

Australian theological education: contexts

Charles Sherlock

A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND THE CHURCHES

The first century: in 'parallel' with the universities

19th century: distinctive denominational seminaries – 'Divinity' is excluded from the universities

1891 *Australian College of Theology*: wholly Anglican until 1962

1910 *Melbourne College of Divinity* (Act of Victorian Parliament): Protestant until 1972

1920-50s Bible colleges emerge: inter-denominational evangelical Protestant

Graduate BDs at Universities of Sydney, Queensland

1964 Martin Report encourages inclusion of theology in public higher education

1965 MCD / ACTh Conference narrowly decides not to pursue BTh;
Morpeth Conference on Theological Education

1968 *Australian & New Zealand Association of Theological Schools* (ANZATS)

1969 *South Pacific Association of Bible Colleges* (SPABC)

The 70s and 80s: two decades of change and co-operation

State governments begin to legislate for non-university degree providers:

1972 MCD Act includes Roman Catholics, inaugurates BTheol

1978 ANZATS Library Consultations lead to ANZTLA (1986)

1979 Tabor SA - 'Christian tertiary education' institution: Tabor now in five states
Flinders University opens to theology (via ACD, on separate campus)

1983 *Sydney College of Divinity*

Brisbane College of Theology (linked to Griffith University for some years)

1985 Harvest Bible College (Melbourne)

Christian Heritage College (Brisbane)

1986 Murdoch University integrates the *Perth College of Divinity* (1985) on campus

The 90s and 00s: new colleges, networks and government relationships

1990 University of Notre Dame: requires 'core' theological units in all courses

1991 Australian Catholic University forms (in eastern states plus ACT):
School of Theology is now a Faculty

1993 *Alphacrucis* (then called Southern Cross) consolidates older Pentecostal colleges

1997 Charles Sturt University includes St Mark's, Canberra

Committee of Deans of Theological Consortia (ACT, MCD, SCD)

2001 MCD gains access to federal research funding

2005 MCD undergoes AUQA audit, MCD Act revised

2007 University of Newcastle commences new BTh

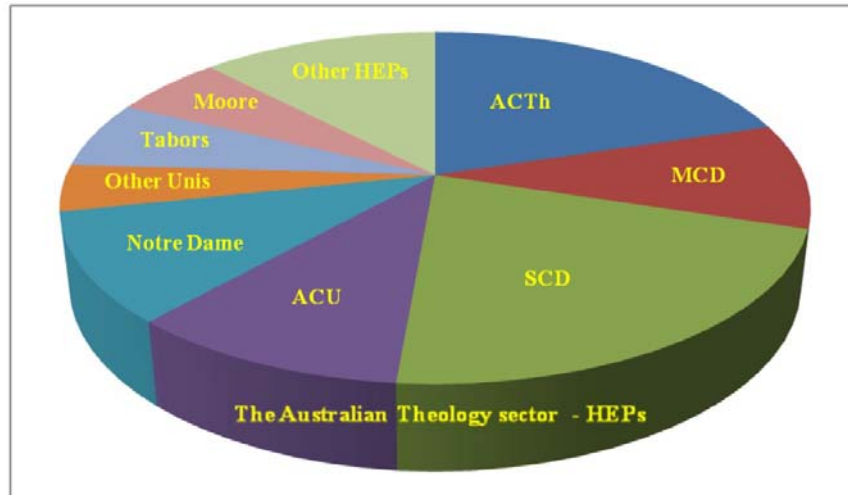
2009 *Council of Deans of Theology* includes all theology-related HEPs

NB: in the public universities in 2005, 'Religious Studies' was c. 300 and 'Theology' c. 325 EFSTL

The Australian theology sector today:

Some 14,000 students, representing 6,200 EFTSL, from 2010 grouped in

3 consortia, 6 university schools, 17 others: 75 distinct HEP institutions (+ at least 31 VET) taught by some 477 fulltime (313 with doctoral) and 470 part-time (170 doctoral) faculty, some 57% related to consortia, 22% to stand-alone HEPs, 12% universities, 9% Pentecostal



<i>Institution:</i>	<i>Level:</i>	Under-graduate	Postgraduate Coursework	Ministry Studies	HDR	Total	Percentage
Australian College of Theology		711.7	471.6	12.0	20.7	1,216.0	19.6
Melbourne College of Divinity		275.0	215.3	12.0	89.0	591.3	9.5
Sydney College of Divinity		926.0	355.5	2.5	9.6	1,293.6	20.8
Australian Catholic University		473.8	158.0	2.0	38.0	671.8	10.8
University of Notre Dame		557.5	42.5		3.3	603.3	9.7
Other Universities: Theology		196.6	64.3	18.8	57.0	336.6	5.4
Tabor (all)		307.4	57.8	3.8		368.9	5.9
Moore Theological College		321.0	21.0		0.5	342.5	5.5
Other Theology HEPs		667.4	102.0	14.5	2.0	785.9	12.7
TOTAL		4,436.4	1,488.0	65.5	220.0	6,209.9	100.0

B GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS

- 1982 Austudy becomes available to theological students
- 1995 *Australian Qualification Framework* inaugurated (fully in place by 2000)
- 2000 *Postgraduate Educational Loans Scheme (PELS)*
Educational Support for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act review: involves
Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS),
and the *Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS)*
which has the effect of instituting a ‘licencing’ system for private providers,
involving Tuition Assurance Schemes (cf formation of ACPET, COPHE)
- 2003 *Higher Education Support Act (HESA)*:
National Protocols: Universities: 3+ Fields [1- Field Specialist University proposal]
governance requirements tightened
Tables A (37 public, 2 private universities),
B (3 private Self-Accrediting Institutions, including the MCD)
C (1 overseas university operating in Australia
plus Non-Self-Accrediting Institutions (now c. 150)
‘National priority places’ in teaching and nursing, and beyond Table A.
- 2005 FEE-HELP: available for all HEPs, makes theology ‘normal’,
requires submission of accountancy data, and adherence to National Protocols
- significant effects on college governance, quality assurance and reporting
- 2008 Bradley Review, responded to in
- 2009 *Transforming Australian Higher Education*:
equity and participation focus (40% by 2013)
universal 5-year accreditation for all HEPs, with focus on standards
student-enrolment based funding from 2012
permanent indexation of all funding from 2012
Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) framework: merges IGS and RTS
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency announced (TEQSA)

C COLLEGE AND CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS

Fragmentation is the ‘obvious’ conclusion from an ‘outside’ survey of colleges:

- but some diversity is understandable: ecclesial, theological, ministerial ...

Church support is varying:

- several traditions continue to support ordination training (Roman Catholic, Churches of Christ, 7th-Day, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Salvation Army)
- some are revising support levels (UCA, Baptist, Sydney Anglicans)
- most colleges are coming to rely on fees and donations (the traditional pattern for inter-denominational, Pentecostal and some other colleges)
- but there is little support for other than ordinands: teachers and nursing receive CSP /HECS
- limited research resources, except for Table A and B HEPs access to federal funding

Some questions for principals:

What is the minimum EFSTL for a viable HEP?

- administrative / infrastructure / reporting ability
- discipline coverage
- people diversity
- research capacity

How are changes in church and society affecting funding?

- shifts in church support
- successive 'de-Christianised' generations
- aging of long-term supporters
- a new competitiveness emerging?

What relationships could be fostered to ameliorate these issues?

- consolidation of consortia
- benchmarking between theology and other relevant HEPs
- using the DEEWR typology of faculty qualifications
- further co-operation in library inter-action
- more encouragement for cross-institutional enrolment in specialty strengths
- common research admission and examination processes, shared supervisor training

How possible do these ideas for co-operation seem?

- common admissions scores (UAI, IELTS), credit points
- shared articulation / credit transfer policies
- consistent use of AQF nomenclature, levels (300-700)
- sector-wide Tuition Assurance scheme (FEE-HELP, ESOS)?
- shared policies & procedures for privacy, harassment / discrimination, grievances

How helpful would it be to work towards

- a common basic template for unit descriptions
- cognate degree structures (eg majors, honours, demand hours) and graduate outcomes
- shared guidelines for essay preparation, citation rules, word length values etc.
- assessment models, grade descriptors (level / discipline / course), scales: letter, %, GPA
- a sector-wide student learning evaluation instrument

Some challenges arising from the project:

'Service teaching': (c. 25% of theology EFSTLs, growing):

- how *little* theology is needed for effective application in another discipline?
- how is the teaching / research nexus maintained?
- how is faculty teaching creativity / satisfaction sustained?

Technology:

- widespread email, wireless web presence: can assignments be sent electronically?
- how are pedagogy issues related to a 'visual' culture (eg data projectors) being addressed?
- how is online learning being integrated into the community of learning, and formation?
- how is the use of (non-) 'visual' learning in ministry explored / encouraged ?

Three national structures seem to be needed:

- facilitating faculty and institutional relationships (ANZATS, SPABC)
- a clear voice to government (Committee of Deans?)
- encouraging scholarship (ATF, ANZSTS, CBA, AAL, AASTFE ...)