

# Report for 31st Queensland Synod October 2014



## Report from **Schools Commission**



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### Context:

The Schools Commission is the body established by the Uniting Church (Queensland Synod) to be the link between the church and Uniting Church in Australia-related schools. Its members seek to encourage and support schools to further the mission of Christ in their context.

The Commission is chaired by Rev David MacGregor and comprises Peter Campbell, Mike Millard, Mike Hennessy, Annette Dale and Noela Lister. Greg Adsett was a member until the beginning of 2014.

The Schools Commission currently engages with the following schools:

UCA	PMSA	Ecumenical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lakes College (Mango Hill)</li> <li>• Calvary Christian College (Springwood and Carbrook)</li> <li>• Shalom Christian College (Townsville)</li> <li>• The SCOTS PGC College (Warwick)</li> <li>• Moreton Bay College (Manly West)</li> <li>• Moreton Bay Boys College (Manly)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somerville House (Brisbane)</li> <li>• Brisbane Boys College (Brisbane)</li> <li>• Sunshine Coast Grammar School (Forest Glen)</li> <li>• Clayfield College (Brisbane)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unity College (Caloundra)</li> <li>• Emmaus College (Jimboomba)</li> <li>• Jubilee Primary School (Gaven)</li> </ul>

In practical terms, the Schools Commission also engages with the boards and principals of five of the six residential colleges:

- Grace College (UQ)
- Emmanuel College (UQ)
- Kings College (UQ)
- Cromwell College (UQ)
- John Flynn College (JCU).

Raymont Lodge does not have its own board.

The engagement includes managing 61 board appointments and engaging with 18 principals and six business managers.

The Schools Commission understands its purpose as:

- to serve Uniting Church schools and residential colleges, and our wider church, through sharing information, providing well-researched advice and advocating externally
- to strengthen governance across our portfolio, relationships among affiliates, and the emphasis on mission
- to support the learning and training networks of boards, executive staff and chaplains.

In alignment with *Together on the way, enriching community*, (<http://ucaqld.com.au/about-us/about-the-uniting-church-in-queensland/together-on-the-way-enriching-community/>) our vision for 2014 to 2016 is to develop and maintain sustainable authentic partnerships with schools, residential colleges and the wider church so that together the mission of Christ is furthered.

## Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

### Enabling a demonstrated commitment to the shared Call and Vision

The Schools Commission has developed a Directions Paper 2014–2016 (<http://schoolscommission.ucaqld.com.au/strategic-direction/>) which articulates its vision, purpose, values, focus and then priority actions. This document was prepared so that it was consistent with and used similar language to the *Together on the way* document, for example the values listed are identical and the three focus statements reflect the Synod Priority Directions:

1. engaging in intentional, open connections and partnerships
2. building viable, sustainable governance and management structures and protocols
3. fostering cultures grounded in gospel values.

## Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The Directions Paper will be used to direct and focus the work of the Schools Commission and the executive officer over the next three years. This should ensure that new and continuing projects and activities will remain aligned with Synod priorities.

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## Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

### Promoting a discipline of prayer and spirituality (individual and corporate)

The recently released Ethos Statement for Uniting Church schools in Queensland clearly articulates an expectation that schools will embrace gospel values and embed a Christian culture. It articulates these under the headings of *Modelling the life of Christ* and *Expressing faith: worship, witness and service*. The document can be found on the Schools Commission website <http://schoolscommission.ucaqld.com.au/policies/>. As a church we are served well by the chaplains working in our schools who play a large role in leading a culture of prayer and spirituality.

## Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

One of the commission's priority actions for 2014 is to "embed the Queensland Ethos Statement onto the culture of our schools and colleges". It is intended that this will continue beyond 2014 and become a regular activity of the Executive Officer. Further resources are being developed to supplement the document.

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## Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

### Developing sustainable mission orientated organisation (way of being) for the Church in Queensland

#### Governance

The Schools Commission has continued to employ rigorous processes regarding the appointment and evaluation of school and residential college board/council members. The process of re-appointment includes board members undertaking a self-reflection on their contribution to the particular board, their understanding of the relationship with the Uniting Church and the professional development they have

undertaken. An interview with two members of the commission follows plus a conversation with the relevant board chair before a recommendation is made.

During 2014, the focus of the commission's work is being informed by the Directions Paper priority actions:

- enacting rigorous recruitment, selection and appointment processes for vacancies in affiliated boards and councils
- improving the corporate governing arrangements across affiliated entities
- implementing school constitutional requirements.

Since the last Synod, 12 new appointments and 13 re-appointments have been processed by the Schools Commission. There are seven existing vacancies and 13 additional members whose terms expire at the end of 2014 and will need to be processed for re-appointment or replaced. Details of these appointments are maintained in a register which allows the commission to keep track of when re-appointments are due.

Another priority since last Synod has been the strengthening of the induction of board members. While there is more work to be done, a start has been made in establishing a framework and conducting induction sessions with boards. Increasingly, board members are attending relevant courses to enhance their understanding of governance issues. Work on this project is being undertaken in consultation with the Assembly Formation Education and Discipleship working group, schools and colleges, Trinity College Queensland and various providers of similar courses.

### **Schools Commission**

The Schools Commission has reviewed the effectiveness of its own structure, composition and operation. It has identified that the current Synod by-laws do not refer to the position of executive officer as ex-officio, nor do they make reference to the residential colleges. The commission has alerted the Governance Nomination and Remuneration Committee (GNRC) to this and a number of other issues and are working with that committee to identify what changes need to be made. To enable greater effectiveness without adding additional members, the commission has determined to operate when necessary with small task groups and to harness external expertise for that purpose.

The Schools Commission has met ten times since the 30th Synod. Papers such as agendas and reports are distributed five to seven days before the meeting and minutes are generally distributed within a week of the meetings.

## **Working towards our Priority Directions in the future**

One of the three focus statements for 2014–2016 is “Building viable, sustainable governance and management structures and protocols”.

In addition to organising networking functions, the commission intends to establish regular meetings for groups of our Uniting Church nominees to school and college boards. The purpose of these meetings will be to ensure board members understand what is expected of them and to identify any issues at an early stage.

The commission will continue to work with GNRC around policies and processes relating to governance.

The commission has been conscious of its own sustainability and the need for good succession planning and has completed preliminary work so that the Synod can progress identifying a replacement for the current Executive Officer early next year.

## Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

### Facilitating renewal of leadership for the mission of the Church

The Schools Commission has been working for some years to produce a document which would assist school leaders to articulate the ethos of the Uniting Church in a school context. This is now complete and is being rolled out with the various boards/councils. A principal's handbook has also been produced to assist new principals to understand the relationship of the schools with the Uniting Church and related matters.

## Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

Advice from schools during the consultation phase indicated that a suite of documents would be helpful; hence the commission is now working on a brochure that can be given to parents. One of the priority actions for the Commission in 2014 is "Embedding the Queensland Ethos Statement into the culture of our schools and colleges".

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## Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

### Engaging in opportunities for intentional, open community connections and partnerships

The most significant partnership developed since the last Synod has been with Calvary Presbytery and Congress as we worked with Shalom Christian College. A special covenanting group which included the Executive Officer met regularly during 2013 and close contact has been maintained with the chair of Calvary. A Presbytery and Congress staff office will be located in one of the houses on the school site from July. All but one of the commission members have now visited Shalom so they have a greater understanding of the issues facing Indigenous students.

The Schools Commission has also been engaging with the Director of Mission UnitingCare to consider how schools might connect with our agencies. Most already have a strong connection with UnitingWorld.

## Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The Schools Commission will continue to facilitate connections between schools and the various community groups as the opportunity arises.

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## Key achievements/initiatives

Four key achievements/initiatives since the last Synod have been:

1. the publication of the Ethos Statement for Uniting Church in Australia-related schools in Queensland
2. the development of a sustainable governance and management model for Shalom Christian College
3. the contribution to the Uniting Church in Australia's response to the Royal Commission on Sexual Abuse of Children
4. induction resources for board members and school staff
5. religious education curriculum framework.

## 1. Ethos Statement

For several years the commission has been working to produce a document articulating the ethos of Uniting Church schools for use with board members and school leaders. This has now been completed and can be found on the commission website <http://schoolscommission.ucaqld.com.au/>. Copies will be available on the Schools Commission display at Synod.

## 2. Shalom Christian College

At the time of the last Synod, Shalom Christian College as part of the Congress Community Development and Education Unit (CCDEU) was under a Deed of Administration. In the time between then and 10 September 2013 when the operation of Shalom Christian College was transferred to the Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Q.), a number of significant matters involved the Schools Commission and Executive Officer:

- appointment of a new principal, Chris England
- checking of staff terms and conditions ready for transfer
- educational matters relating to the college
- liaison with the administrators
- appointment and induction of the board
- application for public benevolent institution (PBI) status
- liaison with educational authorities.

Since September 2013 the new board, chaired by Mike Millard, has met monthly. The board of seven includes three indigenous members and is advised by Rev Dennis Corowa who attends all board meetings. In addition to the chair, current members of the board are Rev Bruce Cornish, Professor Yvonne Cadet-James, Rev Richard Wallace, Judith Geary, Emmakita Geia and Elaine Rae.

During 2014, the major issues being addressed are:

- the development of a strategic plan for the college as a whole and for the Crystal Creek campus in particular
- signing off on a new Enterprise Agreement
- cyclical review as required by the Non-state Schools Accreditation Board
- monitoring of enrolments and finances of the college.

The college has maintained enrolments of between 270 and 300, with just over one half from the local area and the remainder from remote communities. The workforce has remained stable and the facilities have been well maintained.

The curriculum offered to the students and the quality of pastoral and health care continue to produce excellent outcomes and there have been a number of very significant achievements by the students.

More information on the exciting things happening at the college can be found on the school website <http://www.shalomcollege.qld.edu.au/>

## 3. Royal Commission on Sexual Abuse of Children

The Schools Commission through its chair and Executive Officer has continued to contribute to the Synod Task Group and through the Executive Officer to the National Task Group. In addition, the commission has kept itself abreast of issues raised in the public hearings and their potential impact on school policies or operations and communicated any insights to school leaders and boards. As well as being prepared to present at a future hearing if required, it has been important for us to understand how current policies and operations might be improved.



#### **4. Induction materials**

The Schools Commission has been working with staff from Trinity College Queensland to develop an online package that can be used for inducting school staff into the ethos of the Uniting Church. This project gained impetus with the establishment of the new Assembly Working Group: Formation, Education and Discipleship with Neil Thorpe and Elaine Rae being members and charged with overseeing a task group relating to schools. By the time of Synod in Session, trials of the first course will be completed.

In addition, a framework for a comprehensive induction program for board members has been developed. It is hoped that funding might become available to develop the modules during early 2015.

#### **5. RE Curriculum**

The Schools Commission is working with the Assembly Formation Education and Discipleship working group to explore a framework for religious education curriculum in Uniting Church schools. This work is in its infancy but good progress is being made thanks to assistance from Judy Harris at Moreton Bay College.

## Challenges/risks as we progress:

1. Ensuring good succession planning for the boards, the Schools Commission and for the Executive Officer role.

It is our experience that some school boards completely turn over within six to seven years. This means that we continually have to be conscious of who might fill those roles. At present there are 61 positions to maintain. The quality of the boards will depend on a continued commitment to engage in a rigorous recruitment, selection, evaluation process even though it is time consuming.

In 2015 there will be a transition from the present Executive Officer to a new person in the role and new relationships will need to be developed.

2. Maintaining and strengthening the links between the church and schools.

Because of the turnover of board members and changes in key leadership positions there is a challenge to maintain the relationship between schools and the church and to maintain a common understanding of the desirable culture and expectations. This will require good resources and sufficient time commitment to deliver good induction and to build relationships.

3. Ensuring that we are compliant with our requirements as an Approved Authority.

New Commonwealth legislation in 2013 has meant that there are additional responsibilities for the Synod in relation to accountability for schools for which the Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Q.) is the legal entity.

4. Monitoring the sustainability of the schools.

Schools are very dependent on enrolment numbers and subsequent government funding. Tardiness in responding to changing circumstances can quickly lead to financial difficulties. There appears to have been a lag time from the global finance crisis and this has negatively affected the enrolment growth of independent schools generally.

## Issues to be addressed:

There is pressure from governments for new schools to be built to accommodate increasing needs. Previous Synods and reports have encouraged exploring developing schools in new areas but there have not been the resources available to progress any action. As a church we need to be clear about whether we wish to participate in this space and what our long-term vision is for our involvement in Uniting Church schools.

The framework for an induction program for school governing bodies is in place but the issue ahead is how we fund the development and delivery of the program.

## Contact for Report questions:

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