

ACU Position Statement on Engagement and Partnerships

Section 1 - Position

(1) As a mission-driven educational institution in the Catholic tradition, committed to ethical and responsible practice, the Australian Catholic University (ACU) strives to engage in partnerships that support its Mission, Values and Vision (the “ACU values”). Conversely, the University recognises that at times, certain relationships may present moral, ethical, and operational challenges with the potential to compromise its integrity, or which otherwise carry regulatory or reputational risks inconsistent with its risk appetite. In response, ACU has developed this Position Statement (to be read in conjunction with the [Non-Education External Collaboration Policy](#)), with the aim of enabling partnerships that align with its identity and values, and avoiding those that do not.

(2) For the purposes of this document, ‘partnership’ refers to any formalised relationship with an external party (entity or individual), including but not limited to:

- a. Funding arrangements;
- b. Service agreements;
- c. Research agreements
- d. Consultancy or commercial activity;
- e. Academic collaborations;
- f. Strategic partnerships;
- g. Research training partnerships; and
- h. Letters of intent, memorandums of understanding and other, such documents.

(3) In preference to prohibiting partnerships with specific industries or organisations, or relying on a decision-matrix, ACU has chosen to take a principles-based approach. This means that responsible officers, as outlined under the [Delegations of Authority Policy and Register](#) (or other relevant policies / procedures), will have scope to assess potential partnerships on a case-by-case basis, with an emphasis on prudential judgement. ACU has deemed this approach to be fit for purpose, noting it:

- a. ensures flexibility and adaptability (i.e., to changing trends, attitudes and circumstances);
- b. allows for nuanced decision-making and ownership, by relevant stakeholders and subject matter experts;
- c. maximises ACU’s opportunity for partnership while still ensuring partnerships are values-based and mission-supportive;
- d. facilitates alignment with [Statute 13 - Freedom of Speech, Intellectual Freedom and Academic Freedom](#), the [Risk Appetite Statement](#), and other relevant policies and procedures; and
- e. does not unfairly discriminate against any partnerships, i.e., on the basis of potential partners’ associations or past activity.

NB: While this Position Statement may apply to procurement and third-party educational arrangements, it is not intended to supersede established practice in these spaces, as covered under the [Procurement Policy](#) and [Third Party and Educational Partnerships Policy](#), respectively. Further, this Position Statement

does not apply to ACU's receipt and investment of philanthropic funds, or its broader investment strategy, which are covered under the [Endowment Management and Spending Policy](#) and the Treasury Policy, respectively.

Section 2 - Process

(4) In conjunction with the existing review and approval pathways for partnerships, each responsible officer should give consideration to this document, and whether a proposed partnership is consistent with ACU values and interests. Recognising that partnerships can be unique, complex and sensitive, there is no specific framework for this decision-making. Instead, responsible officers should take all relevant considerations into account, including the below-outlined principles, exceptions and heightened risks, as well as any potential benefits, legislation, regulatory frameworks, and additional ethical or reputational issues presented by the specific case. These considerations should be balanced carefully so as to make a well-reasoned judgement, based in experience, common sense and the ACU values. Importantly, while responsible officers will have flexibility to manage this process in accordance with their specific practices or needs, judgements should be procedurally fair, justifiable, documented and transparent.

(5) Additionally, responsible officers should, where relevant and possible, give consideration to the reputations and ethical practices of the University's secondary relationships, i.e., its potential partners' partners. This may include evaluating whether potential partners are engaged with, or invested in, organisations or activities that do not align with ACU values, or otherwise pose a risk to the University's reputation.

(6) Where alignment with this Position Statement is not immediately clear, and a decision on a proposed partnership cannot be reached, responsible officers should escalate the matter in accordance with the [Delegations of Authority Policy and Register](#) (or other relevant policy / procedure).

NB: The alignment of a proposed partnerships with this Position Statement does not remove the need for other, relevant risk and compliance checks, such as financial or foreign interference due diligence.

Section 3 - Principles

(7) Proposed partnerships should be assessed against the following principles, which are adapted from ACU's Mission, Values and Vision:

Pursuit of Knowledge

(8) ACU prioritises partnerships that enhance the acquisition, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge, fostering an environment conducive to intellectual growth and innovation.

Dignity of the Human Person

(9) ACU prioritises partnerships that respect and promote the intrinsic worth and rights of every individual, ensuring that human dignity is preserved and honoured in all endeavours.

Common Good

(10) ACU prioritises partnerships that contribute positively to the well-being and development of society as a whole, promoting justice, solidarity, and sustainable practices for the benefit of all.

Truth

(11) ACU values and promotes the pursuit of truth, honesty and transparency as a foundational principle of its engagements and partnerships, striving to uphold integrity and intellectual rigor in all endeavours.

Excellence

(12) ACU is committed to excellence in teaching, research, and engagement, seeking partnerships that inspire and enable the highest standards of performance, innovation, and achievement.

Service

(13) ACU embraces a culture of service, aiming to enhance the well-being and dignity of others through acts of compassion, empathy, and respect, and with the goal of making a positive impact on society.

Flourishing Lives

(14) ACU prioritises partnerships that enable individuals to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives, providing opportunities for personal growth, health, and happiness.

Fostering Community

(15) ACU prioritises partnerships that empower communities to thrive, fostering social cohesion, inclusion, and sustainable development.

Forging an Ethical Future

(16) ACU prioritises partnerships that uphold high ethical standards, promoting integrity, transparency, and accountability in all actions, to create a future founded on trust and responsibility.

Section 4 - Exceptions

(17) The above-outlined principles-based approach notwithstanding, there are certain situations in which ACU will not, under any circumstances, enter into partnerships. These exceptions are based on legal and regulatory risk and include partnerships that:

- a. are inconsistent with ACU's obligations under the [Modern Slavery Act 2018 \(Cth\)](#) and the ACU 2022 Modern Slavery Statement;
- b. involve bodies or individuals subject to Australian or United Nations Security Council autonomous sanctions regimes, as implemented under the [Autonomous Sanctions Act 2011 \(Cth\)](#) and the [Autonomous Sanctions Regulations 2011 \(Cth\)](#); and
- c. pose unacceptable foreign interference risks, as outlined under the University Foreign Interference Taskforce Guidelines.

Section 5 - Heightened Risks

(18) The above outlined principles-based approach notwithstanding, there are certain partnerships which will naturally present heightened risks, and to which ACU should be particularly sensitive. This includes, but is not limited to:

Human Rights Violators

(19) Serious consideration should be given to partnerships involving organisations implicated in, or suspected of,

human rights violations. Partnering with such entities could contradict the University's values of respect for human dignity and social justice.

Unethical Labour Practices

(20) Serious consideration should be given to partnerships involving organisations implicated in, or suspected of, exploitative labour practices or violations of workers' rights. Partnering with such entities could contradict the University's values of respect for human dignity and social justice.

Misinformation Peddlers

(21) Serious consideration should be given to partnerships with organisations that engage in unscientific or anti-academic practices, or which intentionally promote disinformation. Partnering with such entities could undermine the University's values of truth and academic excellence.

Environmental Violators

(22) Serious consideration should be given to partnerships involving organisations implicated in, or suspected of, environmental violations or unsustainable environmental practices. Partnering with such entities could undermine the University's commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability. Exceptions may be considered where the proposed partnership does not centre on the production or use of pollutants or unsustainable environmental practices, and does not otherwise present significant reputational risk.

Unhealthy Products & Practices

(23) Serious consideration should be given to partnerships with organisations involved in the production or promotion of consumables which are deemed detrimental to human health, such as alcohol, tobacco or 'junk foods'. Partnering with such entities could undermine the University's commitment to promoting health and wellbeing. Exceptions may be considered where the proposed partnership does not centre on the use, production or promotion of these products, and does not otherwise present significant reputational risk.

The Gambling Industry

(24) Serious consideration should be given to partnerships with organisations that facilitate or promote gambling. Partnering with such entities could contradict the University's values of respect for human dignity and promotion of health and happiness. Exceptions may be considered where the proposed partnership does not centre on gambling and does not otherwise present significant reputational risk.

Section 6 - Partnerships with Defence and the Defence Industry

(25) In all of its endeavours, ACU advocates for peace, love and unity. At the same time, the University recognises the necessity for Australia to uphold its interests and protect itself and its allies, including through military means. This includes acknowledgement for the unique roles of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), and other defence and defence industry organisations in safeguarding Australia, promoting security, undertaking aid and humanitarian operations, and supporting the health and welfare of veterans and other defence personnel.

(26) In light of these considerations, the University may selectively engage with defence organisations and industry (both domestic and international), where the proposed partnership is compatible with ACU's interest, identity and values. Moreover, the University is committed to fostering defence-related partnerships that are ethically sound and

which specifically seek to promote its values of human dignity, flourishing and societal wellbeing. This includes, but is not limited to, partnerships involving:

- a. Dual-use goods;
- b. Digital technologies;
- c. Policy and ethical practice;
- d. Health and wellbeing; and
- e. Veterans' transition and support.

(27) Conversely, ACU is mindful of its responsibilities as both an academic and Catholic institution, and will avoid defence-related partnerships that conflict with its values or undermine this standing. This includes, but is not limited to, partnerships involving:

Arms & Weapons Manufacturers

(28) Serious consideration should be given to partnerships with organisations involved in the production or sale of weapons, or other offensive military equipment. Partnering with such entities could undermine the University's commitment to promoting peace and love. Exceptions may be considered where the proposed partnership does not centre on arms manufacturing or use, and does not otherwise present significant reputational risk.

Offensive Capabilities

(29) ACU will not engage in partnerships intended to enhance offensive, military capability, including research, training or consultancy on military strategy and the combat effectiveness of equipment and personnel (e.g., through physical training, bioengineering, genetic modification, surgical manipulation, ideological indoctrination, or psychological conditioning). Partnering with such entities could undermine the University's commitment to human dignity, the common good, and forging an ethical future.

Classified Activities

(30) Defence and defence industry partnerships requiring high levels of classification and secrecy may be inconsistent with ACU's commitment to truth, openness and transparency, and are likely, by their nature, to present other ethical or reputational risks. Such partnerships would need to be assessed on their own merits, to ensure alignment with ACU values and interests.

Section 7 - Associated Policies / Documents:

Internal

- (31) ACU Delegations of Authority Policy & Register
- (32) ACU Endowment Management & Spending Policy
- (33) ACU Non-Education External Collaboration Policy
- (34) ACU Procurement Policy
- (35) ACU Risk Appetite Statement
- (36) ACU Statute 13 (Freedom of Speech & Intellectual Freedom)
- (37) ACU Third-Party and Educational Partnerships Policy

(38) ACU Treasury Policy

(39) ACU 2022 Modern Slavery Statement

External

(40) Australian Veterans' Recognition Act 2019 (Cth),

(41) Autonomous Sanctions Act 2011(Cth)

(42) Autonomous Sanctions Regulations 2011

(43) Defence & Strategic Goods List

(44) Modern Slavery Act 2018 (Cth)

(45) University Foreign Interference Taskforce Guidelines

Section 8 - Glossary

(46) In this Statement, the following terms are used as defined:

| Term | Definition |
|----------------|--|
| Dual-Use Goods | Goods, technologies, software and services that have both civilian and military applications, and which may be subject to export controls, as outlined under the Australian Department of Defence's Defence & Strategic Goods List (DSGL). |
| Veteran | Per the Australian Veterans' Recognition Act 2019 (Cth), a "veteran" is defined as a person who has served or is currently serving in the ADF, including the ADF Reserves. |

Status and Details

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Status | Not Yet Approved |
| Effective Date | To Be Advised |
| Review Date | To Be Advised |
| Approval Authority | |
| Approval Date | To Be Advised |
| Expiry Date | Not Applicable |
| Responsible Executive | Abid Khan Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) |
| Responsible Manager | Sebastian Gimenez Manager, Research Ethics and Integrity |
| Enquiries Contact | Sebastian Gimenez Manager, Research Ethics and Integrity |