Research Institutes, Centres, and Groups Policy

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) This Policy outlines the framework for the establishment, governance, management, review, and disestablishment of Research Institutes, Research Centres, and Research Groups within the University. It aims to foster sustained excellence and innovation in research, enterprise and education.

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(2) This Policy applies to all organisational units and members of the Australian Catholic University (ACU) community involved in the creation, operation, and management of Research Institutes, Research Centres, and Research Groups. It does not cover academies, institutes, centres and other groups whose primary purpose is not research. It encompasses all stages of these entities' lifecycle, from establishment to disestablishment. The Policy outlines differences between Research Groups, Research Centres, and Research Institutes to articulate the expected development pipeline for transitioning between these entities.

Section 3 - Definitions

Entity Definitions

Research Entity	Definition
Research Group	A collection of collaborating and aligned researchers located within a School, Research Institute, or Research Centre focused on an area of research. Research Groups, including named laboratories, have limited formal affiliations for their staff and are focused on research specialisms. While needing to meet academic performance criteria, they have fewer financial obligations and are flexible in their composition to meet the changing demands of their specialisation. A Research Group must enhance capabilities (including HDR) and outputs beyond what would be able to be done through more general networks of individual researchers.
Research Centre	A narrower and generally smaller (relative to Research Institutes; see below) entity, focusing on specialised and / or thematic research, education, and external engagement and impact activities. They will generally include a small cluster of aligned Research Groups. Following any initial (start-up) investment, all Research Centres are required to have a sustainable financial model appropriate to their discipline mix and roadmap / plan, support multiple PhD students, have strategic international, government, community, and / or industry partnerships, and contribute to key areas of the University's research strategy, mission, and Vision 2033. A Research Centre must add value to the University’s research profile and performance in a manner that cannot be met through Research Group level approaches.

Research Entity	Definition
Research Institute	A substantial, specifically interdisciplinary entity engaged in research, education, and enterprise activities, generally including a cluster of leading Research Groups or Research Centres (possibly from a variety of Faculties) allied to delivering the Research Institute's mission. Research Institutes will have strategic external relationships with international and domestic universities, industry, and government partners. Research Institutes will work to maintain sufficient scale and resources to advance their objectives to the highest academic standard in accordance with regularly reviewed KPIs. Research Institutes will generally be Faculty-based. Research Institutes must have a sustainable financial model appropriate to their discipline mix and roadmap / plan, support cohorts of PhD students, and have strong links to international, government, community, and industry partners. A Research Institute must add value to the University's research profile and performance in a manner that cannot be met through less substantial structural approaches (i.e., a Research Centre).
Steering Committee	A group of academic and strategic stakeholders responsible for assuring appropriate governance of a Research Institute (or Research Centre where appropriate), compliance, and guide the strategic direction of the Research Institute.

Position Definitions

Term	Definition
Institute Director	Institute Directors are executive positions as defined in the Delegations of Authority Policy and Register, that lead a Research Institute. They also lead the University's research around strategic themes derived from ACU Mission, Identity and Values and Vision 2033. Institute Directors are responsible for the financial stability and sustainability of the operations of the Research Institute and the sustained performance of Research Groups / Centres within the Research Institute.
Centre Director	Centre Directors are typically established high-performing research active academic staff member (or respected non-academic leader from industry, government, or the For Purpose sector) with leadership skills. Centre Directors are responsible for the financial stability, sustainability of the operations of the Research Centre, alignment of Research Centre activities with ACU Mission, Identity and Values and Vision 2033, and the sustained performance of the Groups in the Research Centre.
Institute / Centre Member	A research active academic staff member performing with a significant profile (relative to opportunity and career stage) in research include a well-rounded profile in areas such as knowledge creation, external income, engagement and impact, teaching-research nexus, and research training within a Research Institute or Research Centre.
Institute / Centre Affiliate	A research active academic staff member who undertakes at least some of their research, teaching, engagement and impact, and research training within a Research Institute or Research Centre.

Entity Summary

Features	Research Group	Research Centre	Research Institute
Size	Small number of academics organised around a common theme and / or specialisation	Small number of academic staff preferably representing multiple Schools and / or Faculties	Moderate number of academic staff across multiple Schools and potentially Faculties
Vision	Innovate in new fields or significantly advance existing areas of research for ACU	Position ACU as a national leader in research and education in the Research Centre's area of focus	Position ACU as a world leader in research and education in the Research Institute's area of focus
Focus Disciplines	At least 1 four-digit FoR	At least 2+ four-digit FoRs	At least 2+ four-digit FoRs
Knowledge creation performance in discipline/s	At least above world standard	At least above world standard	Well-above world standard
External Income performance in discipline/s	> National average performance	Substantially above national average performance	Significantly above national average performance

Features	Research Group	Research Centre	Research Institute
Engagement and Impact Profile	At least local	At least national	International
Focus Area	Research specialisms that contribute to higher-order themes of the University and Vision 2033	Research specialisms that contribute to higher-order themes of the University and Vision 2033	Leads a major theme of the University and Vision 2033
Financial Requirements	Bring in external revenue	Sustainable financial model appropriate to their discipline mix and roadmap / plan	Sustainable financial model appropriate to their discipline mix and roadmap / plan
Governance	Normal School and Faculty governance structures	Existing structures	Steering committee

Section 4 - Policy Statement and Principles

Establishment

(3) Research Centres and Research Institutes are established in accordance with the Delegations of Authority Policy and Register and Statute 2.7 - The Centres, Academies and Research Institutes.

(4) Approval for the creation of a Research Group within a Research Institute, Research Centre, or School in a Faculty must be obtained from the relevant member of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (e.g., the Executive Dean).

(5) Proposals for a new Research Institute or Research Centre must be presented to the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (VCAC). They must align with the ACU Mission, Identity and Values and show significant potential to advance the vision and values outlined in Vision 2033. They must also provide a credible plan for sustainability that includes milestones and KPIs.

(6) Research Institute and Research Centre proposals should include input from critical internal and external stakeholders.

(7) The University will build from identified strengths in creating new Research Groups, Research Centres, and Research Institute.

(8) When considering new Research Groups, existing collaborative networks of high performing (specialised) researchers will be prioritised.

Disestablishment

(9) Research Centres and Research Institute are disestablished according to the Delegations of Authority Policy and Register and Statute 2.7 - The Centres, Academies and Research Institutes.

(10) Research Institutes and Research Centres may be recommended for disestablishment by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) (DVCRE) and relevant Executive Staff member where, for example, performance is found to be unsatisfactory or consistently falls short of agreed KPIs, it no longer meets the strategic objectives of the University, or where the entity is no longer financially viable.

(11) Research Groups may be disestablished by the relevant Executive Dean if they no longer meet the criteria for status, have fulfilled their purpose, or where achievement against KPIs has not been met.

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(12) Arrangements for disestablishment must include the transfer of staff, assets, and commitments. The impact on external research grants and research contracts must be evaluated.

Governance and Management

(13) Each Research Institute and Research Centre must have a Director responsible for its strategic and operational management, appointed in accordance with Statute 2.7.3.

(14) Research Institutes must have a Steering Committee. This body will guide strategic direction, ensuring compliance with governance requirements. The Steering Committee will generally include end-users outside of academia.

(15) Research Centres will have a Steering Committee where deemed appropriate by the relevant VCAC member (e.g., the Executive Dean).

(16) Research Institutes, Research Centres and Research Groups are required to report annually to their Faculty Board (where relevant) and the University Research Committee (URC) on performance against established KPIs.

(17) Entity KPIs are set by the relevant VCAC member in consultation with the Institute Director / Centre Director Associate Dean, Research (ADR), and the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) (ODVCRE). The ODVCRE will provide data to assess performance against KPIs as required.

(18) Research Institutes, Research Centres and Research Groups must demonstrate their performance against agreed KPIs annually in at least the following areas:

a. Knowledge creation (see section 3 Entity Summary for performance expectations);
b. External income (see Section 3 Entity Summary for performance expectations);
c. Research engagement and impact (see Section 3 Entity Summary for performance expectations); and
d. Research training.

(19) For knowledge creation, entities must also report annually on the following:

a. Research Institutes must be able to demonstrate research well-above world standard within at least two 4-digit FOR disciplines;
b. Research Centre must be able to demonstrate research above or well-above world standard within at least two 4-digit FOR disciplines; and
c. Research Group must be able to demonstrate research above or well-above world standard within at least one 4-digit FOR discipline.

(20) Entities must also report on their activities in the teaching-research nexus which may include contributions to curriculum or development of new education products.

Operation of Research Entities

(21) Research Institutes, Research Centre and Research Group must contribute to the University's mission, fostering academic excellence, interdisciplinary engagement, research training, and external partnerships.

(22) A sustainable funding model appropriate to the entity’s discipline mix and roadmap / plan, emphasising diverse income sources is essential. Where relevant, the impact on the Faculty's Operating Budget is to be considered in ensuring a sustainable funding model.

(23) Engaging external stakeholders, including industry and academia, is crucial to enhance research impact and

income generation.

(24) Institute Directors and Centre Directors will have responsibility for appropriate risk monitoring and management within their respective Research Institute or Research Centre. Risks include but are not limited to research ethics and integrity, appropriate workload assignment for research projects, potential foreign interference, and identification of projects that may meet the criteria for foreign arrangements. Management of risks will be made in conjunction with advice from the ODVCRE.

Review and Approval

(25) Formal reviews will be undertaken consistent with the Thematic and Functional Reviews Policy.

Sustainability

(26) Research Centres and Research Institute must have a current research roadmap or planning document valid for 3 years. This must include:

a. A sustainable funding model, with expectations of external income generation (including category mix targets) and strategic financial planning;
b. A staff development and succession plan;
c. Aggregate research activities in related fields into coherent themes, consistent with the ACU Mission, Identity and Values, Vision 2033, and the relevant research strategies of the University;
d. Contributions to teaching, new product development, curriculum development, and the teaching-research nexus;
e. An interdisciplinary, partnership, and engagement and impact plan; and
f. A diversity, equity, and inclusion plan.

(27) The research roadmap / plan must be approved for a 3-year period, by:

a. DVCRE for Research Institutes on endorsement by the relevant VCAC member (e.g., the relevant Executive Dean);
b. Executive Dean for Research Centres on endorsement by the relevant Head of School or Institute Director / Centre Director;
c. Head of School or Institute Director / Centre Director for Research Groups.

(28) The relevant VCAC member (e.g., the relevant Executive Dean) is to ensure that the consolidated lifecycle plans of Research Groups, Research Centres and Research Institutes within their portfolio contribute to sustainability and University KPIs.

Membership Categories

Research Institute / Centre Member

(29) Institute membership status is defined by reporting lines under the direction of an Institute Director;

(30) Members will be actively engaged in attracting external income to the Research Institute / Research Centre consistent with their academic career path and academic level; and

(31) Members are expected to perform (relative to opportunity and career stage) above national average in knowledge creation and at least one of research income, impact and engagement, and research training.

Research Institute / Centre Affiliation

(32) Affiliate status is at the approval of the relevant Executive Dean on endorsement of the relevant Institute Director / Centre Director and the academic staff member's Head of School or equivalent;

(33) Institute / Centre Members of one Research Institute or Research Centre can be affiliates of another Research Institute or Research Centre;

(34) Affiliates undertake at least some of their research activities within the relevant Research Institute or Research Centre and are expected to align this research with the strategy or roadmap of the relevant Research Institute or Research Centre;

(35) Affiliates are expected to contribute to the performance and standing of the relevant Research Institute or Research Centre; and

(36) Research Institutes or Research Centres are responsible for the development of the affiliate's research capability and capacity building, consistent with their success and development strategy.

External Engagement

(37) Research Institutes, Research Centres, and Research Groups should actively engage with external partners to enhance research outcomes, Higher Degree Research programs, research-led teaching, income generation, and societal impact.

Section 5 - Review

(38) In accordance with the Policy Development and Review Policy, this Policy is scheduled for review every five years or more frequently if appropriate.

Section 6 - Roles and Responsibilities

(39) For this Policy:

Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor and President
Governing Authority	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)
Responsible Officer	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Other Relevant Stakeholders	• Executive Deans • Heads of School • End-user groups • International and domestic university partners • External stakeholders • Government Partners

Status and Details

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Responsible Executive	Abid Khan Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)
Responsible Manager	Phil Parker Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Enquiries Contact	Phil Parker Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)