committee, and in line with the regulations, policies and procedures of the participating RPOs, choose appropriate, internationally recognised experts whose range of expertise spans the activities of the CRT.

The Advisory Board members, who are independent and external to the CRT, may collectively offer subject matter expertise, academic expertise, senior industrial experience, public service and policy experience, and international experience, as the CRT deems fit. Appointing experts of cohort-based PhD in governance and management bodies is highly recommended. This appointment would ideally sit within the Advisory Board, but CRTs may choose to appoint the cohort-based PhD expert within a different management committee.

Executive Management Committee

The Executive Management Committee's (EMC) role is to drive the CRT towards the strategic objectives of the CRT and the strategy agreed with the Governance Committee. The EMC would be an agile and small group of representatives of the CRT who are responsible for overseeing the daily implementation of the CRT's strategy and vision. In their day-to-day management of the CRT, the EMC maintain regular communication with SFI, through the CRT Director or the CRT Programme Manager, and ensure timely submission of SFI Annual Reports, SFI Research Outputs, Financial Reports, Cost-Share Reports and all and any other updates requested by SFI.

The EMC, led by CRT Director, have decision-making authority on the CRT's budget and can propose budgetary changes, following discussions with the VPR (or equivalent) and the respective finance managers at the impacted institution(s). Full cognisance will be given by the CRT Director and EMC to the conditions of the Letter of Offer (LoO) with regards to the level of personnel directly employed to support the CRT and the support provided by overheads through the host institution. This will not preclude SFI's right to relocate the CRT from one host institution to another as necessitated by a change in Directorship.

Membership and Meetings:

The EMC demonstrate flexibility and the ability to meet regularly, often at short notice, to appropriately address critical issues for the successful running of the CRT. Members of the EMC typically include:

- CRT Director;
- CRT Co-Directors;
- Representative from *each* RPO;
- CRT Programme Manager;
- Sub-committee chairs (as the CRT deems fit).

The CRT Director, as the award holder / Lead PI, is accountable to SFI and to the host Research Body for the running and performance of the CRT award, as laid out in the LoO and in line with the SFI Grant General Terms and Conditions⁴.

Scope of Governance:

Key areas of governance and responsibilities of the EMC are identified in Figure 1a, with the expectation that these eight areas of governance are clearly addressed through the oversight of the EMC:

⁴ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/SFI-Board-approved-GTCs-2019.pdf>

- Research Excellence and Integrity;
- Student Recruitment;
- Student Progression;
- Cohort Training and Network;
- Student Career Support;
- Partnerships and Placement;
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI);
- CRT Supervisors.

While the discretion to address six of these areas of governance through a dedicated sub-committee or directly through the EMC is left to the CRT's management, the two aspects below require a dedicated sub-committee:

- EDI oversight through the development of an EDI sub-committee and presence of EDI expertise within the Governance Committee.
- Engagement with CRT supervisors to encourage internal communication and feedback through a Supervisors sub-committee that would also facilitate support and development opportunities and the sharing of best practices between supervisors.

Sub-Committees

Sub-committees offer the benefit of amassing specialised knowledge and expertise in an aspect that is of importance to the CRT. EMC have the discretion to form and dissolve committees as deemed necessary to address the areas of governance within their purview. It is the discretion of the EMC to address the identified areas of governance (or additional aspects) directly through the EMC, or through the formation of dedicated sub-committees. It is best practice for the EMC to assess and evaluate their sub-committees regularly to ensure they remain productive and relevant to the mission of the CRT.

Reporting:

The performance of CRTs is monitored through SFI Annual Reports, SFI Research Outputs, Financial Reports, Cost-Share Reports and a range of other updates requested by SFI throughout the year. The reporting from CRTs will include the following aspects:

- CRTs are required to update their Admin Profile on SESAME and submit SFI Research Outputs through SESAME annually, by the deadline communicated by SFI.
- CRTs are required to report annually using the CRT Annual Report template accessible to the CRTs on SESAME, by the deadline communicated by SFI.

- CRTs are required to submit Financial Reports to SFI as requested, by the deadline communicated by SFI.
- CRTs are required to submit Cost-Share Reports to SFI as requested, by the deadline communicated by SFI.
- CRTs are required to report on Collaborative Research Agreements (CRAs) to SFI as requested, by the deadline communicated by SFI.
- CRTs are required to submit ad-hoc reports to SFI as requested, by the deadline communicated by SFI.
- Minutes from bi-annual meetings of the Governance Committee should be compiled and submitted to SFI via email, by the CRT Director. Each submission should be accompanied by a cover letter from the Governance Chair reflecting on the activities of the period.

In addition, the CRTs are required to report on the following aspects:

- Detailed reporting on gender balance, specifically including details on students, active and named supervisors, and all committee and management membership.
- Any changes to appointments within the Governance Committee need to be communicated by writing to SFI.