Education–Research Nexus Course Review Guidance Document

What is the Education–Research Nexus?

The Education–Research Nexus is the connection between learning and research. This is a distinctive feature of higher education programs which should aim to support students to develop 'as participants in research and inquiry, so that they are producers, not just consumers of knowledge' (Healey & Jenkins, 2009, 6). To facilitate this academic staff need to utilise evidence-based approaches to teaching.

At ACU, the term *Education–Research* has been deliberately chosen—rather than *Teaching–Research*—to reflect a broader perspective that encompasses all educational opportunities, not just classroom instruction.

Why is the Education–Research Nexus important?

Integration of the Nexus into curriculum design and teaching promotes the development of students who not only absorb current knowledge but also understand how that knowledge is created, tested, and applied. At ACU, this means students are engaging with the latest evidence, learning through staff who use research-informed teaching methods, and developing skills to critically evaluate and conduct research themselves.

Evidence indicates that embedding research into education increases student motivation and understanding and supports essential graduate capabilities (GC) such as critical thinking, information literacy, and community-mindedness (Visser-Wijnveen et al., 2016). Some studies show that when research is part of learning, students become active participants—developing curiosity, confidence, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to their fields and communities (Brew & Mantai, 2017).

To ensure evidence is integrated into higher education experiences, TEQSA requires that higher education providers demonstrate quality assurance processes that integrate research and teaching to maintain academic standards and ensure student learning outcomes are met. Embedding the nexus within course design and review supports compliance with TEQSA's Higher Education Standards, particularly1.4 that focuses on the development of critical thinking and independent learning, 3.1 that focuses on current research informing curriculum development and 3.2 that focuses on evidence-based teaching.

Why now?

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) has not previously established a shared definition or systematic approach to embedding the Education–Research Nexus into curriculum.

When is the Education–Research Nexus integrated?

The intent is for the Nexus to be embedded throughout course design and teaching practices at ACU. This embedding is systematically considered within the Course Review process. The Nexus is integrated continuously as students progress, enabling them to critically engage with research evidence, use research-informed methods, and develop research skills that enhance their learning experience and outcomes.

This work will need to be completed for all course reviews commencing after 1 September 2025.

The Four Principles of the Education–Research Nexus at ACU

P1. Our curriculum is informed by current and relevant evidence, including research by ACU staff and students.

→ GC1: Discipline Knowledge | GC2: Applied Knowledge

P2. Our staff teach using methods grounded in robust and contemporary evidence.

→ GC1: Discipline Knowledge | GC2: Applied Knowledge | GC3: Learning Autonomy

P3. Our students learn to critically evaluate and use evidence in their academic and professional lives.

→ GC6: Community Mindedness | GC7: Critical Thinking | GC8: Problem Solving

GC9: Information Literacy

P4. Students have the opportunity to learn foundational research skills including designing, conducting and communicating research within a best practice research and ethics framework.

→ GC7: Critical Thinking | GC8: Problem Solving | GC9: Information Literacy |

GC11: Written Communication | GC12: Oral Communication

Benchmarking and Action Items

This unified set of principles enables the university's key learning and teaching stakeholders to work collaboratively towards embedding the Education–Research Nexus across all courses. ACU's performance in this area has been benchmarked against sector standards and peer institutions. The review identified areas for improvement, which informed the development of targeted action items, subsequently endorsed by the university's governance bodies.

One key action item is the integration of the Nexus principles into the course review process. All course reviews are now required to demonstrate—consistently and in a documented manner—how the four principles of the Education–Research Nexus are embedded. This is captured in a new section within CMAS, as outlined below. Embedding the Nexus in course reviews will increase staff awareness, enhance educational practice, and enable targeted support where integration remains limited.

Purpose of the Guidance document

This Guidance document supports academic staff to integrate the Nexus into course review processes and to evidence the integration of the four principles into the reviewed course.

This work will need to be completed for all course reviews commencing after 1 September 2025.

Evidencing the Education-Research integration

There is a new section in Part C- Course Design, Quality and Integrity of CMAS, C4 Education-Research Nexus Integration. The aim of this section is for the recording of the narrative of the course level integration of the Education-Research Nexus. To achieve this narrative, Course Review teams will need to include the Education-Research Nexus as part of regular course review.

Embedding the Nexus into the Course Review

As part of the review process, a Course Review will need to consider how the Education-Research Nexus principles have previously been integrated in the course (during Stage One), identify potential gaps (during Stage One), and take action (during Stage Two) to ensure integration of the principles in the course moving forward. The work of review and improvement can be achieved in different ways, as discussed below and will result in a narrative in CMAS in Section C4 that describes the overall integration and the nexus principles, along with specific examples.

1. CMAS Section C4: Integrating Education-Research Nexus description

Section C4: Education-Research Nexus Integration is a new addition to CMAS Part C Course design, quality and integrity. Completion of this section is a requirement of the course review process. It has been introduced to strengthen alignment between course design and ACU's strategic focus on research-informed teaching and learning. This section provides a concise narrative on how the four core principles of the Education-Research Nexus have been purposefully embedded across the course. The creation of this description will result from the work that is completed during Stage One and Stage Two of the Course Review.

The section contributes to course quality and academic integrity by demonstrating how students progressively engage with research-informed content, evidence-based teaching practices, and opportunities for inquiry, critical evaluation, and ethical research practice. The integration of these principles ensures curriculum relevance, supports graduate capability development, and reflects institutional priorities.

Course teams will need to provide examples for each of the four principles in Section C4, illustrating where and how they are embedded in the course structure, content, teaching and assessments. This guidance document and associated resources is intended to support you in developing this narrative during the course review and development stages. An example has been provided below.

2. Embedding the Nexus in Stage One Course Review

Purpose of Stage One for the Nexus: To identify commendations and make recommendations for Faculty Board and Courses and Academic Quality Committee (CAQC) in relation to the Education-Research Nexus. This is an explorative stage that includes an External Chair Report and an Action Plan, to guide Stage Two. The table below is a guide on where the Nexus might be introduced and discussed in Stage One.

Table 1. *Suggested examples of Stage One integration of Nexus*

Example Course Review Activity	What to Include	Evidence Examples: Aligned to Principle 1 (P1) – Principle 4 (P4)
Course Committee meetings	Incorporate the Nexus as a standing agenda item and a focus of discussion.	Meeting Agenda

Mapping of Nexus Principles	Initial mapping to suggest changes (if required)	Mapping documents
Benchmarking of similar programs	Compare integration of Nexus principles with peer courses.	Benchmarking Reports (P1–P4)
Sub-committees/ working groups	Integrate Nexus in these groups.	Subcommittee minutes or reports (P1–P4)
External Chair Report	Include commentary on Nexus integration and any need for change.	Chair Report Template
Action Plan	Include Nexus-related recommendations, including LO changes	Course Review Action Plan (P1–P4)

3. Embedding the Nexus in Stage Two Course Review

Purpose of Stage Two for the Nexus: To evidence that the Nexus principles are integrated across the CMAS sections can be enhanced as per the table below.

Section C4 is a new addition to CMAS. Course Leaders are encouraged to integrate Nexus principles throughout CMAS to support claims in this section.

Supporting resources: An example has been provided to give guidance on how staff might incorporate the Nexus throughout the various CMAS sections. This example is designed to give staff ideas on how they might address these sections, not all aspects may be relevant to individual courses and it is not exhaustive. See Appendix 1- CMAS C4 description, examples **of** further integration in various other CMAS sections.

CMAS Section	Action	Resource
C4	Description and specific examples of principles integration	See example in this Guidance document (below)
A1 Summary Description	Reference changes made to align with the Nexus	Appendix 1- CMAS examples of integration in various sections other than C4.
B1.1 Reason for Proposal	Include rationale for Nexus-related revisions	Appendix 1
B1.2 Aims of the Course	Reflect Nexus principles	Appendix 1
B2.2 Strategic Alignment	Align with Nexus and institutional priorities	Appendix 1

C1.1 Course Description	Make Nexus explicit	Appendix 1
C2.1 Course Learning Outcomes	Reference Nexus principles	Appendix 1
C3 Graduate Statement	Reference Nexus principles in C3.1-4	

4. Example of Completed C4 Description at Completion of Course Review

C4. Heading: Education-Research Nexus Integration

(description in Section C4 of CMAS)

Please provide a description of how each of the four principles of the education-research nexus has been integrated into the course. Provide explicit examples for each of the four principles. An overview of the Education-Research Nexus can be found here (insert link to guidance document on CEI website).

Example of a C4 description, with specific examples from a course

The Bachelor of Allied Health has been designed to embed the four principles of the Education-Research Nexus across the course structure and student learning journey.

P1. Our curriculum is informed by current and relevant evidence, including research by ACU staff and students → *GC1: Discipline Knowledge* | *GC2: Applied Knowledge*

The curriculum is designed to reflect current and relevant evidence, incorporating contemporary scholarship as well as research conducted by ACU staff and students. This ensures that students gain up-to-date discipline knowledge and can apply that knowledge in practical, real-world contexts.

Specific example of P1: In early-year units, students are introduced to current evidence and case studies, including research led by ACU staff on rural health access. In the *Foundations of Allied Health* and *Health and Society* unit (HLxx101), students engage with current literature and research publications (GC1, GC2), including studies led by ACU staff on rural and regional health service delivery. These examples are embedded in lectures, readings, and assessments, allowing students to build a foundational understanding of the sector's contemporary challenges.

P2. Our staff teach using methods grounded in robust and contemporary evidence → *GC1: Discipline Knowledge* | *GC2: Applied Knowledge* | *GC3: Learning Autonomy*

Teaching practices throughout the course are informed by evidence-based pedagogies, such as problem-based learning and simulation activities, which are used in clinical decision-making units to model real-world application of knowledge.

Specific example of P2: Academic staff in the *Clinical Communication and Decision-Making* unit (HLXX208) use evidence-based strategies such as role play and problem-based scenarios (GC1, GC2). These methods reflect best practice in health education and are supported by research in communication training and clinical judgement. Students are encouraged to reflect

on their performance, set learning goals, and take an active role in managing their development, fostering autonomy in both academic and clinical contexts (GC3).

P3. Our students learn to critically evaluate and use evidence in their academic and professional lives → *GC6: Community Mindedness* | *GC7: Critical Thinking* | *GC8: Problem Solving* | *GC9: Information Literacy*

The course supports students to critically evaluate and apply evidence in both academic and professional contexts, fostering informed and reflective decision-making. Through engagement with real-world scenarios, case studies, and evidence-based assessments, students strengthen

their critical thinking, problem solving, and information literacy skills. This approach also encourages community mindedness, as students learn to consider the broader social and ethical implications of evidence-informed practice in their chosen field.

Specific example of P3: In applied ethics and population health units, students critically evaluate public health data and peer-reviewed research to develop community-based proposals, promoting evidence-informed thinking and community mindedness. In the *Population Health* and *Health Ethics and Advocacy* unit (HLXX204), students review peer-reviewed journal articles, public health reports, and government datasets (GC7, GC9). They use this evidence to develop strategies addressing health inequities in underserved communities, such as mental health support in rural youth populations (GC6). Assessments are designed to strengthen students' ability to source, critique, and apply diverse forms of evidence to propose ethical and effective solutions to real-world problems (GC8).

P4. Students have the opportunity to learn foundational research skills including designing, conducting and communicating research within a best practice research and ethics framework → *GC7: Critical Thinking* | *GC8: Problem Solving* | *GC9: Information Literacy* | *GC11: Written Communication* | *GC12: Oral Communication*

Across the course, students are provided with structured opportunities to develop foundational research skills, including the ability to design, conduct, and communicate research within a best practice research and ethics framework. Through a combination of scaffolded learning activities and assessment tasks, students build competencies in critical thinking, problem solving, and information literacy. These skills are demonstrated through written and oral communication of research findings, ensuring graduates are prepared to engage in ethical, evidence-based inquiry relevant to their professional practice.

Specific example of P4: The capstone unit (HLXX304) offers students the opportunity to design and communicate a small research project aligned with ethical guidelines, allowing them to develop and apply core research skills (P4, *GC7: Critical Thinking* | *GC8: Problem Solving* | *GC9: Information Literacy* | *GC11: Written Communication* | *GC12: Oral Communication*)

Appendix 1 - CMAS examples of integration in various sections other than C4

In achieving the narrative for section C4 in CMAS, it can be helpful to consider integrating nexus information and activities in other sections. This can provide evidence of integration and ensure that the nexus is coherent across a course. Completion of integration throughout these other sections is not a requirement of the course review but is considered good practice and will assist in the development of the narrative for section C4.

A1. Summary Description

Stage One of the Course Review for the *Master of Professional Practice* has been completed. While feedback from the Course Review Committee was largely positive, a number of minor amendments were identified. These have been endorsed by the Course Monitoring Committee, National Head of School, and Faculty Board for implementation in 2026. The proposed revisions include:

- Addressing gaps in Principles across the course.
- Reviewing and refining the number and wording of Course Learning Outcomes to more clearly embed Education–Research Nexus principles.

B1.1. Reason for This Proposal

This proposal is a direct response to recommendations from Phase One of the Course Review for the *Master of Professional Practice*. The resulting action plan outlines the following proposed course enhancements:

- **Improved Course Learning Outcomes**
  Revised learning outcomes will ensure stronger alignment with the Principles particularly those that support advanced knowledge, critical thinking, and professional education skills. The revised outcomes will also explicitly embed the Education–Research Nexus.
- **Updated Unit Learning Outcomes for Selected Units**
  The integration of the four Education–Research Nexus Principles within selected units will enhance coherence between course and unit-level learning expectations.
- **Modified Unit Content**
  Unit content will be updated to align with revised learning outcomes. This ensures students develop the capacity to critically evaluate and apply evidence and acquire research skills suited to both academic and professional contexts. **The Research Skills Development Framework (RSDF)** has been used to guide these revisions.

B1.2. Aims of the Course

Incorporate the Education-Research nexus integration into the Aims. This can be done through the inclusion of a sentence or by adding specific words that identify the nexus and/or the principles. The example below is the latter, with the words bolded.

The Master of Professional Practice program (MPP) is designed to prepare graduates with the comprehensive knowledge and practical skills necessary to deliver high-quality, **evidence-informed** professional education and best practices within their respective fields. It

emphasises the cultivation of culturally safe and respectful professional environments, achieved through effective leadership and communication strategies. Additionally, the MPP fosters the development of graduates' abilities to generate new knowledge through both practice and **research**, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to curriculum design, policy development, and professional innovation.

B2.2. Alignment with Strategic Plan and VC's Strategic Priorities

This course supports ACU's strategic goals by embedding scaffolded opportunities for students to:

- Critically evaluate and apply evidence in both academic and professional contexts.
- Acquire foundational research capabilities, including designing, conducting, and communicating research within a framework of research ethics and best practice.

C1.1. Course Description

Graduates of this course will be prepared to lead interdisciplinary teams and drive innovation in their fields. They will be able to embed evidence-based, ethical research and practice into professional contexts and contribute to shaping the knowledge of professional education.

C2.1. Course Learning Outcomes (Examples)

The nexus can be integrated in Course Learning Outcomes (CLOS). There should be between four and six CLOs. There can be specific learning outcomes that relate to the nexus or specific words can be added that indicate the inclusion of the nexus to LOs. The examples below do both. These are just examples and should be considered in the context of the other CLOs that are required.

Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Locate and critically evaluate scholarly literature using research tools and databases to inform their professional practice.
- Formulate clear, researchable questions using the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- Critically apply a range of research methodologies—including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches—appropriate to the research question and context.
- Graduates will be able to critically evaluate and apply evidence-based approaches to inform professional practice, decision-making, and continuous improvement in health education and service delivery.

References

Brew, A., & Mantai, L. (2017). Academics' perceptions of the challenges and barriers to implementing research-based learning. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 22(5), 551–568.

Healey, M., & Jenkins, A. (2009). *Developing undergraduate research and inquiry*. Higher Education Academy.

Visser-Wijnveen, G. J., van Driel, J. H., van der Rijst, R. M., Verloop, N., & Visser, A. (2016). A questionnaire to capture students' perceptions of research integration in their courses. *Higher Education*, 71(4), 473–488.