



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

15-17 March 2024

DOCUMENT 11

Title	Report from the Standards for Ministries Committee
Type of Paper	For approval and noting.
Assembly or ASC Minute	Assembly minutes 22.09.04 and 22.06.05.
Consultation	Nil in this reporting period
Purpose	Report to ASC request a change to a Regulation and reporting on MEB/College responses to Assembly requests.
Rationale & Findings Summary	This report includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. General report of the SFM.2. A proposal to amend Regulation 3.1.6 (j) (vii) concerning processes for the recognition of completion of formation requirements and the issuing of certificates.
Attachments	Nil
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive the report.2. Approve the amendment to Regulation 3.1.6 (j) (vii) as detailed in the body of this report to be included in a report and proposal to the 17th Assembly.
Submitted by	<input type="text" value="Rev Dr Rob McFarlane (Committee Chairperson)"/>

Report from the Standards for Ministries Committee

Introduction:

Since last reporting to the ASC in March 2023, the Standards for Ministries Committee has met three times.

Consultations with Heads of Colleges and MEB Chairs:

Since SFM's last report to the ASC, a number of Heads of Colleges and MEB Chairs were invited to the Act2 consultation on theological culture and education on 6-7 December, 2023. We look forward to feedback from the Act2 Working Group arising from this gathering.

The MEB Chairs met most recently on Zoom on Monday, 19 February. The agenda focussed on:

- A round-up of the state-of-play around the MEBs and Colleges.
- Current and emerging areas of collaboration across our Synods.
- Reflections on last year's Act2 consultation on theological culture and education.

It is anticipated that MEB Chairs meetings will occur several more times in the first half of the year, focussing on growing greater collaboration, especially in shared programs.

The next gathering of the Heads of Colleges will be hosted by Nungalinga College on Tuesday, 25 June, immediately preceding the annual National Theological Educators Gathering on 26-27 June.

Consultations:

The next consultation to occur is with the Northern Synod will be held in March, 2024, led by the Rev Fran Barber, Rev Dr Geoff Thompson, and the Rev Mark Kickett.

The consultation with NSW/ACT scheduled for the second half of 2022 has been deferred to 2024 due to the difficulty of finding a team to lead it, with the previous team members having withdrawn due to other commitments, changing roles and study leave.

Annual MEB reports:

Annual reports are being sought from MEBs covering the year 2023. Apart from standards areas, SFM is seeking particular comment on areas of collaboration across our MEBs and Colleges.

The 2023 reports covering the year 2022 sought comment on two resolutions of the 16th Assembly:

- "Note that the current 'Standards for Education and Formation of Candidates for Ordination - Phase 2' requires that "due attention be given to the different perspectives of Ministry of Deacon and Ministry of the Word" (Clause 15) and draws the attention of UCA theological colleges to the need to provide specific courses, formation and field placements for Deacon candidates to prepare them for diaconal ministry." (Assembly minute 22.09.04)
- "To request the Standards for Ministry Committee to identify the most appropriate way to embed learning from the wisdom of First Peoples, care of creation, climate justice and the spiritual and theological basis for a zero emissions church into formation, education and training for the specified ministries of the Uniting Church and report back to the November 2022 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee." (Assembly minute 22.06.05)

Due attention ... to the different perspectives of Ministry of Deacon and Ministry of the Word

The MEBs reported on both the diverse practical ways in which they fulfil this requirement as well as the actual numbers of candidates. The number of candidates for MoD in our Synods range from 0-3, with only one Synod (VicTas) having 3 candidates. Accordingly, each College provides a bespoke program for their MoD candidates developed collaboratively for each candidate, and in collaboration with formation panels which include Presbytery representation.

The Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (SA Synod) has picked up responsibility for the required Deacon Intensive, and developed a formal program with three diaconally-focussed subjects with integration into a Master of Social Work to support bi-vocational ministry. SFM has commend this to all our Colleges. Several with Deacon candidates are supporting them to participate, ensuring both quality and creating a critical mass. A number of Colleges have embraced this program.

“ ...embed learning from the wisdom of First Peoples, care of creation, climate justice and the spiritual and theological basis for a zero emissions church into formation, education and training for the specified ministries of the Uniting Church ... ”

The MEBs reported on their Colleges' programs with both First Nations and climate justice. The Northern Synod noted that learning from the wisdom of First Peoples is embedded in all of the programs at Nungalinga College. No College responded to the highly specific nature of the request.

Regarding the specific wording of the Assembly request, “request the Standards for Ministry Committee to identify the most appropriate way ...”, the SFM invites the ASC to note that SFM is an oversight committee and does not deliver programs.

Further:

- There was no previous requirement/resolution that Colleges actually include this, and that the proposal didn't come from a working group or committee.
- Colleges teach according to the rules for the Specified Ministries which focus on attributes, and that the Assembly doesn't direct Colleges as to content.
- It's an unhelpful precedent for full Assembly meetings to make specific curriculum teaching content decisions as a matter of practice? (In a sense, that the proposal is technically “not competent”).
- Even allowing for the above, this is an extraordinarily specific and detailed curriculum content request.

An appropriate next step would be for the ASC to appoint a working group to develop a “theological basis for a zero emissions church” which would support the Colleges in their work.

A proposal to Amend UCA Regulations Regarding Processes Connected with Assembly-Issued Certificates

Introduction

There has been confusion in some Synods around processes whereby MEBs request “Statement of Satisfactory Completion of Phase 2 Studies” certificates from the Assembly (hereafter referred to as “certificates of completion”). In some instances, people had subsequently been ordained without a certificate of completion having been requested; in other instances, there has been confusion around who within the Synod requests the certificate of completion: College or MEB. These issues alerted SFM to the fact that the current process is somewhat unwieldy. This paper proposes a process which is more streamlined and makes sense within the current unfolding of our polity.

Current Process

1. Theological College determines that a candidate for ordination has completed their studies and reports this to the MEB.
2. MEB confirms that the candidate has completed all formation requirements and requests a certificate of completion from the Assembly. This certificate is signed by the President and General Secretary.
3. MEB communicates to Presbytery that the candidate has completed their formation.
4. Presbytery, having determined to ordain the candidate requests a certificate of Ordination from the Assembly. This certificate is numbered but not signed by President and General Secretary but has room for signing by Presbytery Chairperson.

Suggested Process (Proposed changes underlined)

1. Theological College determines that a candidate for ordination has completed their studies and reports this to the MEB.
2. MEB confirms that the candidate has completed all formation requirements and produces a certificate of completion.
3. MEB communicates to Presbytery that the candidate has completed their formation and provides the certificate of completion to the Presbytery.
4. Presbytery, having determined to ordain the candidate requests a certificate of Ordination from the Assembly, and provides a copy of the certificate of completion to the Assembly as part of this request. The Ordination certificate is numbered and is signed by President but also has room for signing by Presbytery Chairperson.

Benefits of the Proposed Changes

The proposed process:

1. Reflects that Assembly, through the ASC on the recommendation of SFM, approves Colleges every five years as meetings the standards for formation of candidates for ministry. SFM does not assess each candidate. Thus, the process reflects appropriate accountability and control in governance, devolving authority to MEBs to issue certificates under the authority of their five-yearly accreditation.
2. Makes the relationship between Colleges and MEBs clear.
3. Both simplifies and speeds up the issuing of certificates while ensuring that all steps have been completed.

Changes to Regulations Required

Modification of 3.1.6 (j)(vii) to indicate that Assembly sets the general conditions for qualification for ordination, rather than those for individual candidates, though this may be adequately covered under (iii).

Existing regulation 3.1.6

Without limiting the generality of the responsibilities of the Assembly as set out in Paragraph 38 and 39 of the Constitution, the Assembly shall be responsible for:

(j) for the oversight of standards of ministerial education and for establishing policies relating to standards of formation, education and training for the specified ministries, including continuing education, professional development and training. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- (i) recognition of colleges as approved centres for training for ministry;*
- (ii) determining the pre-requisites for admission to candidature and the standards of ministerial education to be required of a candidate to qualify for recognition as a Minister, including the requirements for completion of the period of discernment;*
- (iii) prescribing the areas of study and the minimum requirements within each area which shall comprise an acceptable course of study for the various ministries of the Church, including the requirements for mentoring and support for newly ordained ministers during the first three years of their ministry;*
- (iv) receive annually for review from each Ministerial Education Board a report on ways in which the prescriptions specified under (iii) are being met;*
- (v) maintain a roll of candidates;*
- (vi) setting standards for qualifying examinations where appropriate for applicants seeking acceptance as candidates for specified ministries and arranging for the administration of such examinations;*

(vii) prescribing the conditions under which a candidate qualifies for ordination and/or recognition and issues statements certifying that the requirements of Phase Two have been fulfilled in respect of each candidate on receipt of advice from the Ministerial Education Board concerned that all requirements of the course have been satisfactorily met;

(viii) arranging regular consultations of staff of the several theological colleges as may be appropriate; and

(ix) determining guidelines whereby Ministers and Youth Workers shall fulfil the requirement for three to five year continuing education agreements with their Presbytery or other appointing body;

Proposed change to Regulation 3.1.6 (j)(vii)

Amend to read:

(vii) prescribing the conditions under which a candidate qualifies for ordination and/or recognition, and receiving from Presbyteries statements certifying that the requirements of Phase Two have been completed in respect of each candidate, as issued by the Ministerial Education Board concerned;

Rev Dr Rob McFarlane, Chairperson Standards for Ministries Committee

PROPOSALS:

That the Assembly Standing Committee:

- 1. Receive the report.**
- 2. Approve the amendment to Regulation 3.1.6 (j) (vii) as detailed in the body of this report to be included in a report and proposal to the 17th Assembly.**