

The Uniting Church in Australia
National Assembly

NATIONAL EDUCATION CHARTER

This Charter offers broad principles and guidelines to members of the Uniting Church in Australia, regarding education in Australian society.

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The National Education Charter

- provides foundational reflections on education so that the Officers of the Church may have a sound understanding of the Church's approach to education when they are called upon to represent the Church to Government on policies and proposals concerning education;
- aims to be of service to all members of the Uniting Church when education issues arise at local, State and Federal levels of Government;
- states principles that inform all educational ministry activities within the life of the Church.

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The Charter is founded on the Uniting Church's confession of Jesus Christ as 'Lord over its life... Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity' (*Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3). This self-understanding encourages the Church to reflect on issues in society, including education, in the light of its faith in Christ and its commitment to his teaching. The Church's confession leads it to uphold a value system based on love, social justice and compassion within which morality is defined. In this way, the Church seeks to help its members shape both personal and community attitudes, behaviour and decisions according to gospel values and the traditions they have received.

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Education is at the heart of the Church's self-understanding. The Church's mission is to learn and then to teach – and the Charter reflects the Church's historic and on going commitments to education in all areas of life. For the Uniting Church, this commitment is demonstrated in its support for Government education institutions; the establishment of its own schools, colleges and supporting institutions; and its diverse educational programs for people of all ages.

At Union in 1977 and again in 1988, the Uniting Church proclaimed its commitment to a continuing engagement in social and national affairs. These statements affirmed the rights of all people to access education, and the need for education to have integrity. The National Education Charter stands in this tradition.

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The Charter follows extensive consultation with representatives from congregations, schools and tertiary institutions as well as consultation with Synods and Assembly agencies of the Uniting Church. It was prepared for the Church by Uniting Education, as part of Uniting Education's mandate as the educational agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, and is endorsed by the Standing Committee of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.

PRINCIPLES OF THE UNITING CHURCH'S EDUCATION CHARTER

The Uniting Church in Australia

- values all people as created in the image of God with rights and responsibilities under God for the well being of society
- believes that education is a 'lifelong journey by which all people develop the ability to participate in society and lead lives that are life creating and life sharing'
- calls for quality education that is accessible and equitable for all
- encourages excellence in education by which the God given gifts and talents of people are fully developed
- commits itself to promoting education for its members as part of their faith, ministry and community responsibility
- promotes the value of diversity in educational provision, expression and access
- affirms the contribution to Australian society of the teaching profession and those engaged in educational research
- acknowledges the primary importance of families in the context of education
- commits itself to pastoral care and chaplaincy within educational institutions

Guidelines for our 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

1. A COMMITMENT TO LIFELONG LEARNING

The guideline of lifelong education 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. It teaches us to become socially and morally responsible citizens, locally and globally. It assumes opportunities for knowledge and learning, encourages enthusiasm for education and invites each person to develop their full potential within the community.

2. 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.

3. 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.

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 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.

Experiencing Principles in Action

(The following are general statements only. They complement rather than connect specifically with the eight guidelines on pages 2 and 3.)

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to being a community of learning, and to advocating for education within the Australian community. The Uniting Church also recognises that education does not exist in a vacuum but that all educational institutions belong within communities who support them and accept responsibility for them.

In identifying eight principles of education, the Uniting Church seeks to critique the expression of these principles within our society and educational frameworks. We will know that these principles are expressed in action when:

- (a) Australian people and Governments give fiscal priority to the provision of lifelong education, especially in areas of need or disadvantage;
- (b) Educational institutions are held accountable for their expressions of quality, diversity and acceptance;
- (c) Australian people and Governments provide measurable choices in access and learning opportunities for all students;
- (d) Educational institutions acknowledge objective standards while valuing the potential of individuals and the diversity of excellence, tradition and structures;
- (e) Governments and institutions are accountable for holistic and integrated approaches to education;
- (f) Safe learning environments are central components of all communities;
- (g) Australian people and Governments are committed to research, teacher training and the development of educational philosophies and practices;
- (h) The Church is generous in its commitment to the provision of chaplaincy services in educational institutions;
- (i) The Church encourages sound theological reflection, based on gospel values, when it considers matters related to education;
- (j) The contribution of families to lifelong education is acknowledged through active support for families by Australian Governments, churches and educational institutions;
- (k) Australian people and Governments acknowledge the particular and specific educational needs of indigenous people, those with special education needs and those from rural and isolated areas;
- (l) Uniting Church educational institutions and programs witness to Christian values and uphold the ethos of the Uniting Church.

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