



## Book Review

Catriona Cunningham, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

---

Healey, M. (2025) *The Research-Education Nexus: Engaging students in research and inquiry. A report for the University of Westminster*. University of Westminster, UK.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394463281>

### Context

For many years, Mick Healey's website on the 'Research-Teaching nexus' was a place I would direct colleagues – an embarrassment of riches to support colleagues in making sense of the relationship between research and teaching in their context.

The purpose of this latest book – as the title indicates – was twofold. On the one hand it is an internal document for the University of Westminster to inform institutional policy and practice and a tool for academic colleagues to develop their practice. However, it is also a resource for the sector more broadly, acting as a mirror through which we can look back and contemplate the – arguably seismic – shifts and changes that have happened since the previous work compiled in 2009. From this perspective it captures an important piece of our collective history as well as enabling us as institutions and as individuals to explore the complex relationship between research and education.

### What do we see?

---

It is important to note the change in terminology to the term 'Research-Education Nexus' (REN). Healey argues that this term better encapsulates the broader meaning offered by education to include aspects of student experience that are now understood to shape our students' success beyond 'teaching'. Interestingly, we see this reflected in the sector at large with an increasing number of former Learning & Teaching Strategies becoming 'Education and Student Success Strategies'. Language matters.

Other significant differences to highlight include the way in which 'students as researchers' has become part of our institutional cultures as well as the focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as part of the nexus, and even the very definition of 'research' as changing. Of particular interest for this Special Issue is that REN needs to be embedded from the first year so that students see themselves as researchers from the outset of their degrees. Cutting across all of this is a sense that the way we in higher education (HE), and even in society at large, see the creation of knowledge and the increasingly important role that students (as partners) play. For our diverse learners transitioning into HE in different contexts and in different ways, we need to consider how we prepare them for this aspect of their learning.

### How do we embed REN?

---

So, the mirror is a helpful reflective tool but also enables us to look forward. Healey outlines the key features of REN and draws on 65 mini case studies as a way of evidencing what this looks like across our diverse contexts. While the breadth of case studies offers a wonderful snapshot of practice across the country (and beyond), it is also inevitably a more surface view as we cannot see the depth of impact we would get from fewer case studies with greater analysis and exploration. Similarly, although the models around student partnership highlight the range of ways we can embed such an approach in our own context, the sheer volume makes it more difficult for the reader to identify what might be most effective for them.

For me, the most enlightening aspect of this book was realising just how much the role of the students has changed in our universities, which of course changes so much about what we do and how we teach. Similarly, Chapter 5 demonstrates how some universities have embedded REN as a strategic approach, explicit in their curriculum frameworks and across disciplines. Indeed, for Healey, this gets to the heart of why REN is invaluable. He argues that students engaging with REN will lead to better understanding and outcomes, which is a big claim. This is where I would welcome greater evidence of impact.

In conclusion then, Healey's latest book on REN points to a sector that is increasingly student-centred and highlights an approach to learning and teaching where our students are active partners in how we generate and disseminate learning across the disciplines. What remains to be seen, is whether the evidence here alone can convince cash-strapped universities that it is the way to go.

### Biography

*Professor Catriona Cunningham* is Head of the Department of Learning and Teaching Enhancement at Edinburgh Napier University and a JPAAP Editor.