

# renewal

FAITH FOR A NEW SEASON ▪ SYNOD 37

## Report from Uniting Education Schools and Colleges



## Summary

The National Education Charter, developed in 2002, states that education is at the heart of the Church's understanding and reflects a historic and ongoing commitment to education in all areas of life; a commitment that is demonstrated through support of government education institutions, the establishment of our own schools, colleges and supporting institutions and diverse educational programs for people of all ages. Through the power of education, the Church seeks to shape both personal and community attitudes, behaviours and decisions according to gospel values and traditions.

Having experienced significant turnover in membership since last Synod, Uniting Education Schools and Colleges (UESC), (formerly the Schools and Residential Colleges Commission (SRCC)), has focussed on renewing its membership and bringing all members up to speed with the purpose and functions of the Commission. The Commission has focussed on:

- commencing development of a new strategic plan,
- continuing to source high-quality board/council members for our schools and colleges,
- relationship re-sets with each school and college following the substantial turnover of the commission, and
- constitutional reform, with the aim of bringing clarity and modern governance to the constitutions of schools and colleges.

The developing Uniting Education Schools and Colleges Strategic Plan has sought to link each strategic theme to one or more Plentiful foci through the development of a series of strategic intents. The Strategic Plan is currently being socialised with relevant stakeholders and following this period of consultation, the approval of Synod Standing Committee (SSC) will be sought.

Green shoots include:

- strategies for greater collaboration and Life Together between Schools and Colleges, and the broader Church,
- ongoing constitutional modernisation and governance reform to provide for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. Since 2017, both federal and state governments have demanded a higher standard of compliance from school governing bodies. Uniting Education Schools and Colleges is committed to the development of an assurance framework that equally satisfies the governing rules of the Church, the legislative and compliance obligations of school governing bodies and the missional objectives of the education ministry,
- an education pathway should be developed from Early Years to Employment (and beyond), to reflect the lifelong nature of learning, and
- growth opportunities including within existing Schools and Colleges; the establishment of new feeder early learning centres and schools and colleges as opportunities present; greater alignment between existing and new services to encourage participants to follow the pathway.

## Context

Uniting Education Schools and Colleges is a Synod governing body established by Charter under the Synod By-laws. Its purpose is to assist and advise the SSC in fulfilling its obligations relating to the oversight of schools and residential colleges in which the church has an interest by way of ownership, or power of appointment to relevant boards, or by way of ecumenical collaboration (the Schools and Colleges).

Uniting Education Schools and Colleges is currently the link between the Queensland Synod and the affiliated Schools and Colleges. The Commission seeks to encourage these institutions to fulfil the objects under which they were established and ensure that they remain mission-focused; furthering the mission of Christ in their local contexts.

The Schools and Colleges portfolio includes:

### Property Trust (UCAPTQ) Schools

- Calvary Christian College
- Scots PGC College
- The Lakes College

### Ecumenical Schools

- Emmaus College
- Jubilee Primary School
- Unity College

### Affiliated Schools

- Moreton Bay College
- Moreton Bay Boys' College

### Residential Colleges

- Cromwell College
- Emmanuel College
- Grace College
- King's College
- John Flynn College
- Raymont College (notionally)

### PMSA Schools

- Brisbane Boys' College
- Clayfield College
- Somerville House
- Sunshine Coast Grammar

### The UESC members are currently:

- Mr Nigel Fairbairn (Chair)
- Mr Richard Leo (Deputy Chair)
- Mrs Margaret Goody
- Rev Linda Hanson
- Mrs Tracey Johnson
- Mr Matthew Rollason
- Mr Jon Moriarty (ex-officio)

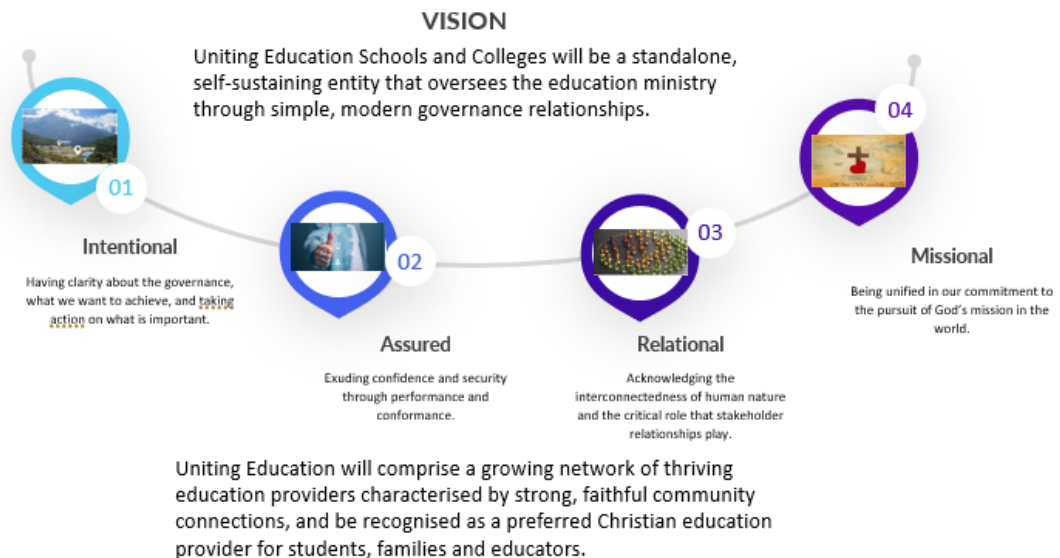
The activities of Uniting Education are supported by Mr Jon Moriarty (Executive Officer) and Ms Gillian Keir (Operations Manager).

## Priorities

Members of Synod may notice that there has been a significant turnover in membership of Uniting Education Schools and Colleges since the last Synod, with all members, bar one, having resigned. Whilst unusual, there are clear and explainable reasons for each occurrence, and it is a natural part of the lifecycle of such a body. Restoration of the membership and bringing all members up to speed with the purpose and functions of Uniting Education Schools and Colleges has been a priority task; which whilst challenging, has also presented the opportunity for the development of a new strategic plan for the portfolio. Renewal also brings new ideas and perspectives.

In fulfilling its purpose, Uniting Education has 15 responsibilities, which have been linked to the developing strategic plan through four (4) key themes, as illustrated in the figure below.

## Uniting Education Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028



The strategic themes have a Plentiful focus, which will be outlined in the next section of this report.

Additional high-priority foci of Uniting Education Schools and Colleges have been as follows:

- Continuing to source high-quality board/council members for our Schools and Colleges. In fulfilling this responsibility, Uniting Education has sought to balance the need for professional skills and abilities aligned to the skills matrix of each entity with candidates that have an understanding and heart for the mission of the Church.
- Relationship re-sets with each school and college following the substantial turnover of the commission. The Chair and Executive Officer or Operations Manager have met with the Chair and Principal of all schools and colleges. Joint strategy sessions have commenced with Commissioners and the Chair and Principal of Calvary Christian College, Scots PGC College and The Lakes College, with plans to continue this on a quarterly basis through the monthly Commission meetings. Similar sessions are planned with the Chairs and Principals of the residential colleges before the end of the year.

- As mentioned in the last report to Synod, constitutional reform, with the aim of bringing clarity and modern governance to the constitutions of schools and colleges continues. Since the last Synod, reform has been undertaken in relation to Calvary Christian College, the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association (PMSA) and Grace College, with work commenced in relation to Scots PGC College, the PMSA (further reforms) and Cromwell College. A particular feature of constitutional reform has been the introduction of Ethos Statements, which link the Objects of the institution and the activities of the Board and Executive to the ethos and spiritual traditions of The Uniting Church in Australia.

## Plentiful focus

The developing Uniting Education Schools and Colleges Strategic Plan has sought to link each strategic theme to one or more Plentiful foci through the development of a series of strategic intents as shown in the tables below. The Strategic Plan is currently being socialised with relevant stakeholders and following this period of consultation, the approval of SSC will be sought. Once the Strategic Plan is agreed, a detailed operational and implementation plan will be developed.

Strategic Theme	Plentiful Focus
<p><b>Intentional:</b> Having clarity about the governance, what we want to achieve, and taking action on what is important.</p>	<p><b>Transforming Communities:</b> We will be active partners in meeting existing and emerging needs and building upon the strengths of the communities and world in which we live.</p> <p><b>Fit for Purpose:</b> Our governance, service delivery and use of assets are shaped to support the missional priorities of our Church, with effectiveness and efficiency as two key markers.</p>
<p><b>Intents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review governance structures, roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders within the portfolio.</li> <li>• Develop and implement a clear plan for strategic growth, incorporate new services, campuses and schools, and enhance revenue sources.</li> <li>• Build a unified and intentional education/training pathway under the UCA brand with a joint commitment to excellence in outcomes.</li> </ul>	

Strategic Theme	Plentiful Focus
<p><b>Assured:</b> Exuding confidence and security through performance and conformance.</p>	<p><b>Fit for Purpose:</b> Our governance, service delivery and use of assets are shaped to support the missional priorities of our Church, with effectiveness and efficiency as two key markers.</p>
<p><b>Intents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an assurance framework encompassing risk management, internal controls and reporting and monitoring that reflects the governance structure of the portfolio.</li> <li>• Ensure the assurance framework is systemised to remove dependency upon any one individual/role.</li> <li>• Review the Board Calendar for Uniting Education annually and communicate to Schools and Colleges.</li> </ul>	

Strategic Theme	Plentiful Focus
<p><b>Relational:</b> Acknowledging the interconnectedness of human nature and the critical role that stakeholder relationships play.</p>	<p><b>Life Together:</b> Across the life of the church we seek closer collaboration to bring God’s gifts to the world.</p> <p><b>Transforming Communities:</b> We will be active partners in meeting existing and emerging needs and building upon the strengths of the communities and world in which we live.</p>
<p><b>Intents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote intentional relationship development to bring Uniting Education and Schools and Colleges closer together.</li> <li>• Build connections across the Synod e.g. Wesley Mission Queensland and UnitingCare Queensland.</li> </ul>	



Strategic Theme	Plentiful Focus
<p><b>Missional:</b> Being unified in our commitment to the pursuit of God’s mission in the world.</p>	<p><b>Discipleship:</b> Foster a renewed discipleship culture within the Church through modelling, educating, training and equipping.</p> <p><b>Transforming Communities:</b> We will be active partners in meeting existing and emerging needs and building upon the strengths of the communities and world in which we live.</p>
<p><b>Intents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a common understanding of what it means to be a UCA School or College, supporting students and residents to ‘grow and develop, learn and live’ in safety, secure in the knowledge that they can progress to their individual potential.</li> <li>• Develop communication and training for School and College staff to develop an understanding of the ethos of the UCA and Synod.</li> <li>• Encourage the provision of service opportunities to enable active participation in mission.</li> <li>• Support Directors of Mission/Chaplains and RE Teachers.</li> </ul>	

## Challenges

Last Synod, this report identified the ongoing impact of Covid on education as a challenge. It is pleasing that 2023 has not (yet) been impacted by Covid in the same way the last few years have. Schools and Colleges have been able to progress the core business of education and look to the future with a confidence and certainty that has been missing over recent years.

This report also identified the following threats to the education ministry:

- The tension between the need for an appropriately resourced Commission to enable a strategic approach to mission and growth, compliance with both federal and state regulations, oversight of our schools and the desire to ensure that the schools continue to build their strong local presence,
- Balancing the funding needs of the Commission and Synod office to meet the ongoing accreditation and compliance costs of the education mission, without negatively impacting the operations of Schools and Colleges,
- Reliance on government funding within our UCAPTQ schools to keep school fees affordable for families,
- Growth limitations as existing infrastructure reaches capacity or needs replacing and the prohibitive cost of establishing new building works and schools, and
- Identifying suitable board/council members for our Schools and Colleges from across the Church, including balancing skills matrix needs with an understanding of the ethos of the Uniting Church.

Whilst these challenges have been somewhat mitigated through proactive risk management, none have been totally resolved or removed. As such, risk management remains a key focus of the Commission.

Further, a new challenge has emerged within school-based education, and this is the provision/retention of quality teaching staff, particularly in technical subject areas. Whilst schools are specifically responsible for employment within their contexts, Uniting Education and Synod staff have given attention to the recognition of long-standing staff as a retention strategy and the development of deeper relationships with higher education providers as an attraction strategy.

## Proposals to the 37th Synod

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

## Greener Shoots - possibilities and opportunities

The National Education Charter, developed in 2002, states that education is at the heart of the Church's understanding and reflects a historic and ongoing commitment to education in all areas of life; a commitment that is demonstrated through support of government education institutions, the establishment of our own schools, colleges and supporting institutions and diverse educational programs for people of all ages. Through the power of education, the Church seeks to shape both personal and community attitudes, behaviours and decisions according to gospel values and traditions.

Several opportunities have progressed since the last report to Synod. These include:

- Strategies for greater collaboration and Life Together between Schools and Colleges and the broader Church. Earlier in this report, Uniting Education Schools and Colleges has outlined strategies to develop closer working relationships with Schools and Colleges, but also across the Synod. To some extent, these opportunities at a local level will depend upon the local relationships and contexts, however, Uniting Education is committed to an intentional approach to relationship development.
- Ongoing constitutional modernisation and governance reform to provide for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. Completed and active constitutional reform has been outlined in an earlier section of this report. Since 2017, both federal and state governments have demanded a higher standard of compliance from school governing bodies. Uniting Education Schools and Colleges is committed to the development of an assurance framework that equally satisfies the governing rules of the Church, the legislative and compliance obligations of school governing bodies and the missional objectives of the education ministry. Both Uniting Education Schools and Colleges and individual schools and colleges have responded to the Governance Research Brief Report prepared by Elizabeth Jameson. The Synod should note that Uniting Education Schools and Colleges has proposed an operating model, whereas the boards/councils of Calvary Christian College, Scots PGC College and The Lakes College have expressed a preference to become individually separately incorporated. Whilst Uniting Education Schools and Colleges does not support the separate incorporation of individual schools, both the Commission and school representatives perceive this discussion to be a



generational opportunity to consider re-framing Synod's delivery of the education ministry towards 'best practice' to:

- preserve the use of Church assets for the benefit of the whole church,
  - comply with federal and state legislative and regulatory requirements, and
  - support the mission of the Church in society.
- Developing an integrated education pathway from Early Years to Tertiary – a principle of the Education Charter is that education is a lifelong journey by which all people develop an ability to participate in society and lead lives that are life sharing and life creating. In subsequent work undertaken by the Synod office and Uniting Education Schools and Colleges, there is a recognition that the education pathway should be developed from Early Years to Employment (and beyond) to reflect the lifelong nature of learning. In this regard, Uniting Education Schools and Colleges has instigated a business case to consider the establishment of a 'training organisation' for people within the Church which would provide a platform for the development and delivery of:
    - Accredited certificate courses,
    - Accredited short courses/micro-credentials, and
    - Non-accredited short courses.

At the time of writing this report, the business case is still in its infancy.

- Growth opportunities including within existing Schools and Colleges; the establishment of new feeder early learning centres and schools and colleges as opportunities present; greater alignment between existing and new services to encourage participants to follow the pathway.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges and opportunities that changing societal and education paradigms present, Uniting Education Schools and Colleges encourages the Synod to remain fully committed to the transformative impact of the ministry of education.

## Contact for report questions

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