Academic Career Pathway Policy

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) Aligned with ACU's mission and Vision 2033, the policy promotes excellence in education, research, scholarship, service, and engagement across the university. The policy supports individual staff's achievements and career trajectory, while ensuring that their contributions align with ACU's strategic ambitions and support a sustainable operating model for the university.

(2) This policy is guided by the following:

a. ACU Mission, Identity and Values;
b. Vision 2033; and
c. ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement 2022-2025.

(3) Other relevant policies and frameworks:

a. Recruitment and Selection Policy;
b. Academic Workload Allocation Policy;
c. Academic Roles and Responsibilities Policy;
d. Progress Plan for Academic Staff Policy; and
e. Delegations of Authority Policy and Register.

Section 2 - Academic Career Pathways

(4) Academic Career Pathways are defined at the university level. They include the following:

a. Teaching and Research – the standard pathway for new appointments;
b. Teaching-focused;
c. Research-focused;
d. Research-only – only available for a fixed term, typically supported by external funding (see Section 7); and
e. Leadership and Service – only assigned for a fixed term, with primary employment typically in career pathway a, b, or c (See Section 7).

Section 3 - Principles

(5) Excellence: ACU values and supports high achievement to ensure that its students learn from leading academics and its research benefits from a culture of excellence.

(6) Integration of Education and Research: ACU is dedicated to maintaining strong and deep connections between education and research. The university is committed to academic staff contributing meaningfully to both areas, in ways that support the student experience.

(7) Sustainability: ACU's academic workforce profile supports the university's operational model, ensuring both economic sustainability and effective succession planning. Flexibility in work arrangements also supports the university's ability to adapt to changing demands in higher education and ensure long-term viability.

(8) Career Trajectories: ACU provides clear academic career pathways that support the strategic goals of the university. These pathways ensure that all academic staff have opportunities to advance their careers and be recognized for their contributions.

(9) Consultation: ACU values staff input. Staff consultation is undertaken, where appropriate, to ensure decisions related to the workforce profile are well-informed and aligned with the university's strategic goals.

Section 4 - Review

(10) In line with the university's Policy Development Policy, this policy is scheduled for review every five years, or more frequently, if appropriate (e.g., to ensure compliance with the ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement).

Section 5 - Section 5 – Further Assistance

(11) For further assistance, please contact the Deputy Provost via the Executive Officer.

Section 6 - Roles and Responsibilities

Approval Authority (approves all new policies and major amendments to reviewed policies)	The Vice-Chancellor and President.
Governing Authority (endorses new policies and major amendments to reviewed policies; approves minor amendments to policy; approves procedures)	The Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) oversees the strategic alignment of this policy with ACU's academic objectives, ensuring it integrates effectively with other policies and supports the university's mission.
Responsible Officer (oversees the development and review of policies and procedures; approves minor amendments to procedures; approves editorial amendments to policies and procedures)	The Deputy Provost is responsible for the framework that supports the implementation of this policy.
Other Relevant Stakeholders	1. Executive Deans – determine the appropriate academic career pathway for new appointments, as per the Delegations of Authority Policy and Register. Executive Deans also handle requests for changes or temporary variations in academic career pathways, making decisions based on the principles in this policy. 2. National Heads of School and Institute/Centre Directors – collaborate with Executive Deans to provide input on appointments and pathway changes. 3. Academic Staff – engage actively with planning processes and consultations regarding their own career pathway and, when consulted, the university's broader workforce profile agenda. 4. People & Capability – supports the implementation of the policy by providing systems for recording, managing, and monitoring data that is relevant to the university's academic staff profile. They ensure compliance with the ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement and facilitate the integration of this policy with related human resource functions.

Section 7 - Schedule 1

7.1 Academic Career Pathways for New Appointments

(12) To support connections between education and research, the Teaching & Research pathway is considered the standard pathway at the point of recruitment. The decision about the pathway for a new appointment; however, is made by the Executive Dean of the Faculty (see Delegations of Authority Policy and Register). Exceptions include Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff who are also enrolled in a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) at ACU. These staff may choose between a Teaching & Research or a Research-focused pathway for the duration of their HDR candidature (See Enterprise Agreement Section (6.2.5.4).

(13) The profile of staff across the career pathways is designed to promote a dynamic and balanced workforce that excels in education, research, scholarship, service, and engagement. ACU views the education-research nexus as critical in delivering excellent education and innovative research. Typical reasons to recruit a staff member on one of the other four pathways are provide below (14).

(14) Other Career Pathways at Point of Recruitment.

a. Teaching-focused: Where the School/Faculty/university is seeking to strengthen links with industry or is establishing a new course with direct links to industry. A Teaching-focused academic with significant industry expertise might be appointed;
b. Research-focused: Where the School/Faculty/university is establishing a new research strength or seeking to further develop an existing strength. A Research-focused academic with relevant expertise might be appointed to support this strategic goal, with pathway designation reviewed regularly in accordance with section 7.2 below;
c. Research-only: New continuing appointments are not made on a Research-only pathway. Where a research-only appointment is required, this can either be a fixed-term position on a Research-only pathway for the duration of an external funding period, or where a continuing appointment is made, it will be on a Teaching & Research or Research-focused pathway, with a fixed-term secondment to a Research-only role. In either instance, the Research-only period of the appointment would typically be externally funded. When the period of external funding ends, the staff member's fixed term employment ends or, if continuing, returns to their underlying pathway (i.e., Teaching & Research or Research-focused pathway); or
d. Leadership & Service: New continuing appointments are not made on a Leadership & Service pathway. Where a new appointment includes significant management responsibilities (e.g., National Head of School or Deputy Head of School; see Academic Staff Roles and Responsibilities Policy) these staff are appointed on a continuing basis to one of the other three primary pathways (Teaching and Research, Teaching focused, Research focused), with a fixed-term secondment to the Leadership & Service pathway. When the staff member is no longer undertaking the management role, they return to their underlying pathway at the time of appointment.

7.2 Changes to Academic Career Pathway

(15) Variations to career pathway are approved by the relevant Executive Dean, considered in consultation with the staff member and the relevant National Head of School or Institute/Centre Director.

(16) A staff member, a National Head of School, or Institute/Centre Director may request consideration of a change in career pathway. The Executive Dean may also initiate consultation about a career pathway change.

(17) The Executive Dean considers requests to change career pathway on a case-by-case basis. The Executive Dean uses evidence to inform their decision based on:

a. The policy principles (Section 3);

b. the strategic and operational needs of the university;
c. the staff members' career aspirations (documented and assessed in their progress plan); and
d. the staff member's track record of relevant achievements (or demonstrated potential to achieve excellence). Track records are considered in light of achievement relative to opportunity (see ARtO Guide).

(18) Unsatisfactory performance does not trigger a change in career pathway. In these cases, supervisors manage performance according to the terms of the ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement 2022-2025 and relevant policy.

7.2.1 Staff Requests for a Change in Career Pathway

(19) The university views Teaching & Research as the typical career pathway for academic staff. A transition from other pathways to the Teaching & Research pathway is not a requirement or an expectation of all staff, but one that some staff might wish to pursue.

(20) Staff seeking to make a transition should:

a. Attend an information session hosted by the Office of the Provost. At least two sessions are held annually (see Academic Workload Allocation portal for details and timing);
b. Work with their supervisor to develop a progress plan that includes an achievable trajectory towards the achievement standards described in relevant university policy/frameworks (e.g., research active definition for staff seeking to transition from a Teaching-focused pathway to a Teaching & Research pathway);
c. Seek National Head of School or Institute/Centre Director input and endorsement of the progress plan; and
d. Seek Executive Dean endorsement of the progress plan. NB: Executive Dean endorsement of a progress plan does not mean that all targets must be met before a transition can be approved, nor does endorsement guarantee that meeting all the targets in the plan will lead to a change in career pathway.

7.3 Temporary Changes to Academic Career Pathways

(21) There are several circumstances in which a temporary change to a career pathway may be suitable.

(22) A decision to temporarily change a career pathway should follow a collaborative process, involving open discussions between the staff member, their National Head of School (or Institute/Centre Director) and the Executive Dean.

(23) University requirements that could justify a temporary change in pathway may include, but are not limited to:

a. establishing or securing a research strength or industry collaboration within a particular area (e.g., a staff member with particular research/industry expertise and achievement could be moved to a Research-focused pathway to help the university establish or secure a strength in this area);
b. responding to opportunities that require coursework offerings to be developed and delivered (e.g., a staff member who has particular teaching/industry expertise in an area that requires development/delivery could be moved to a Teaching-focused pathway to support this work); or
c. ensuring that a staff member has sufficient workload to fulfill external contractual obligations (e.g., research or commercial activities) may warrant a change to a Research Only or Leadership & Service pathway for a limited period.

(24) Staff aspirations or temporary personal circumstances may also provide input into consideration of a temporary pathway change. For example, a continuing staff member on a Teaching-focused pathway who is actively enrolled in a Higher Degree by Research (at ACU or another recognised institution) would typically be temporarily assigned to a Teaching & Research pathway for up to four years of their HDR enrolment (subject to satisfactory progression).

Status and Details

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Effective Date	10th March 2026
Review Date	10th March 2030
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor and President
Approval Date	10th March 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Chris Lonsdale Deputy Provost
Responsible Manager	Chris Lonsdale Deputy Provost
Enquiries Contact	Office of the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

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