



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

10 – 12 March 2023

**DOCUMENT 17**

Title	<b>Act2 Report</b>
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For information and decision
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	
Purpose	To update the ASC regarding the work and process of the Act2 project.
Rationale & Findings Summary	See the report.
Attachments	None
Recommendations	That the Assembly Standing Committee:  <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Receive the Report</li><li>2. Noting the decision of 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly regarding Act2 and the draft budget of the Act2 Project, request the Assembly General Secretary write to each of Synods requesting they consider what financial contribution they are able to make to fully funding the Act2 Project for the 2023-24 financial year.</li></ol>
Submitted by	Andrew Johnson, Act2 Project Lead, <a href="mailto:andrewj@nat.uca.org.au">andrewj@nat.uca.org.au</a> 0424 373 713

## **Introduction**

The work of the Act2 Project continues at a rapid pace with the 2023 calendar year being a decisive period for broad and deep engagement with the Church alongside identifying specific directions and options for the Church's discernment. Establishing a Steering Committee has assisted the project in progressing the work quite quickly while ensuring oversight and accountability.

## **Steering Committee**

Since our last report the Steering Committee has met on two further occasions on 1 December and on 1 February. It is now in a regular rhythm meeting on the first Wednesday of each month. Attendance and participation has been strong with the Chair following up members who have been unable to attend. All members receive all the documents via a shared GoogleDrive and are encouraged to include comments directly into the documents before, during and after meetings alongside the discussion and deliberation within the meeting itself. The Steering Committee will meet again on 1 March prior to the meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC).

At its December meeting considered the scope of the workstreams including the overall goal, the objective prior to the 2024 meeting of the Assembly and the issues to be addressed. This led to a sharpening of the scope and a simplification of language which will be reflected in the communication with the Church.

At its February meeting considered the project plan, particularly the activities for Phase 1: Explore between now and May. This helped sharpen the focus of the activities and ensure that the engagement with the Church is as broad and deep as possible. This phase of work to the end of May is focused on exploring of the ideas and imperatives the Church has for the work of Act2. We are currently not at the stage of offering specific options or directions, this will come in Phase 2 between June and November.

The Steering Committee also spent time considering the 2022-23 budget reforecast submitted to the Assembly Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. It also considered a draft budget for the 2023-24 financial year. The outcome of that discussion is offered to the Assembly Standing Committee below in the budget section of this report.

## *Project Plan*

A summary of the project plan is provided as an attachment to this report. We continue to utilise design thinking and an agile approach to project management. We are also being informed by contemporary change management approaches. As we scale up our church engagement this year we are focused on broadening and deepening our engagement with the Church, particularly through direct contact with as many different parts of the Church as possible.

Within Phase 1 here is a brief summary of some of the key approaches we are taking:

Workstream 1:

- Outreach to every congregation, faith community and presbytery
- Inviting church councils and leaders to have conversations and feeding back.
- Focus groups about based on community of faith profiles (mostly online)

#### Workstream 2:

- Utilising Uniting in Prayer to strengthen national identity
- Topical national forums on national work
- Asking local communities of faith what they value about national identity and national work of the Church

#### Workstream 3:

- Data and information gathering to understand current state
- Deep engagement with key stakeholders including visits to all Synods and the Congress National Conference

#### Workstream 4:

- Data and information on current state
- Call for papers on theological culture

Across all workstreams we are will offer opportunities for submissions, regular drop-ins, synthesise existing research and data and invite insights from partner churches in Australia and internationally. We are also seeking to leverage every opportunity to work across multiple workstreams on any one engagement. Therefore while a key approach (e.g., Synod visits) is focused on one workstream, we will also seek engagement and insight on other workstreams at the same time.

At the conclusion of Phase 1 (end of May) we anticipate the following outputs to move into Phase 2 (between June and November):

- *Workstream 1: Local Communities of Faith & Discipleship:* Directions paper (barriers and enablers for local communities of faith, directions for change, principles to guide options).
- *Workstream 2: National Identity:* Identified national priorities arising from the broad and deep engagement across the Church. The resourcing component of this workstream will feed into Workstream 3.
- *Workstream 3: Governance and resourcing report* (current state data, design imperatives and principles and governance and resourcing options).
- *Workstream 4:* Discussion papers on the theological culture of the Uniting Church and current state report on provision of theological education.

The planned focus for the Synods in Session and Presbyteries in Session in the second half of the year is expected to be on Workstreams 1 and 3. Uniting in Prayer (May-June) is planned to be an important

time for strengthening our national identity. Workstream 4 will progress at a slightly slower pace with a national gathering expected in the second half of the year to specifically work on a national framework for the provision of theological education.

Ultimately all four of the workstreams are expected to converge towards the end of 2023 with an integrated set of recommendations coming to the March 2024 ASC ahead of the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly in July 2024.

We are continuing to work on ways to fulfil our core commitments to the Covenant with Congress, being a multicultural Church and fulfilling our ethical, legal and social obligations. We look forward to attending the UAICC National Conference in April and connect with Congress leaders as we travel around the Country. We are looking to have a dedicated focus group for CALD communities for Workstream 1 and a national forum with National Conference leaders as part of Workstream 2.

### *Risk Management*

The Steering Committee is also responsible for overseeing risk management for the Project and considers the risk register at every meeting. The only significant change in the risks identified are the separation out of the risks related to not completing the project. These fit into the category of lack sufficient time and lacking sufficient finances. However, we also recognise the direction of the Assembly about the urgency of this work.

Time: The Steering Committee and the Project Unit are acutely aware of the short time scale on which we are operating, particularly with the first Synod in Session meeting in June. This is why we have significantly scaled up our direct engagement with the Church and are not relying on ‘cascading’ material. It is also why we have asked to meet in person with key Synod staff between now and the end of April and offered direct engagement (either in person or online) with key Presbytery leaders.

Finances: The Steering Committee and Project Unit are also acutely aware of the limited financial resources of the Assembly and the wider Church. We are seeking any efficiency we can possibly find, including savings in travel, consultancy, and office costs. However, we have also budgeted what believe it will take to get the job done.

In terms of mitigation strategies for all the risks, this has been a strong focus of the project plan and has guided the strategies for broadening and deepening our engagement with the Church. However, it is also the case that the team is very much working at maximum capacity. Therefore, we are working to ensure the team is resilient and has the right support around them to sustain the effort required to deliver on the project plan.

### *Budget*

The Steering Committee requested the early preparation of a 2023-24 draft budget. After considering it at its February meeting, following further work and revision it is now provided to the ASC.

	2023-24 Draft	2022-23	2022-23
--	---------------	---------	---------

	Budget (\$)	Budget (\$)	Reforecast (\$)
Salaries and Wages	262,298	299,000	176,092
Superannuation	27,206	31,395	17,764
Non-salary staff costs (rent, IT, phone, internet)	27,000	29,900	26,334
Travel	40,000	30,000	30,130
Events	48,000	12,000	26,400
Office Costs (postage, printing, subscriptions)	10,000	2,000	10,985
Professional Fees	100,000	-	-
Consultants & Contractors	25,000	20,000	19,998
<b>Total</b>	<b>539,504</b>	<b>424,295</b>	<b>307,703</b>

Above is a summary of the budget reforecast and the 2023-24 Draft Budget agreed by the Steering Committee. The budget assumptions for the 2023-24 budget include:

- A continuation of the current staffing
- A 2.5% increase in salaries and non-salaries costs
- Extensive travel to all Synods and provision for travel to Presbyteries through the collective discernment phase
- A further retreat of the Steering Committee in December 2023 and provision for a gathering of for Workstream 4 of key leaders in August/September
- A similar provision for consultants and contractors for research (including National Church Life Survey), communications and audio-visual content, translation or interpretation needs.

The most significant variation from the 2022-23 budget is the provision for professional fees. This has been separated out from the other consultants and contractors budget line so that it is clear that this is a provision for professional services, specifically financial modelling, governance advice and legal advice. The indicative split between these two is:

- \$50,000 for financial modelling. Indicatively this would purchase about 20-25 days work. We have sought advice and this is recommended where we have one to two options to model. Cost

could be reduced if we were able to collect financial data internally in a consistent way. This will be a focus of our data collection process.

- \$50,000 for governance and legal advice. Indicatively this would purchase 10-15 days work. We have sought advice and this is also recommended where we have one to two options. The focus of this advice would be on the legal issues with options to be considered and a proposed roadmap for the legal steps required to implement the options. Some of this provision may be required to get specific advice on legal and governance issues identified in particular contexts.

This provision is for where we need specialist, timely and independent advice which we cannot readily source in-house. This is not a substitute for seeking advice internally where it is available. This is designed to be an adequate provision for the scale of possible options being contemplated. If the amount budgeted is not required then we will not use it.

Based on the ASC's decision to fund the project until the end of the 2023 calendar year based on the original 2022-23 Budget this leaves a funding gap of \$327,356. The Steering Committee and the Project Unit are deeply committed to maximising the value of the resources the Church is investing in this project and finding efficiencies wherever possible. However, the timeline, the scale of the project and the focus on quality outcomes mean the budget has been prepared with a realistic assessment of what achieving the mandate set by the Assembly will take.

This draft budget will feed into the overall budget process of the Assembly however in light of the funding gap it is provided to the ASC at this stage to assist it in planning and engagement with the Church.

The Assembly decision regarding Act2 includes the following:

*22.4 to affirm the importance and urgency of this work and that it should be adequately resourced; and*

*22.5 to request each of the Synods in consultation with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress to join with the Assembly to consider and contribute to resourcing the work.*

In noting the decision of the Assembly, after discussion with the Steering Committee and the Assembly General Secretary we are proposing the General Secretary write to all Synods requesting their consideration of what contribution they can make to fully funding the Act2 Project for the 2023-24 financial year.

### **Project Unit**

The staff of the Project Unit are now fully on board and are now working at full capacity. Over Christmas Cyrus relocated to Perth and we are grateful to the Synod of Western Australia for its provision of a desk for Cyrus in the Synod office while he settles in.

The diverse experience and expertise are coming to the fore. While it was not in the planning, it has been excellent to have connections across multiple states in Australia ensuring that even within the team we do not become too focused on the situation of one context.

### *Church Engagement*

At the time of writing the project unit is in an intensive period of direct outreach across the Uniting Church. This includes:

- Seeking an opportunity to visit every Synod before the end of April to meet with key Synod leaders. Four Synods have responded with visits scheduled. (17 Feb) The General Secretary has also written to each Synod requesting time at Synods in Session for the Act2 Project.
- Direct personal contact with every Presbytery. We have made direct personal contact with the leaders of 31 of the 33 Presbyteries (17 Feb).
- Contact with as many congregations and faith communities as possible with a pack including information about the project (poster, material for notices, video) and a guide to conversation with their Church Council and/or leaders to share back with the project.

We have received a largely positive response from the Church to our direct outreach with many eager to engage with project. Even those who are more sceptical have appreciated the direct contact and the staff having the time and ability to explore areas of concern. This engagement will scale up over the coming weeks and months.

### *Uniting in Prayer*

By the time the ASC meets in July Uniting in Prayer will have just recently concluded. On 15 February the President launched [Uniting in Prayer](#) with a call to the whole Church to join in prayer between Pentecost (28 May) and 46<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Uniting Church (22 June). Key activities during this time will include:

- Joining every part of the Church together in prayer chain
- Daily prayers offered from across the Church
- Liturgical resources and biblical reflections

The early registrations from the launch have been very encouraging and anecdotal feedback seems to indicate the ideas has been resonating. As a team we believe this is an important galvanising moment for the Church, however even more important, we believe prayer works.

### *Drop-Ins*

The drop-ins were offered as an early point of engagement for people interested in finding more about the project. We have held them fortnightly at different days and times. About 20 people have participated including people from every Synod and a diversity of age, mainly generation X and generation Y. Most people are somewhat familiar with the project. Generally, they come to find out more information, explore when and how their community can be involved or because they are enthusiastic about a particular issue. Now they are up and running they are a relatively low effort way to

informally engage people. They are also reducing the need for one on one meetings for people within the Church just seeking an update.

### *Communication*

We have had some communication to the Church through the Christmas/New Year period primarily through National Update and social media. From the beginning of February this is significantly scaling up with the following:

- Launch of a Project Plan
- The President's invitation to the Uniting in Prayer<sup>1</sup>
- Launch of the congregational resources

The Assembly Communications Unit has also met with the Synod communications teams about the amplification of key moments.

The Steering Committee regularly receives an updated on the reach and engagement of communications We are utilising this to refine our communications strategy and plans. While we are focused on utilising existing communications channels, we know there are many bottle necks and leaks in our Church's communication channels. Therefore, we are seeking as far as possible to connect directly and track our communications across the Church.

### **Conclusion**

This report comes at a time of significant scale up and momentum in the work of the Project. By the time the ASC meets in March much more work will have been completed. The Project Unit remains motivated and engaged in progressing the work mandated by the Assembly with the whole Church. It remains both daunting and exciting and as we connect with the diversity of our Church, we are both encouraged and challenged. Prayer remains our constant source of strength, as we encounter both our own and the Church's hopes and fears for this project we are comforted by the knowledge of Christ as our companion and guide on this journey. We are ever attentive to the leading of the Spirit. We see little signs that maybe God is doing a new thing and through this Project we have the chance to participate.

---

<sup>1</sup> Uniting in Prayer is the name for the 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.