

renewal

FAITH FOR A NEW SEASON ▪ SYNOD 37

Report from Board for Christian Formation

Summary

The Board for Christian Formation (BCF), consistent with its Charter, has redefined its mission, vision, values and operational approach. This process has created a platform to discern that its strategic priorities over the next 18 months are threefold: supporting a culture of discipleship across the Church; leadership development; and equipping and resourcing the four (4) phases of ministry. To fulfil this strategic intent, the Board will be aware of the strategic intent of other Boards and Church entities to coordinate resources and maximise outcomes where strategic intent aligns. Within each of the Board's strategic intents, the approach will be human-centred and co-designed where prototyping and scaling mission and ministry resources are informed by a commitment to evaluation and learning. Furthermore, the intent will be bold, innovative and energised by optimism.

Context

The Board for Christian Formation's role in fulfilling the Church's mission is best described by the Board's Vision and Mission.

Vision

Through the work undertaken by the BCF, the Uniting Church in Australia, QLD Synod is a global leader in providing education and formation for Christian life and ministry. It is celebrated for growing and revitalising churches, agencies, schools and residential colleges, institutions and other missional activities.

Mission

The Board's Mission is expressed via why, how, and what statements.

Why: To inspire and equip everyone within the Queensland Synod to live a life of purpose modelled on the way of Jesus (congregations, agencies, schools and residential colleges, institutions, and other missional activities).

How: By combining best practice theological education, with faith, vocational and spiritual formation, together with commitments to missional innovation, continuous improvement and proactive and evidence-informed decision-making, in order to transform the whole person.

What: Individuals, congregations, agencies, schools and residential colleges, institutions and other missional activities of the Queensland Synod are able to live out their call to discipleship in support of the Church's mission and ministry.

Trinity College

The Board for Christian Formation oversees the operation of Trinity College Queensland (TCQ), ensuring that College activities and programs appropriately equip its students for mission and ministry.

Priorities

Prior to the commencement of 2023, the Board for Christian Formation, in terms of its work, had been in somewhat of a holding pattern waiting for the appointment of a new Board Chair and then filling four other Board vacancies. It is pleasing to report that a Board Chair and new Board members with an appropriate level of knowledge, experience and competencies have been appointed.

During 2023, the Board has focused on redefining its mission, vision and operational approach to equip the Church for mission and ministry. The Board Operational approach is best described using four interrelated elements:

1. **Philosophy of Christian Education and Formation** – The Board’s philosophy of Education and Formation is grounded in the understanding that all education is essentially formative and that all learning inherently shapes us into particular ways of thinking and acting in the world. Thus, the focus of Christian Education and Formation is necessarily on the life and way of Jesus Christ as the head of the church.
2. **Service Delivery Model for Mission and Ministry** – Discipleship and Christian Education; Formation and Vocation; Leadership Program; and Research.
3. **Values** – These are the non-negotiable guiding principles that set the tone for the ways in which the BCF and its agreed initiatives will work. There are five (5) values: Human-centred co-design approach; Intellectually honest; Biblically responsible; Spiritually and emotionally satisfying; and Socially fulfilling.
4. **Practices** – These are the best practice ways of developing and delivering the BCF’s agreed initiatives to equip the Church and its people for mission and ministry. These practices are collaboration, knowledgeable, innovation, high quality, proactive, and compliant.

For further information related to each of these four (4) interrelated practices, please refer to Appendix One. Underpinning the work of the Board is a commitment by its members to operate as a high-performing board (Appendix Two).

Trinity College

Strategies for renewal and growth in TCQ’s numbers over the next 3 years are focused on identifying and targeting new markets for students (in addition to existing UCA congregations). A focus area for recruitment over the coming years will be graduating high school students and RI teachers from Uniting and PMSA schools. Two programs being developed and launched are Trinity’s Activate (gap year) program in 2024 and a new online Grad. Cert. in Christian Education in 2025.

Plentiful focus

The Board for Christian Formation has determined that its strategic focus over the next 18 months will be in the following three (3) areas:

Discipleship Culture: Working within the discipleship framework that is described in the Plentiful Progress report written for the 2023 Synod in Session.

Leadership: Working within the leadership framework that is described in Shared Life, Flourishing Communities progress report that was received by the last Synod in Session.

Four Phases of Ministry: In the first instance, a particular focus will be on the first and third phases of ministry.

Underpinning our strategic work over the next 18 months will be a focus on the following:

- Are we thinking big enough? It is believed that this statement is consistent with the “Renewal” theme of the upcoming Synod in Session. It is believed that if the BCF is going to be impactful, it needs to be bold, innovative, and act with optimism.
- We often overestimate what we can achieve in one year yet underestimate what we can achieve in ten years. Consequently, the 10-year vision is bold, but in an effort to establish momentum the BCF will be asking the following three questions:
 - Where is the low-hanging fruit?
 - What existing work and content can be leveraged?
 - Who can we ideate and prototype with?
- A belief that the impact of the BCF can be measured. Consequently, there will be a commitment to developing a theory of change and related program logic that identifies the correct data to collect and then evaluate to determine if BCF’s work is actually helping people in the Church to live a life of purpose.
- Determining how various Office of the Synod staff can play a role in the development and implementation of each of the Board’s strategic intents. Part of this will mean that the use of Trinity College staff and the functions they currently undertake will be more coordinated with the Office of Synod Staff. The outcome will be a first-for-purpose personnel strategy.

Challenges

While good work is being undertaken by others within the Church that is aligned with the Board’s strategic priorities, the challenge at times has been identifying this work and ensuring that there has been no duplication of effort.

A second challenge is that the strategic priorities of other Church Boards are not clearly understood which then leads to a lack of coordination of how priorities align and resources are best utilised.

In response, the Board in its design and implementation of current and future strategic priorities will first seek to understand what are the strategic focuses of other Boards, Presbyteries and key Committees across the Church. There will also be a quest to determine what activities and initiatives are already occurring as well as identify gaps related to the Board’s strategic focuses.

Trinity College

Australian theological colleges (across all denominations) have struggled with a decline in student numbers since the impact of Covid-19. The past 3 years have seen declining numbers for a variety of reasons, including healthy management of work/life balance; mental health issues; financial strains; and a lower appetite for theological education in light of government incentives focused on STEM research and degrees. Trinity is no exception in experiencing the impact of these sociological shifts.

In the past 18 months, three members of the faculty have also concluded 5-year placements at the college, responding to calls to serve in other parts of the church, both in Australia and overseas. This

has also posed a challenge for sustaining our student services and consistent provision of units and courses.

Proposals to the 37th Synod

It is proposed that the 37th Synod receive this report.

Greener Shoots - possibilities and opportunities

If the BCF strategy is delivered successfully, Board members are confident that its work will support the Church's pursuit of renewal, ensuring that all people within its bounds are equipped to respond confidently to their context in a manner consistent with the ethos of the Church.

While Trinity College student numbers have decreased over the past 3 years, the College has continued to maintain a healthy number of candidates training for ministry, and this is good news for the Uniting Church in Qld.

Contact for report questions

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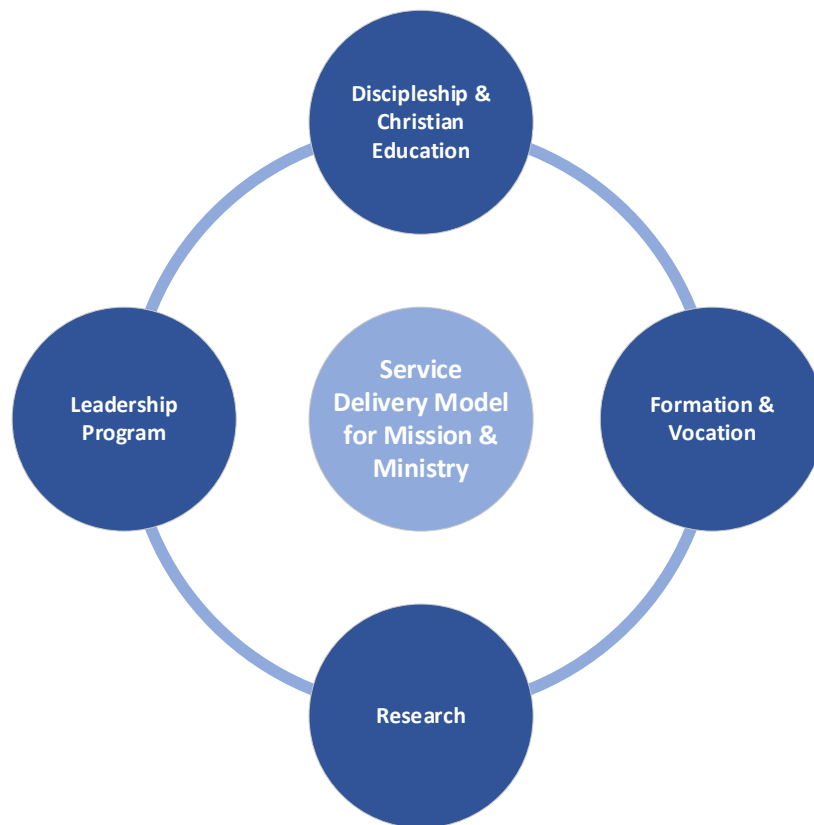
Appendix One – BCF Operational Approach

Philosophy of Christian Education and Formation

The Board’s philosophy of Education and Formation is grounded in the understanding that all education is essentially formative and that all learning inherently shapes us into particular ways of thinking and acting in the world. Thus, the focus of Christian Education and Formation is necessarily on the life and way of Jesus Christ as the head of the church.

Service Delivery Model

The Board’s service delivery model can be described as follows:



Note: Vocation means providing holistic educational, wellbeing and strategic/business resources that support lay and ordained people across the life of the synod, to thrive in their context.

With respect to Discipleship & Christian Education, Leadership Programs, and Formation & Vocation there will be a focus on:

- *Philosophy of education:* Relates to the underlying values and priorities that underpin a particular approach. For example, enquiry-based or play-based learning.
- *Pedagogy of education:* Relates to the art and science of teaching.

- *Curriculum scope*: Relates to the courses that are or will be taught.
- *Curriculum design*: The sequence of curriculum development. For example, moving from an introductory course to a more advanced course.
- *Content acquisition*: Relates to the acquisition of books or digital material, as well as the hiring of adjuncts in areas that are desperately needed, such as Lecturers in family, children and youth ministries to support the delivery of content. This area needs a strong understanding of copyright and moral rights.
- *Content development*: Relates to content developed by the BCF to deliver on BCF strategic intent.
- *Course Delivery*: This relates to the style and pace of content delivery. For example, will the content be delivered over a semester or via an intensive? Will the content be delivered face-to-face, online or via a hybrid approach? Leveraging both Trinity's existing learning management system (LMS)/Moodle system and the Synod's existing learning management system will be critical to content delivery.

Research

Research serves two purposes. First, staff involved in the delivery of BCF strategic intent, are supported to undertake research to satisfy an outcome of biblical responsibility (see the practice framework section below), support staff career development, and maintain compliance with accrediting bodies. Second, it relates to understanding the impact that courses are having in fulfilling the BCF Vision.

Values

Curriculum design, program and course delivery will be undertaken in a manner consistent with the following fundamental values:



Definitions

Human-centred codesign approach: students, prospective students, and lecturers/teachers will be involved in the development of courses. As such, there will be a process of enquiry (to understand what students want), ideation, prototyping and testing. If the test is successful, BCF will seek to go to scale. Underpinning this process is a commitment to continuous improvement where relevant data is collected and evaluated to assist a learning process.

Intellectually honest: curriculum design will be relevant to the context in which the Church and its people engage. Consequently, courses will promote two things – the application of content in the world and reflecting upon their context and how the experience informs “living a life of purpose”. Furthermore, BCF's approach to education thrives on the natural capacity of humans to wonder and be curious about what we do not yet understand.

Biblically responsible: The church's entire mission is driven by a thorough grounding in the biblical narrative and a deep understanding of the Mission of God. We know what to do because we are informed by the biblical story that we inhabit. Contemporary biblical scholarship is fundamental to curriculum design and content acquisition/delivery. Furthermore, the Church's ethos, as described in the foundational documents like the Basis of Union, is integrated into curriculum design.

Spiritually and Emotionally satisfying: The Christian faith comprises a plausibility structure that makes sense of all of life, and this is emotionally sensible and satisfying. Consequently, content creation and course delivery should evoke a level of emotion that engages the student. This is on the basis that if a student is emotionally engaged, their level of learning is far more than when they are emotionally disengaged.

Socially fulfilling: Curriculum design and content delivery are safe, inclusive, and respectful. In addition, it will promote an understanding of and wholesome engagement with social justice.

renewal

Practices

The following practices seek to guide and bring to life the philosophy, service delivery model and values.

Collaboration	Knowledgeable	Innovation	High Quality	Proactive	Compliant
The BCF is committed to an open and responsive approach, where internal and external relationships across the breadth of all synod entities are established and enhanced to fulfil strategic intent.	The BCF is committed to maintaining a contemporary understanding of effective adult education practices delivered across a range of modes and settings.	The BCF is committed to a process of continuous action-reflection improvement to ensure the impact of courses is maximised.	The BCF is committed to high-quality content acquisition/development and course delivery.	The BCF is committed to asking what the Church and its people need to be equipped for mission and ministry, rather than waiting to be told.	The BCF is committed to upholding a strong understanding and application of Church polity and strategic intent as well as maintaining accreditation requirements.

Appendix Two

The Board have committed to operating as a High Performing Board (HPB). Please refer to the diagram below for a summary of the HPB Framework. The Board has also agreed that it will be clear about its strategic intent and related goals in achieving it. There will also be an understanding of who is doing what and when, as well as clarity about what are the lead indicators to achieve each of the core goals to support the Board in being able to report upon progress.

The Board also recognises that the Synod Standing Committee wants the Board for Christian Formation to plan and act in a manner that supports the mission and ministry needs of the whole of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod. Consequently, the Board will set an ambitious, yet relevant and realistic, strategic plan.

