



#realunitingchurch

Report from **Board for Christian Formation**

Context

The Board for Christian Formation (BCF) holds a range of responsibilities including the overview of the theological college of the Synod, selecting candidates for ministry, continuing education and reception of ministers. Trinity College Queensland (TCQ) is the Synod's primary vehicle for the delivery of education for ministry to achieve its vision to see a church that is formed for Christian mission.

The college is accountable to the BCF for delivering high quality outcomes in formation, teaching and learning, research and service across the broad range of education for ministry areas within the Queensland Synod.

As the BCF's newly appointed chairperson, I'd like to acknowledge the work done by the outgoing chairperson, Rev Peter Lockhart. Peter has led the BCF over a period of transformational change. In addition to the significant investment of his time over the past few years, Peter oversaw the implementation of changes to the future direction of the college.

Highlights since last Synod

Since last Synod the main highlights within the BCF portfolio of responsibilities relate to the activities of Trinity College Queensland.

1. Implementation of the Future Ministry Model

Trinity College Queensland has focussed on the implementation of the Future Ministry Model endorsed by the BCF in June 2016. This model's key features include:

- Aspirational models of leadership
- Flexibility to meet the needs of a modern lifestyle
- Educational activities that produce mission-ready graduates
- A generous orthodoxy
- A rigorous academic education delivered by a lean and fit-for-purpose faculty to support Trinity College Queensland as it grows its capability to serve the educational needs of the church
- To enter formal negotiations with appropriate providers for the future accreditation of Trinity College Queensland.

2. Appointment of new faculty and staff

Over the past 12 months the BCF has appointed new faculty who are working within the Future Ministry Model. They also deliver lay education and offer models of leadership in addition to their work within accredited programs of study.

3. Development of new student catchments

The identification of a new supply of students is critical for securing TCQ's future. To this end the college has developed three student catchments and all are growing in attendance:

a. **Trinity Unplugged**

These events seek to ground people in their faith by addressing difficult questions that may confront people as they live out the life of Christian faith in a modern context. They also provide an opportunity to introduce people to learned approaches to reading and applying the Bible. We hope that over time the people attending these events may enrol in our short course program or apply to undertake accredited study.

b. **Trinity short courses**

The faculty of Trinity College Queensland offer short courses to people who would like to learn more about the Bible, theology, and the life of faith. We are particularly interested in attracting small groups from local congregations. We encourage groups such as these to take five weeks out of their regular weekly program and come along to Trinity to gain some input from our faculty.

c. **Academic courses for Lay Preacher's Certificate candidates**

In keeping with Assembly requirements the BCF has endorsed a suite of short courses and assessment methods to fulfil the academic training component of the Lay Preacher's Certificate. The college aims to provide lay preacher candidates with an educational experience that will encourage them to enrol in accredited courses.

4. Increase of 200 per cent in students from Uniting Church congregations

In second semester 2016 the college had 16.25 FTE students enrolled in its degree programs. The decision to dissolve our partnership with St Francis Theological College resulted in the loss of 10 FTE students who were training for ordination in the Anglican Church. Thus we expected that we would have as few as 6 FTE students in first semester 2017.

Though still relatively small numbers, the BCF was encouraged that the college enrolled 12.75 FTE students (made up of 29 different people) in Semester 1, 2017. At the time of writing this report we anticipate that our numbers will increase above 20 FTE students (made up of more than 40 different people) in Semester 2, 2017. We aim to attract more than 22 FTE enrolments in Semester 1, 2018.

5. Continuing Education for Ministry (CEM) program

Trinity College Queensland is offering people in placements unlimited access to our accredited courses in return for their CEM allowance plus 15 per cent of the advertised unit fee. This program of study allows a person to complete a masters for a quarter of the cost (based on a person studying at least two units/year). To be eligible a person must have finished a bachelor level theological degree or be an ordained Uniting Church minister.

6. Dispersed learning

The college seeks to disperse the learning of its faculty across the Synod's congregations, schools, and agencies. This semester it has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Sandgate Uniting Church to offer degree-level units on the latter's campus. The college intends to continue the initiative of previous Trinity leaders to establish regional learning hubs.

7. Anticipated 2018 launch of *Activate* – Gap Year program

See in report below.

8. Launch of new Trinity College Queensland website

trinity.qld.edu.au

9. Christian Education curriculum

The Trinity College Queensland faculty produced a Christian Education curriculum for Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and intends to offer professional development of people teaching this curriculum to CSA students.

Priority Directions

1. Christ-centred, at prayer, and listening

The Future Ministry Model commits the college to modelling a generous orthodoxy. Our faculty are committed to upholding the creedal faith of the church as it has been received within our Reformed and Evangelical heritage. Such faith is inescapably Christ-centred and obliges us to offer units of study that focus on interpreting Christ in the scriptures and in fellowship with others who engage in this activity. We pray as a community, asking that the Spirit would help us to live like Christ.

2. Discipleship

The TCQ faculty is supporting discipleship in the following ways:

- a. Delivery of accredited courses
- b. Trinity Unplugged events aimed at grounding young people in their faith
- c. Launching of the *Activate* – Gap Year program for 18 to 23-year-olds in 2018
- d. Writing and supporting Religious Education curricula for schools
- e. Short courses that seek to develop frameworks for reading the Bible and serving in the local church
- f. Prioritising the interaction between faculty and students within the college community.

3. Leadership

The Synod's Leadership Development Framework has been incorporated into Trinity College Queensland's formation program.

4. Connecting with communities

- Raymont Residential College
- Religious and Christian Education frameworks for Uniting Church/ Christian Schools Australia schools
- Trinity Unplugged
- Research engagement.

5. Youth, children and families

- *Activate* – Gap Year program launches in 2018; this program seeks to mature young people in their faith as they move from home into a tertiary study or a career
- Trinity Unplugged
- Units within the Diploma and Bachelor of Ministry.

Report

I. BCF responsibilities

1. Scholarship aid and provision for candidates

Candidates are to be directed to raise issues of financial difficulty with their formation panel in the first place. These panels are presbytery-centric and this will facilitate a presbytery's consideration of whether it is in a position to provide financial assistance to the candidate. Where a presbytery determines that a candidate requires assistance but it is not in a position to provide this assistance, the person will be directed to engage with a process to be established by Synod's People and Culture team.

2. Synod Selection Panel

BCF has responsibility for appointing members to the Synod Selection Panel secretariat and overseeing the secretariat's responsibility for managing the selection of candidates for Ministry of the Word or Ministry of Deacon. This year the BCF appointed Trent Wheeley to the secretariat to replace outgoing member David Busch. Since the 32nd Synod in Session, the secretariat has:

- a. updated information booklets to assist in the application and selection process. These booklets were distributed in February after final approval by Uniting Communications. The booklets include:
 - i. Information booklet for panel members
 - ii. Information booklet for presbytery support persons and applicants
 - iii. Information booklet for presbytery Pastoral Relations Committees.
- b. prepared an annual timeline of actions and responsibilities to streamline and clarify the process in cooperation with the Synod office.
- c. reduced the Synod Selection Panel process to one day which runs twice each year.

II. Trinity College Queensland

The primary resource the Synod makes available for achieving the BCF's vision and responsibilities is Trinity College Queensland. Many in the Synod will be aware that Trinity has undergone radical changes over the past 12 months. The college's principal Dr Leigh Trevaskis was appointed in March 2016 to drive a strategic agenda for securing the college's future as the primary provider of theological education within the Queensland Synod. The BCF received and endorsed the principal's proposed Future Ministry Model in June 2016. The changes to staffing and accreditation necessitated by its adoption were announced on 11 July 2016. A number of factors led to the BCF's endorsement of the far-reaching changes:

1. Poor return on Synod investment

Trinity College Queensland was realising a return on investment (ROI) of less than 10 per cent on its \$1.2 million expenditure.

2. Low student enrolments

The college had a low number of student enrolments. Moreover, of its 16.25 full-time equivalent (FTE) degree students, 10 were Anglican candidates for ordination.

3. Poor retention of student fees

Our accreditation with Charles Sturt University via an agreement with the United Theological College (Sydney) provided us with 50 per cent of student fees when other accrediting providers returned 90 per cent of fees to the teaching institution.

III. The Future Ministry Model

The key features of the Future Ministry Model have been listed above.

The implementation of each key aspect of the Future Ministry Model is reported below.

1. Aspirational models of leadership

The leadership aspirations of the Synod, together with a focus on the Synod's leadership framework have been reflected in our approach to appointing faculty.

2. Flexibility to meet the needs of a modern lifestyle

The college has developed the following capabilities:

a. Re-accreditation with the Adelaide College of Divinity permits the college to offer online degrees

b. Timetable

The college timetable restricts all classes to Tuesdays and Wednesdays. We encourage students to use the college library for study on Thursdays. By offering two evening classes each week, a part-time degree student can complete a degree without attending the campus during work hours.

c. Dispersed learning hubs

3. Educational activities that produce mission-ready graduates

The college has implemented the following activities for this purpose:

a. Bachelor of Ministry (BMin) as the core degree for ministry candidates

In addition to the biblical, theological, and historical units offered within this degree, a number of additional units support the graduation of mission-ready people including: Introduction to Preaching; Reading Cultures; Spirituality for the 21st Century; Evangelism, Conversion, and the Mission of God; Homiletics; Pastoral Care.

b. New formation program

The new formation program (see below) concentrates a candidate's formation within his/her own missional context. Moreover, preaching workshops take up one third of the time students spend in formation intensives. An additional third of this time focusses on a student's development as an effective missional leader.

c. Formation panels

Our formation panels (see below) will function as an accountability measure for ensuring that our ministry candidates graduate as mission-ready.

d. Community

The new timetabling enhances the interaction between students and faculty at morning tea and lunch.

e. Voluntary preaching workshops

In addition to our accredited units on preaching, the faculty is encouraging students to enrol in voluntary preaching workshops as a way of honing their preaching skills.

4. A generous orthodoxy

This aspect of the Future Ministry Model was adopted for at least two reasons. First, the concept resonates with our *Basis of Union*. Second, it tends to disrupt a tendency to situate our college somewhere on a spectrum of orthodoxy. Rather than have people characterise us as liberal, conservative, progressive or otherwise, our college claims that we occupy the centre of orthodoxy as defined by the early church creeds and received within the Reformed and Evangelical traditions.

5. A rigorous academic education

We have reduced the FTE of Trinity College Queensland from 11.5 to 8.5 by appointing a faculty who teach accredited and non-accredited courses. The college has a faculty that can cover the core disciplines offered within the Bachelor of Ministry and Master of Ministry courses.

IV. Budget

The restructuring that the BCF approved in July last year reduced the college's expenditure by more than \$200,000/year. The 2018 budget deficit is \$1,050,961 and this is 10.4 per cent lower than that budgeted for the 2017 financial year (\$1,172,530). If the college achieves its goal of increasing FTE enrolments in accredited courses from 16 to 40 by the end of 2019, it will reduce this deficit by a further 20 per cent.

V. Student numbers

a. Short courses

The total enrolments in lay education courses in 2016 was fewer than 40. We have already had 35 enrolments in our short courses this semester and we anticipate that we will more than double last year's enrolment numbers by the end of 2017.

b. Accredited courses

See point I.4 above in Highlights.

c. Candidates

The Queensland Synod has eight candidates for ministry and we expect as many as two of these will exit into placement at the end of this year. Nine candidates are being interviewed by the Synod Selection Panel in November. Thus, we expect the number of candidates to increase in 2018.

Note: the responsibility for keeping a roll of candidates is delegated to Trinity College Queensland.

VI. Formation program

The BCF has endorsed a new formation program for Uniting Church ministry candidates. This new program aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Meet the new Assembly standards for the ordination of Ministry of the Word and Ministry of Deacon candidates.
- Introduce candidates to the Synod's Leadership Development Framework.
- Empower a candidate's local missional context to oversee most of his or her formation for ministry, with a specific focus on developing the person as a mission-ready church leader.

- A high degree of flexibility that allows regional students to complete the program without having to move to Brisbane.
- A sense among candidates that their requests for Recognised Prior Learning and Recognised Prior Experience receive due and fair consideration.

The meeting of these objectives is based upon three foundational components of the formation program. The resources section of the Trinity College Queensland website will serve as the repository for the relevant formation documents as they become available.

1. Formation panels

From July 2017 formation panels will determine the academic and formational requirements for all candidates received through the Synod Selection Panel. The central question asked by a formation panel at each meeting is: "What does this person need to experience or learn to be an effective missional leader?" The panel will request the BCF to ask the Assembly to issue an exit certificate for the candidate when it feels that the person does not require further input within the formation program.

2. Supervised placement program

The Dean of Formation and Dispersed Learning is in the process of developing a supervised placement program that empowers a ministry placement supervisor to oversee most of a candidate's formation as a mission-ready church leader.

3. Formation intensives

Formation intensives occur on eight Mondays each year. The time students spend during these days is equally allocated to (a) preaching, (b) leadership, (c) other issues relating to formation that are not easily addressed within a candidate's missional context (e.g. Aboriginal religion and spirituality).

VII. *Activate* – Gap Year program

Trinity College Queensland will launch a new initiative in 2018 to help ground a younger generation of people in their faith. *Activate* is a one-year, three-day-per-week program for school leavers and those within the age range of initial tertiary study (approximately 18–23 years). It provides an enjoyable opportunity to experience purposeful learning and spiritual growth in the context of a vibrant Christian community. Throughout the year students will complete a Diploma of Ministry, accredited first aid course, mental health first aid course, barista course, safe driving course, financial budgeting/study skills/time management program, SU Queensland camp leaders training.

VIII. Chaplaincy education

The changes made at Trinity College Queensland include the outsourcing of the Cert IV in Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care to National Training Solutions. As part of our dispersed learning program, the college is presently working with UnitingCare, Wesley Mission Queensland and the Chaplaincy Commission to develop educational resources for our Synod's chaplains.

Challenges/risks as we progress

Our effort to redevelop Trinity College Queensland as the key educational resource for seeing a church formed for mission is faced with the following challenges:

1. The development of a new supply of students

The intention of attracting students from across the breadth of the Uniting Church creates the following challenges for Trinity College Queensland:

- a. The clarification of our identity as a college which seeks to ground people in their faith and equip them with tools for lifelong ministry.
- b. The development of effective student catchments which offer aspirational models of preaching, creating an appetite for theological education at the grassroots level of our congregations (e.g. short courses and Trinity Unplugged).
- c. Provision of a first-rate and flexible educational service for potential students.
- d. The development of deep relationships with presbyteries and congregations.

2. Reducing TCQ's budget deficit

The Synod has indicated that the college must demonstrate that it can move toward financial independence before the end of 2019. In addition to renewing a reliable supply line of students, the college is meeting this challenge by engaging in the following activities:

- a. Developing its value offering to potential students.
- b. The identification of new educational markets such as the resourcing of Christian education in schools (e.g. professional development and published resources).
- c. The development of learning hubs for the offering of accredited courses.

3. Mix of faculty at Trinity College Queensland

The BCF defines the required mix of faculty as that which best supports the Future Ministry Model's implementation. Nevertheless, it desires to see female academics represented on this faculty and where possible, people representing our movement's multicultural groups. In the short term, the college has scope for appointing suitable adjuncts who are female and/or from multicultural backgrounds. In the longer term, the director has proposed to implement an operational strategy for identifying and resourcing the emergence of future female and/or multicultural full-time faculty members.

Recommendations

1. Records its thanks and appreciation for the faithful service through Trinity College Queensland of the following people:
 - a) Rev Dr Wendi Sargeant, faculty member and Director of Studies in Apologetics and Evangelism
 - b) Dr Aaron Ghiloni, faculty member and Director of Studies in Mission, Ministry and Leadership
 - c) Dr Jason LeCureux, faculty member and Director of Old Testament Studies
 - d) Rev Dr Malcolm Coombes, faculty member and Director of Studies in New Testament
 - e) Rev Mel Perkins, Adult Faith Educator
 - f) Rev Lynne Gibson, Chaplaincy Educator
 - g) Mrs Lyndelle Gunton, Manager, Trinity Theological Library
 - h) Mrs Anna Lagos, Learning and Teaching Librarian, Trinity Theological Library.
2. Records its thanks and appreciation for the faithful service given by Rev Dr Elizabeth Nolan and Rev Linda Hanson as members of the Board for Christian Formation.
3. Records its appreciation to Rev Peter Lockhart as Chairperson, Board for Christian Formation, through a Minute of Appreciation.

Proposal

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

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