

*renewal*  
SYNOD 37

# Questions on Notice

## Uniting Education Schools and Colleges



The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

You report in a couple of places that UESC has had as a priority the sourcing of high-quality Board/Council Members for the various Boards and Colleges associated with the Synod. Can you expand upon that and explain what the UESC looks for in its Boards and Board Members and how it goes about recruiting such members?

Since 2022, Synod Standing Committee has delegated the appointment of board members at Schools and Colleges to Uniting Education. This is usually a collaborative approach in which the Executive Officer and the Board Chair discuss upcoming vacancies and the particular needs of the school or college stemming from the strategy plan and skills matrix. Often the Board suggests a candidate, however it is just as often that Uniting Education seeks a candidate from internal and external sources. The candidate completes an Expression of Interest and provides their resume or supporting documents. This is reviewed against the needs of the school or college by the Executive Officer/ Operations Manager and suitable candidates are interviewed by two members of Uniting Education; of particular interest are the candidate's faith journey and understanding of the ethos of the Uniting Church. Ideal candidates express a personal faith, and possess both governance experience and skills/ knowledge relevant to the particular school or college. Formal and informal reference checks are completed and a recommendation is put to Uniting Education. Approval is not a rubber stamp; however due to the robustness of the appointment process, a high proportion of recommended candidates are approved.

Uniting Education has developed three online induction modules in conjunction with Learning & Development, together with materials relating to the history, ethos and polity of the Uniting Church. Mr Peter Cranna, Executive Director Strategic Risk and Assurance, also regularly provides an introduction to the Property Trust (Q.) for new staff and appointed board members (where necessary). Candidates and Board Chairs report this induction process to be both informative and valuable.

Further can you assure Members of Synod that the UESC is confident that its Schools and Colleges are in safe and competent hands and that the mission of the Church is being fulfilled through its own Synod Schools and Colleges and also through its affiliated Colleges?

In addition to the robust recruitment and induction processes implemented, there are a variety of assurance methods available to Uniting Education in the exercise of its oversight functions on behalf of the Synod. These include;

- Ongoing board professional development – this year, Uniting Education has offered sessions on a general governance update and cybersecurity;
- Self-reflection – board members coming to the end of the term of appointment participate in self-reflection and re-interview prior to re-appointment;
- Limits on terms – board members are (generally) limited to 3 x 3-year terms (there are some exceptions) to encourage board renewal;
- Reporting and monitoring – subject to the governance structure and individual circumstances, boards report to Uniting Education via a variety of means and frequencies (ranging from monthly to annual). Uniting Education has approved a standard suite of reports (including both performance and support for mission) and these will be implemented in 2024.

Uniting Education is intentional about interacting with schools and colleges, particularly those whose circumstances may be challenged. Whilst this occasionally results in some tension and push-back, individual schools and colleges are reflections of the Church in their place and Uniting Education does not apologise for active oversight when necessary. There have been numerous examples, across both schools and colleges, where this approach has contributed to a turnaround for that particular school or college.

21<sup>st</sup> century regulation and compliance is only becoming more robust and Uniting Education embraces a comprehensive approach to meeting the requirements of both Church and government regulators.

## To what extent would the UESC like to see local Congregations become engaged with the Church's Schools and Colleges?

Uniting Education is extremely supportive of deep relationships in local spaces. This is a perfect example of Life Together and being in community together can be beneficial to both the school/ college and the congregation. Across the Synod, there are numerous examples where schools/ colleges and congregations come together, including;

- School students attending Friday night youth groups/ worship groups run by/ at nearby churches;
- Residents of university colleges regularly worshipping at local churches;
- Churches making use of school spaces and schools making use of church spaces;
- Breakfast clubs;
- Support for each other's mission and charity drives;
- Service learning/ volunteering opportunities;
- Surrogate grandchildren/ grandparents on school grandparents day;
- Congregation offering age-appropriate school holiday programs;
- Students visiting lonely older people during a loneliness epidemic.

Uniting Education is not aware of the specific needs and limitations that may exist in particular locations. One appropriate way to kickstart a relationship that may not exist, or to deepen an existing relationship, is for the Chair of the Church Council or the ministry agent to contact the Principal to discuss what being in community might look like.

The list is truly endless – what opportunities can you imagine?

Can you tell Members of Synod a bit more about the progress of mission in its Residential Colleges. I believe that Members of Synod might like to hear about the remarkable turnaround of Grace College since the last Synod and the successes at Raymont College.

A number of the Residential Colleges - Cromwell, Emmanuel, John Flynn and Kings - have enjoyed stability and full or close to full enrolments in recent years. Raymont College and Grace College have each endured some suffering over the last five years - pre, during and post covid. Enrolments have not been at their previous high levels proving challenging for staff, in some cases limiting opportunities for residents and resulting in facilities that were starting to look tired. Both Colleges have turned the corner.

All colleges report high occupancy levels in 2023, with strong enquiry and application levels for 2024. There are many possible reasons for this including; the loss of community felt by students during online learning in the Covid years, the return of overseas students, and low rental availability, particularly in Brisbane.

The links to the Uniting Church are being strengthened;

- Constitutional reform at Emmanuel College and Grace College has provided for a majority of board members to be Synod appointees;
- Since last Synod, the boards of Cromwell College and Grace College have adopted Ethos Statements which highlights the link to the Church and how the ethos and mission of the Church will be enacted in the College;
- Residents at multiple colleges worship in local congregations; and
- Residents in all colleges participate in a variety of 'good citizen' service initiatives.

The renovation of Grace College over the last two years has been remarkable. Intentional action at all levels of governance has contributed to enrolments returning from a low of 33 residents to 100% occupancy; profitable management which allows considered improvements to infrastructure and the building up of financial reserves. It is early days, but the future looks bright

# *renewal*

**SYNOD 37**



The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD