



NATIONAL EDUCATION CHARTER 2019 (Revised)

Why we are here; Who we are; Principles for action

National Schools Consultative Group May 2019

Why we are here - Mission and Purpose ¹

Alongside its advocacy for more holistic outcomes in all educational settings, the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) participates directly in Schools and Residential colleges to:

- ensure safe environments where children and young people can explore and discover their God-given dignity and progress their individual potential.
- support the growth and development of children and young people who are discerning the meaning, identity, belonging and purpose of their lives such that they can participate in a just society and lead creative and compassionate lives.
- achieve excellent outcomes for students by ensuring effective teaching and learning with appropriate mentoring and coaching.
- encourage leadership by students, staff and governing bodies that is engaged, developed, valued and demonstrated with humility and integrity.
- allow exploration of faith in respectful and engaging ways by providing venues for the development of children and young people in the light of the Christian story guided by the Uniting Church in Australia Basis of Union (1992).

Who we are - Characteristics of UCA

The uniqueness of the UCA is contained in the collective demonstration of the following characteristics ²

1. Enabling faith development and individual wellbeing within the UCA heritage of worship, witness and service. ³

How does the UCA express this?

The UCA strives to 'walk its talk' in living out its values and faith within the community and giving its members the opportunity to develop their faith to participate in the life and work of the UCA and also to serve the wider community. It demonstrates this:

¹ Based on Queensland Synod's 'Schools and Residential Colleges Commission 2018 Policy Statement

² Based on 'The DNA of the UCA – Exploring the key characteristics of the Uniting Church in Australia' – A resource prepared for the fortieth anniversary of the UCA by Rev Dr John Squires

³ Reflective of the Basis of Union (1992) paragraphs 1, 5 and 13



- Through the life of UCA Congregations - communities in which people seek to follow Jesus, learn about God, worship, share their faith, care for each other, serve the local community and seek to live faithfully and with real joy.
- Through ongoing educational opportunities within each Synod and Presbytery providing courses on such topics as pastoral care, living out the UCA values and faith, ethical ministry, safe church and theological studies.
- Through community service agencies operated by the UCA in areas as diverse as aged care, mental health and children's services which assist marginalised and vulnerable individuals and families.
- Through local parish missions which live out the faith of the UCA by supporting those in need within the community.
- Through the formation of ordained ministers and lay people to work in diverse ministries within the church such as congregational ministry, chaplaincy in schools, hospitals, prisons and the armed forces.
- Through support groups for children and adolescents seeking faith within our schools.

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *How does the school's Religious education curriculum reflect the values of the UCA and encourage an understanding of the life and witness of Jesus Christ?*
- *Are the school's chapel services regular and engaging and do they encourage participation of the students?*
- *Does the school community participate in worship and prayer and are students, staff, parents and Board encouraged to attend?*
- *Are the Wellbeing programs within schools robust and tailored to the needs of each developmental stage?*
- *How do the wellbeing programs and spiritual life of the school complement each other?*
- *Are there regular Christian group meetings on the school campus? (Crusaders, Jesus in School Time)*
- *Do the school's Social Justice programs and sustainability activities encourage active "hands-on" participation of each student?*

2. Celebrating the equality and value of all people.⁴ How does the UCA express this?

The Uniting Church in Australia's Basis of Union affirms that every member of the church is engaged to confess Christ crucified, and every person is gifted by the Spirit to engage in ministry in their own particular way.

We are a church that values the ministry of each and every person, including students.

⁴ Reflective of the Basis of Union (1992) paragraph 2, 3 and 13

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *How does the Board culture demonstrate the equality and value of all people?*
- *How does our enrolment policy affirm the value of each child?*
- *What systems are in place to affirm and value all children?*
- *How do recruitment and human resource policies and procedures affirm the value of each person?*
- *How do we recognise, encourage and grow the gifts of our staff and students?*

3. Intentionally listening to all voices which then directs collaborative decision making.⁵ How does the UCA express this?

The Uniting Church has been a leading organisation in developing techniques for meeting that assist people to seek the spirit and to discern the will of God. In practice, the Church has lived out these techniques through a process of consensus decision making. This does not just mean that the Church avoids a simple "majority rule" type of decision. There is a manual for meetings which outlines a detailed process for discernment and decision making. The manual attempts to ensure that before decisions are made there is ample community building amongst the decision-making body and that there is ample time for information receipt and deliberation. The focus is on listening to the Spirit before people speak, and striving to find a way forward that most, if not all, people can see as the will of God for the Church. This process also attempts to ensure that there is joint action across all levels and places in the Church to implement decisions.

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *What protocols and processes aim to ensure that the Board and senior leadership groups develop and maintain a strong sense of connection, understanding and community amongst themselves?*
- *Which methods have been adopted to ensure that executive and board decision making includes insights from diverse aspects of the school community and wider stakeholders?*

- *How are Board and senior leadership meeting practises designed to ensure that concerns, questions and dissent are deeply heard, tested and responded to?*
- *What processes specifically test the degree of dominance of particular voices on any decision making body within the school?*

⁵ Reflective of the Basis of Union (1992) paragraph 15

4. Rejoicing in the diversity of faiths, cultures and languages.⁶ How does the UCA express this?

Since 1985 the Uniting Church has deliberately named itself a multicultural Church and continues to grow in its understanding of that name. This means that the Church rejoices in the diversity of cultures and languages which are found across Australia. The Basis of Union recognises that we share much, as Australians, with people of Asia and the Pacific, and the Church has maintained strong relationships with churches from these regions, as well as forging new links with churches in Africa and the Middle East.

The Statement to the Nation, issued in 1977, acknowledged that the Uniting Church seeks a unity that transcends cultural, economic and racial distinctions. There are people from 193 language groups who belong to the Uniting Church and Sunday worship is celebrated in 26 non-indigenous languages and many indigenous languages across the country each week.

The Church, institutionally and locally, takes an active role in the promotion and conduct of interfaith dialogue, affirming that such dialogue is key to creating and sustaining a culture of peace and harmony.

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *How does the school act to understand and celebrate the cultural and linguistic diversity in its school catchment area and encourage representation of this diversity in the whole school community?*
- *Beyond mandated practices (such as curriculum requirements and anti-discrimination legislation) how does the school actively increase cultural sensitivity and competence amongst its whole community?*
- *Reflecting again on the previous question, how does the school improve understanding of the perspectives and practices of different faiths?*

5. Actively engaging with First Peoples.⁷ How does the UCA express this?

A very important dimension to being the church in this country is that we are a church in Covenant with the First Peoples of Australia. From its earliest years, the Uniting Church has been involved in actions which express our solidarity with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples. Older members will recall events at Noonkanbah Station in the Kimberley in 1980, when Uniting Church members stood in solidarity with the traditional owners, the Yungngora people, against the mining of their land.

⁶ Reflective of the Basis of Union (1992) paragraph 1 and 2

⁷ Reflective of the Basis of Union (1992) paragraph 2, the Covenant with the UAICC (1995) and Preamble to the UCA Constitution.

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) was established in 1985, and a Covenant between the UAICC and the UCA was implemented in 1994. This Covenant recognises that working for reconciliation amongst people is central to the Gospel.

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *Does the school have an enrolment policy for indigenous students?*
- *Does the school have an indigenous scholarship program?*
- *What support is provided for indigenous students to flourish?*
- *Does the school have an employment policy for indigenous employees?*
- *How does the school celebrate indigenous culture and understanding amongst its students?*
- *Does the school acknowledge indigenous elders and people at school events?*

6. Entering into justice for all peoples and the environment.⁸
How does the UCA express this?

The Uniting Church inherited from its predecessor Churches a strong commitment to advocating for justice for all. Many Uniting Church congregations and members are actively committed to serving those people who find themselves on the margins of society. This commitment was clearly articulated in the 1977 *Statement to the Nation* and it has been evident in many actions undertaken by Uniting Church members over the decades.

The Uniting Church has joined in common causes with other groups and organisations in society, in advocating for a welcoming attitude towards refugees; in lobbying for a fair and just system of caring for people who are experiencing poverty and homelessness; in seeking equity for workers in their workplace; and in many other issues.

In like manner, the Uniting Church has always been a church which honours the environment and supports a sustainable lifestyle.

Although such matters are firmly on the radar of the public now, they have long been integral to the DNA of the UCA. Once again, the 1977 *Statement*

to the Nation flagged such commitment. A series of subsequent documents attest to the ongoing determination of the church to live responsibly, in such a way that we minimise the damage we cause to the environment in which we live.

• Reflective of the Basis of Union (1992) paragraphs 3 and 4

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *How are issues of justice reflected in the lived experience of students at the school?*
- *How are issues of justice reflected in the curriculum?*
- *What issues does the School Board consider to reflect the Church's commitment to justice and the environment?*
- *How are environmental concerns reflected in the building programs of the school?*
- *Would the parent community see the school as having a commitment to justice and the environment?*

7. Courageously elevating difficult subjects and evolving responses.⁹ How does the UCA express this?

The Uniting Church in Australia Basis of Union commits us to learn from the insights of contemporary scientific and historical studies and affirms that we remain open to correction by God in the way we order our life together.

An example of an area of enduring controversy engaged within the UCA has been that of human sexuality. There is a wide diversity of opinion within both society and the church, and lively debates regarding human sexuality have taken place in the various councils of the church. In dealing with such issues, we have learned how to debate with respect and integrity with ongoing conversations looking to employ a "Space for Grace" process to encourage respectful, empowering, and inclusive decision making.

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *How does the practice of the school encourage the raising of controversial topics in the appropriate forum?*
- *Should the school or college develop an ethics statement around future developments, such as Artificial Intelligence and robotics?*
- *How does the school engage with the controversial topics currently being considered by the church?*
- *How are students encouraged to explore and engage with difficult subjects*

affecting our community and the church?

◦ *Reflective of the Basis of Union (1992) paragraphs 3 and 11*

8. Demanding the highest professional standards.¹⁰
How does the UCA express this?

Over the last 20 years, the Uniting Church has developed a firm commitment to strong professional standards for both Ministers and lay people who exercise leadership in the church. A whole section of the Uniting Church in Australia Regulations is devoted to this. All Ministers and lay people are expected to adhere to a Code of Ethics of Ministry Practice for Ministers and a Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders.

How does our school or college reflect this? For example:

- *How does the Board ensure school leadership are exceeding the expectations of the Professional Standards for principals?*

<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/australian-professional-standard-for-principals-and-the-leadership-profiles652c8891b1e86477b58fff00006709da.pdf?sfvrsn=11c4ec3c0>

- *What systems are in place for the formal Certification of teachers?*
- *How does the school promote a commitment to professional development for staff that reflects the ethos of the Uniting Church.*

Principles for Action

UCA ASSEMBLY NATIONAL EDUCATION CHARTER - JULY 2002

Guidelines for our Educational Practice

The NATIONAL EDUCATION CHARTER is based upon basic gospel values and principles of education as they are expressed in the best of current practices in educational institutions

I. A Theology of Education

This guideline values education as a critical component of people of faith. As we live out our commitment to Jesus Christ, we must continue to grow and learn in our faith, expressed as discipleship within our community. This practice assumes faith in action, where our commitment to Christ is expressed through our commitment to education, and living out what we learn as responsible citizens within the wider community and society.

Education is not a discipline or a practice promoted within the Church solely for its own life. The practice of learning is embodied within the community of faith, both through its commitment to ongoing learning about faith, but also in ongoing learning that allows for responsible participation in society. It is expressed through commitment to the education of the whole person, and nurturing motivation of

personal and communal responsibilities through lifelong learning.

10 Reflective of the Basis of Union paragraph 15 and the UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

2. **A commitment to Lifelong Learning**

This guideline involves valuing the education process as something integral to each person throughout all of life.

Lifelong education is a journey that allows each person to participate fully in society in ways that are life-giving and sharing. Lifelong education involves teaching and learning about moral and ethical standards, nurturing the development of the whole person - body, mind and spirit - within the community.

Education is not simply about school. For most people in Australia, education begins within a family and community, and continues throughout life. Learning connects us with one another and with our world; and teaches us to become responsible citizens, locally and globally. Education assumes opportunities for knowledge and learning, encourages enthusiasm for teaching and invites each person to develop their full potential within the community.

3. **A recognition of our Rights and Responsibilities**

This guideline reminds us that each of us is created in the image of God and is therefore a person of value. The guideline brings with it a responsibility to respect our world and its inhabitants. Such a responsibility requires us to work for the provision of a just society that promotes integrity, sustainability and liberty for the communities in which we live. Education equips us to participate in society. It encourages the development of skills in community participation, promoting integrity and critical thinking. Education helps us to value such things as cultural and religious diversity; it enhances our understanding of citizenship, national, local and global identity. It teaches us how to live and belong safely, creatively and responsibly within our local, national and international communities.

4. **Access to Equitable and Quality education**

This guideline seeks to maximise learning opportunities through a commitment to quality teaching and learning experiences for all people, regardless of their age, gender, geography, ability or socio-economic status. Such a commitment is expressed through providing opportunities for individuals and communities to access a variety of quality learning opportunities, allowing the development of their full potential.

Education is a human right and needs to be available to all. Education can be provided in a variety of forms and contexts. It should reflect the diverse backgrounds, cultures and needs of individuals and communities. The practice of equitable and quality education requires a commitment to a variety of learning models and contexts; respects the needs of individual learners,

especially those whose ability requires special education provisions; and directs resources to areas of greatest need.

5. Valuing the Diversity of educational expression

This guideline acknowledges the diversity of ways in which learning can effectively occur. Education is delivered and embodied through a range of models, contexts, styles and forms. Diversity values our traditions and our backgrounds, and influences the learning communities that we seek to be. Our commitment to education is expressed in access to a diversity of educational experiences that nurture the unique gifts of each person.

Education occurs in many ways and embraces many traditions and experiences, including those of the indigenous peoples of Australia, those with special education needs and those from rural and isolated areas of the continent. Education assumes a range of models and approaches for individuals and communities that are different. Education requires the experience of safe places, the opportunities to explore new ways of expressing faith and encourages a sense of belonging and participation within and across communities.

6. Valuing Teaching and Research

This guideline actively acknowledges and affirms the contribution that the teaching profession and those engaged in educational research contribute to Australian society. It actively recognises the importance of places of learning, and the vital role that teachers play in facilitating learning. Our commitment to education is expressed through valuing those involved in the discipline of teaching, and in our celebration and affirmation of this gift to our community.

Education is a responsible task that impacts the formation of our society. Those entrusted with the task of teaching and educational research directly affect the integrity of our community. Education includes the need to value and affirm the teaching profession and those who support the ministry of teaching. It entrusts the community with the responsibility to discern and encourage those who offer educational leadership and wisdom.

7. The importance of Families in education

This guideline recognises that education is nurtured primarily and informally within the family, broadly understood. Formal education usually occurs beyond the family and includes the building of community, the integration of values, and the responsibilities of civic society. Within the context of diverse educational experience, the family usually provides a context for culture and tradition, as well as being a strong place for encouraging learning. Our commitment to education requires us to value families and family life for lifelong learning. Education occurs throughout life both formally and informally. Our experience of family and our family's relationship with our community are important ways in which we understand who we are and realise our full potential. Integral to nurturing creative learning environments and responsible communities, a commitment to education recognises the importance of families, in their

diversity of expressions, as essential to the active task of learning.

8. Provision of Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy

This guideline expresses the desire of the Uniting Church to participate actively in the pastoral care of students and staff within educational institutions. In our commitment to holistic education, we recognise the importance of spiritual development as part of lifelong learning. Our commitment to education recognises that as an organisation concerned with faith and justice, we are responsible to ensure that pastoral care and chaplaincy in Government and non-Government institutions are generously provided and freely available. Education involves a commitment to the development of body, mind and spirit of each individual. This needs to be supported in tangible ways. Pastoral care and chaplaincy is highly valued by the church as a way of nurturing and supporting the whole person. In promoting a commitment to education, the Uniting Church pledges itself to contributing such ministry to the task of education as part of its tradition of supporting learning communities.

(the section in italics below can be included as part of a state specific governance document)

The quality of this partnership between the UCA and School will be enabled by applying ethical governance systems:

- To oversee the outcomes, procedures and practices of schools and colleges to ensure alignment with the above purposes.*
- To secure safe and inclusive institutions with a capacity to affirm all people.*