



# #realunitingchurch

## Report from

# Schools and Residential Colleges Commission

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## Context

*Together on the Way, Enriching Community 2016* acts as the foundational and overarching document upon which we have established our vision, purpose, focus and values as the Schools and Residential Colleges Commission.

## Purpose

The commission is to lead and support the work of the Uniting Church in Australia affiliated schools and residential colleges to ensure that the Queensland Synod's responsibilities in relation to schools and residential colleges, under Uniting Church regulations, are fulfilled.

Across this portfolio, the commission's goals are:

- To strengthen:
  - governance
  - relationships among affiliates
  - the emphasis on Christian mission.
- To support the learning and training networks of boards, executive staff and chaplains.

## Metrics

The commission, meeting at least six times a year, consists of a chairperson and six members appointed by Synod Standing Committee with the general secretary or their nominee as an ex officio member. To fulfil its obligations it is assisted by a full-time executive officer and 0.4FTE executive assistant.

	Category	Number	Boards	Uniting Church appointed board members	Students
Schools	Trust schools	4	4	36	2342
	Letters Patent	2	1	6	1584
	PMSA	4	1	6	4856
	Ecumenical schools	3	0	0	3370
School totals		13	6	48	12152
Residential colleges		6	5	72	1438
TOTALS		19	11	120	13590

## Highlights

- Over a period of 10 months, sharply reacting to the consequences of hearings in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse:
  - to ensure Shalom Christian College (SCC) compliance with boarding and well-being regulations of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (NSSAB)
  - to monitor the implementation of recommendations from NSSAB and Boarding Australia Reviews at SCC, and
  - to secure collaboration with the State Department of Education and Training in progressing better learning outcomes and boarding processes at SCC.
- Concerning the 11 boards and councils with 120 members:
  - filling vacancies by interviewing, assessing and, if criteria are met, appointing new and continuing members to the boards of schools and residential colleges
  - monitoring the operations of the 11 boards through advice and instruction.
- Finalised:
  - A Safe Schools statement and framework that includes an audit tool for Uniting Church schools.
  - Progressed the Religious Education in Uniting Church Schools Framework for roll-out in 2018.

# Religious Education in Uniting Church Schools – The Framework

*The Framework* is the vehicle through which students in UCA schools are introduced and experience a Christian faith perspective so as to:

- participate in society leading creative and compassionate lives,
- values living within the faith and unity of the broader church
- be a part of God’s mission of reconciling and renewing the whole of creation.

The Schools & Residential Colleges Commission, in collaboration with Trinity Theological College led the development of the *Religious Education in Uniting Church Schools – The Framework*. *The Framework* aims to provide a basis for fostering, in our schools, Christ-centred cultures grounded in gospel values. Delivering religious education through *The Framework* will assist staff and students to connect to the mission of Christ in our schools.

Rather than dictating matters of content, *The Framework* sets out a range of undergirding convictions—a theology of education—for the teaching of religious education. *The Framework* establishes explicit baseline expectations for education about the Christian faith which can be expected from UCA schools. As such, it is primarily addressed to teachers of religious education, chaplains and school governors, although it also will be relevant to parents and other interested parties.

Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.” Mark 10:14

The Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia takes seriously its responsibility to provide avenues for children and young people to encounter the life of the Kingdom of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ.

This RE Framework will offer schools a means by which the riches of the Christian story, as particularly expressed through the Uniting Church, can be accessed by young people. In the midst of the great transitions that western civilisation is now immersed, an understanding of how the Christian tradition can inform and resource our journey is a vital element of the church’s participation in the education of young people.

As young people explore who they are, their world and what their role in it might be, the Church’s prayer is that they might be encouraged and given hope and purpose by encountering the God revealed in the Church’s witness.

# Priority Directions

The intent of the commission:

- To meet the accountability requirements of the Uniting Church in Australia By-laws and to align its strategic posture and commitment with the priorities of the 32rd Synod, namely,
  - Serving youth, children and families.
  - Engaging in intentional, open connections and partnerships with communities.
  - Building viable, sustainable leadership, governance and management structures and protocols.
  - Fostering Christ-centred cultures grounded in gospel values.
  - Connecting students through a revised RE curriculum and service learning programs.
- To advance the priorities and enact the Uniting Church in Australia By-laws. A new Directions Paper for 2016–2018 was formulated by the commission in October 2016 and determined the priority actions as:
  - Strengthening lines of accountability and reporting between schools and colleges and the Uniting Church in Australia.
  - Creating strategic opportunities and directions for the Uniting Church in terms of the provision of resources, services and support by the executive officer.
  - Establishing biannual events and networking opportunities for Uniting Church board appointees, school principals and college heads.
  - Continuing to embed the Queensland Ethos Statement into the culture and operations of Uniting Church schools and colleges.
  - Maintaining rigorous recruitment, selection and appointment processes for vacancies on affiliated boards and councils.
  - Reviewing and approving resources, policy and governance documents to support the work of Uniting Church boards, councils and executive.
  - Developing greater connection between the commission and the associated agencies by encouraging commission members to also serve on schools and college boards.

## Report

### **Key outcomes Priority Direction 1: Serving youth, children and families.**

- Develop a Uniting Church in Australia Safe Schools statement and audit tool to assist compliance with National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF). Throughout 2017 the commission has also updated the Child Protection Policy and Procedures for all Property Trust (Q.) schools and the executive officer attended the No More Harm Conference.
  - The Royal Commission National Task Group (RCNTG) commissioned a review of the Child Safe Framework following the release of the Key Elements of Child Safe Organisations in 2016.
  - The commission oversaw the production of a self-assessment tool for schools and colleges. RCNTG executive officer and the commission executive officer released this document, aligning the Uniting Church Child Safe Framework with key elements of the Child Safe Organisations document as part of a Safe Schools Professional Development session in June 2017 at the Synod office.
  - NSSAB requested a consistency in the wording in the policies of the four Uniting Church Property Trust (Q.) Schools. With the exception of wording over the delegation of governance, this was finalised in June 2017.

- Ensure SCC compliance with boarding and well-being regulations from the Non-State School Accreditation Board (NSSAB) criteria:
  - Following the November 2016 hearing at the Royal Commission, the NSSAB determined to make changes to a number of clauses in the Shalom Christian College Child Protection Policy. These have all been addressed and the updated policy has been approved by NSSAB.
  - The focus of the executive officer's work at SCC during the first half of 2017 achieved the following outcomes:
    - Finalising the memorandum of understanding between SCC and Townsville Aboriginal and Indigenous Health Service (TAIHS).
    - Developing a compliant child protection policy and associated procedures for the college.
    - Developing a process to ensure those dealing with the health and well-being of students at the college and in the boarding environment have or are in the process of gaining the necessary certifications/qualifications.
    - Confirming a set of identifiable procedures and policies through which the health and well-being of students can be attended to, and clearly facilitated associated reporting.
    - Investigating the suitability of local candidates as potential board members by assessing the board's present skills matrix.
    - Assisting the senior management team to develop strategies to lead and communicate the required changes in response to the NSSAB review and the Boarding Australia's review (including changes to improve the well-being and safety of students, staff and the senior management team).
    - Quantifying the capacity of the senior leadership team to undertake future necessary changes recommended.
  - NSSAB assessors revisited the college in May 2017 to further assess the level of compliance with the identified accreditation criteria.
    - They were satisfied that the college is compliant with the criteria for the health, safety and conduct of staff and students as outlined in section 10 of the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2001*.
    - They understand further work is to be carried out to improve the facilities to enable wardrobe, storage and study arrangements for boarding students.
    - They will make a short visit to the college in the latter part of 2017 to monitor the facilities, staffing and implementation of improvement processes for the boarding provision and provide a report to assist the board to determine whether the college is compliant with the accreditation criteria.
- Completed a recruitment and selection process in October 2016 to replace the previous executive officer of the commission with Mark Bensley who commenced duties in January 2017.
- Awarded two Uniting Church bursaries associated with the Indigenous Learning Pathways Grant initiative. This project is now closed.
- Provided advice and support regarding building applications to Block Grant Authority (BGA).
  - The Uniting Church has provided a letter of support for a building application for The Lakes College (TLC) through BGA.
  - The executive officer is working on a paper for the FIP Board in relation to establishing a long-term and sustainable finance strategy that will position TLC as financially independent and to develop a finance framework to give Synod strategic and financial monitoring over the four Property Trust (Q.) schools.

## **Key outcomes Priority Direction 2: Engaging in intentional, open connections and partnerships with communities.**

- Opening connections to senior officers of the State Department of Education and Training (DET).
  - The chairperson and executive officer of the commission attended a meeting with the Deputy-Director General of Education in April 2017 to request special funding, to seek the development of partnerships between EQ schools and SCC and to clarify the legal relationship between Synod and the four Property Trust schools. This resulted in productive discussions with the Assistant-Director General of Education – Indigenous Education in July 2017. The key outcomes being:
    - Staff at Shalom are able to connect to all available resources of DET.
    - Local Assistant Regional Director to meet regularly with the principal of SCC to have conversations around teaching and learning and school improvement.
    - Access to the two academies of Transition Support Services namely, Clontarf Academy for boys and Stars Academy for girls.
- Commencing conversations with Federal Minister Simon Birmingham’s office.
  - While attending the Christian Schools Policy Forum in Canberra in May 2017, the executive officer established a connection and enjoyed a conversation with Education Minister Birmingham. Following the release of the findings from the SCC Business Renewal Strategy (see below) Minister Birmingham will be sent a briefing note similar to that used with officers of the State Department of Education and Training.
- Residential colleges
  - Grace College Council adopted its new constitution at its May 2017 meeting after it received endorsement by Uniting Church in Australia, Presbyterian Church of Queensland (PCQ) and University of Queensland Senate (UQS).
  - Emmanuel College is seeking endorsement from Uniting Church in Australia and PCQ for a new constitution. Highlights of the proposed changes include:
    - updating governance in accord with ACNC<sup>1</sup> and ASIC<sup>2</sup> requirements and ‘Board’ operating procedures
    - reducing the number of board councillor positions (noting that in doing so proportional representation, such as that of the Uniting Church and PCQ, will stay the same)
    - provisioning for a more professional/skills-based board.

## **Key outcomes Priority Direction 3: Building viable, sustainable leadership, governance and management structures and protocols.**

- The commission commissioned Independent Schools of Queensland (ISQ) to run a governance training and induction program with the SCC Board and senior executive staff to re-position board members on a ‘governance’ trajectory.
- Shortlisting, interviewing and recommending to the Synod Standing Committee the appointment of more than 27 applicants to governing bodies of schools and residential colleges.
- Appointed a new executive assistant to the commission in May 2017.
- Providing inputs to the Business Renewal Strategy for SCC initiated by the Synod Standing Committee in February 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Charities and Not-for profit Commission

<sup>2</sup> Australian Securities and Investment Corporation

- Continued roll-out of the Risk Management Framework (RMF).
  - Over the next six months the commission will use the RMF to address two clauses in the new By-laws, namely:
    - Review and assess the risks facing Uniting Church schools and colleges and ensure that techniques, procedures and controls are put in place to eliminate or mitigate any adverse effects on the church or its schools and colleges.
    - To provide advice to the Synod about the risks facing Uniting Church schools and colleges, including their potential impact on the Synod.
- Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association (PMSA):
  - Work needs to continue on the new PMSA Constitution; work commenced in 2015-2016. A draft was prepared, representatives from PMSA, the Presbyterians, and the Uniting Church met a number of times to deal with it. Issues for continued discussion include:
    - Developing the purpose of Christian schools
    - Dealing with conflicts of interest
    - Dealing with limits to terms of appointment
    - Resolving capacity of the churches to initiate changes to the constitution.

**Key outcomes Priority Direction 4: Fostering Christ-centred cultures grounded in gospel values and Direction 5: Connecting students through a revised RE curriculum and service learning programs.**

- The final draft of the RE in Uniting Church Schools Framework was released to principals, board chairpersons and chaplains in all Uniting Church-affiliated schools in April 2017 as a pre-publication document. This included a request for feedback about the delivery of curriculum, especially how it fits into an already crowded curriculum and the implications on staffing and resources at a school level.
  - Following this feedback the framework was updated and after confirmation of some copyright issues (authorship and intellectual property), the framework will be officially launched at the Synod Office in September.
  - Staff from Trinity College Queensland are working in partnership with executive officers from the Chaplaincy Commission and Schools Commission and staff at Property Trust Schools to provide appropriate training in this new framework.
- To ensure the achievement of the strategic intent of the Uniting Church in Australia, key accountabilities (faith formation and religious literacy) have been written into principal employment contracts:
  - Across the college, ensure the development of Christian faith formation and religious literacy is aligned with Uniting Church theology by encouraging teachers and enabling students:
    - a) to learn about faith through the Religious Education in Uniting Church Schools Framework
    - b) to express faith through worship, witness and service.
  - Resource faith formation and religious literacy in the college by:
    - a) setting aside, outside chapel, class time of at least 30 minutes per week for the delivery of religious education through stand-alone or integrated units of study in accordance with the Religious Education in Uniting Church Schools Framework.
    - b) in addition to any funding received from government sources for the provision of chaplaincy services, the college will fund the position of a chaplain by at least 0.5 FTE to aid in the formation and expression of faith across the college.

## Future short-range goals

- By January 2018 create a New Directions Paper 2018-2019 for the commission:
  - Following the 32nd Synod members of the commission used the priority directions for 2016–2020 to create its Directions Paper for 2016-17.
  - Following the 33rd Synod and prior to the commencement of 2018, members of the commission will use the newly revised Uniting Church By-laws and policy and the newly-developed 2022 Vision and Strategy to create its Directions Paper for 2018-19.
- By January 2018 formulate the 2020 Strategy for Uniting Church schools:
  - This piece of work is being driven by contemporary issues and seeks to answer important strategic questions such as: Why do we invest in schools and colleges? Should we be expanding or contracting this segment of our mission? What new possibilities exist for the church to further its mission?

## Challenges/risks as we progress

Risks associated with the Schools and Residential Colleges Commission	
Risk category	Aspects
<p><b><i>Compliance risks</i></b></p> <p>Likelihood: low Severity: high Importance: high</p>	<p>Compliance and accountability, legislation, regulation and policy, legal. For example, non-compliant schools operations and procedures under the NSSAB Act.</p> <p>School closure, high cost of meeting compliance requirements.</p>
<p><b><i>Financial risks</i></b></p> <p>Likelihood: medium Severity: high Importance: high</p>	<p>Budget and financial performance reporting.</p> <p>Financial strategy and policy, financial sustainability (long-term financial planning).</p> <p>Grants management, procurement planning, sourcing, contract management, purchasing.</p> <p>Payroll services, HR policy, HR major initiatives.</p>
<p><b><i>Governance risks</i></b></p> <p>Likelihood: medium Severity: high Importance: high</p>	<p>Community relationship, external stakeholders.</p> <p>Organisational and government changes, workforce relations, attraction and retention, recruitment and selection, staff development and diversity. For example, how do we structure our participation in governance with an emphasis on mission in affiliated groups such as the PMSA and our ecumenical schools? Specifically in relation to the PMSA, collaborative work needs to continue on the construction of new PMSA constitution.</p>
<p><b><i>Operational or program risks</i></b></p> <p>Likelihood: high Severity: medium Importance: medium</p>	<p>Loosing key members of the commission or the executive staff. This is mitigated by continual attention to succession planning. For example, the difficulty in recruiting and selecting new members from the Uniting Church with the appropriate skill sets to serve and progress the mission of the 11 boards under the umbrella of the Schools and Residential Colleges Commission.</p>



Risks associated with the Schools and Residential Colleges Commission	
Risk category	Aspects
<b><i>Environmental, including event risks</i></b>  <b>Likelihood: low</b> <b>Severity: low</b> <b>Importance: low</b>	
<b><i>Brand and reputational risks</i></b>  <b>Likelihood: medium</b> <b>Severity: high</b> <b>Importance: high</b>	<p>Media and issues management, marketing, publication and web management, internal and external communication, public affairs management.</p> <p>Fraud, corruption, Code of Conduct, student protection, official misconduct.</p> <p>For example, what are the implications for the church of the August 2017 content and recommendation of the “Change the Course: National Report On Sexual Assault And Sexual Harassment At Australian Universities 2017”?</p>
<b><i>Strategic risks</i></b>  <b>Likelihood: low</b> <b>Severity: high</b> <b>Importance: low</b>	<p>School sustainability.</p> <p>Client, industry and customer services.</p> <p>Critical incident management, external stakeholders.</p> <p>Mitigated though strategic and contingency processes associated with commission operation and effectiveness.</p>

## Proposal

It is proposed that the 33rd Synod receive this report.

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