



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
**ASSEMBLY**  
Assembly Standing Committee

11-13 November 2022

**DOCUMENT 16**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Act2 Report</b>
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For information
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	
Purpose	To provide an update on the work of the Act2 Project
Rationale & Findings Summary	See the report
Attachments	
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: 1. Receive the Act2 Report
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# ACT2 REPORT

## Introduction

At the reconvened 16th Assembly in May 2022 the Assembly affirmed the importance and urgency of the work of the Act2 Project. It set a specific scope of work and delegated authority to the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) to progress the work on behalf of the Assembly. The ASC established a Steering Committee and a Project Unit to assist in overseeing and progress the work.

## Steering Committee

On 26 October the Steering Committee met for the first time online. This was followed by a retreat in Melbourne at the Centre for Theology and Ministry on 28-29 October. This was a critical time of forming community, sharing the journey of the Project to date, aligning expectations, and building a shared way of working and direction for the Project. The diversity of background, experience, and expertise of the Steering Committee is impressive, as is the humility and grace they are bringing to the task. It is a testament to the quality of members we have within the Uniting Church that we have been able to assemble such a diverse and capable group of leaders from within our life to guide and steer this Project.

## Workstreams

One of the tasks of the Steering Committee is to define any workstreams for the Project. At its retreat the Steering Committee considered a proposed shape for the workstreams and has agreed to the following:

1. **Local Communities of Faith and Discipleship:** Identifying opportunities to strengthen and develop those communities and changing governance structures and practices to better support and enable those communities.
2. **National Identity:** Discerning, clarifying and strengthening our national identity shaped by the Basis of Union and other foundational documents. It will be informed by our Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and recognising we are a multicultural Church (which will be a focus across all workstreams).
3. **Governance and Resourcing:** Reviewing our governance structures and practices to evolve our interconclliar model and develop a whole of Church resourcing framework. It will also consider how we continue to fulfill our ethical, legal and social obligations (which will also be a focus in Workstream 1).
4. **Theological Culture and Education -** Developing our theological culture as a Church (which will also be a focus in Workstream 2). It will also work on a framework for the provision of theological education.

All our work will be guided by the faith and unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church as described in the Basis of Union. It will also be guided by our core identity markers as a Church expressed in our nationally agreed statements that define and shape our life together.

While these workstreams are a helpful way of organising and communicating the work, we acknowledge there are a lot of inter-connections between the workstreams, therefore the Steering Committee and the Project Unit will be attentive to those connections and ensuring alignment across the Project as a whole. There are also connections to other pieces of work across the life of the Church, where we can we want to understand those connections. However, it is not our intention to seek full alignment or imagine the Project will subsume any of those initiatives. That is not our mandate nor is that a healthy way to manage change. Finally, there are challenges in our life which Act2 is not designed to address. Where people come to us with work outside our scope, we are seeking to be honest and clear about issues we are not addressing.

## Project Planning

The Steering Committee is also responsible for guidance on the Project plan. Project planning is still to be undertaken, including the specific details of individual workstreams. The Steering Committee has identified that like the pre-Assembly phase of the Project, this phase will need to be iterative and responsive. However, an overall shape for the Project has been agreed to give some clarity to the Church about the timing and approach.

The work of the Project through until the 17th Assembly will be in three phases:

1. **Exploration** (Nov 22 - May 23): This is a time for us to explore ideas, think about how we could shape our life differently. This will be an important phase in preparing ourselves to participate in the next phase.

*Our intention is that this will culminate in a whole of Church period of prayer and reflection between Pentecost 2023 on 28 May and the 46th anniversary of the Uniting Church on 22 June.*

2. **Collective Discernment** (Jun 23 - Nov 23): This is a time when we will engage in an intensive period of collective discernment. Over this period every Synod in session will meet. It will be a time when all parts of the Church - congregations, church councils, agencies, schools, presbyteries, synods, ministers, colleges, conferences, and networks are invited to gather to consider specific ideas about the four streams of work. To find solutions for our life we will need to find ways of finding common directions not only within councils but across our councils and governing bodies. This will be a period of intense prayer and deliberation essential to the success of the Project.
3. **Recommendations for Action** (Nov 23 - Jul 2024): This is when we will make choices about the recommendations put before the 17th Assembly for action. This will involve consideration of the insight and wisdom drawn from the collective discernment. The Project has always been framed in terms of needing a bias towards action not simply reflection. Its goal is to lead to implementing change which we anticipate commencing across the triennium of the 17th Assembly.

#### *Risk Management*

The Steering Committee is also responsible for overseeing risk management for the Project. At the retreat the committee engaged in a conversation about the risks facing the Project. These aligned to many identified in the initial risk assessment and were broadly in the categories of:

- Insufficient resources to complete the Project
- Insufficient buy-in from the whole Church
- Insufficient ambition in the recommendations arising from the Project
- Burnout of the Steering Committee and/or Project Unit

The Project Unit and the Steering Committee is deeply committed to seeking ways of mitigating these risks and is working hard on the approach to project design, communication, discernment, consultation, imagination and change management. However, these critical risks highlight the vital role all leaders will have across the life of the Church in ensuring hopeful, productive, and sustained engagement with the Project.

#### *Budget*

The Project Unit has continued to work from an indicative budget prepared to inform the budget agreed by the ASC in July. To date there has been annual salary savings mainly due to lower than budgeted FTE in the Communications Officer and Administration Officer roles. This is likely to provide some flexibility over time as required. However, it also presents a risk in ensuring we have enough staffing to do the task. This will be closely monitored.

#### **Project Unit**

On 1 September the Act2 Project Unit was established with the commencement of the Act2 Project Lead. This was followed by the commencement of the Communications Officer, Bethany Broadstock (0.4 FTE) commenced 19 September. Following a successful recruitment, we have appointed Rev Erik Lennestål as Project and Research Officer (fulltime) and Rev Cyrus Kung as Administration and Engagement Officer (0.6 FTE) both commencing on 21 November.

We are very excited with the overall makeup of the unit. Spread across Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, the members of the unit bring diverse experience, background, and capability. All have articulated a deep commitment to the Project and to the future of the Uniting Church. They also bring valuable perspectives from outside the life of the Uniting Church which are directly relevant to the Project.

The focus of the Project Unit has been on building the foundations for the Project to be successful. This includes the organisation of the Steering Committee retreat, building the website, developing the workstreams, and overall timeline and approach. When and how we communicate with and engage the Church in our collective discernment has been a high priority. While currently we are seeking to keep the Church updated on the Project, soon we will be moving to more sustained two-way conversation, both informally and then formally as we move into the new year.

On 2 November we launched the Act2 Project website: [act2uca.com](http://act2uca.com). This is an opportunity to bring together all the work undertaken so far, give people a sense of the direction of the Project, introduce the people leading the project and providing specific opportunities to connect with the Project.

Two of our first opportunities for engagement are:

1. **Prayer:** We are inviting the Church to pray with and for the Project including the ability to submit prayers on the website. You can do that here now: [act2uca.com/pray](http://act2uca.com/pray)
2. **Fortnightly Drop-Ins:** We are inviting anyone from across the Church can join us to hear about the Project, share their insights and get advice on how to get their community involved. These will be informal gatherings, at different times during the week so people from across the Church can join us.

Work on this Project is both exciting and daunting. There is a lot to do, and the expectation and ambition of the Project is high. However, the timeline is also creating a sense of urgency and helping us to bias towards action. We feel the prayers of the Church in our work often, confident that God is with us on this journey.