

Director's Report: Growth for Future Impact

The Queensland Bioethics Centre (QBC) celebrates its fifth anniversary this year as a partnership between the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and Australian Catholic University. A clear sign of how fruitful these five years have been is that, as director, I am finding it increasingly difficult to fit all the information about the Centre's activities into a brief one-page report. This, surely, is good news. And, of course, this fruitfulness has been made possible by the ongoing support and commitment of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Queensland, and of our key partners in Catholic health and aged care: St Vincent's Health Australia, Southern Cross Care Queensland, and especially Mater Group, which co-funds, with ACU, the Mater Senior Lectureship in Healthcare Ethics, held by Dr Bridget Pratt.



If there is a theme for the 2021-2022 report, then it must be *Growth for Future Impact*.

This year has seen the commencement of the three doctoral candidates recruited and funded by ACU to work with Dr Pratt. This brings the number of ACU-funded doctoral candidates currently being supervised by QBC staff to four. This year also saw the completion and graduation of two doctoral candidates under my supervision, Dr Jeyver Rodríguez and Dr Christopher Parkes (their work is profiled later in this annual report). This is a great achievement for our young, and small, centre (and for the partners we work with in ACU's Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry, the Schools of Theology and Philosophy, and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile). The new candidates are working on important topics in the field of bioethics, including, African philosophical perspectives on justice in global health, epistemic injustice in global health research, social and environmental justice in aged care, and reconsiderations of the meaning of compassion in the context of VAD. This development of the QBC with respect to the recruitment and training of HDR students promises both outputs in terms of high-quality research publications in the coming years as well as, very importantly from the perspective of the objectives set out in the QBC partnership agreement, the development of bioethical capacity in Australia.

This development has only been possible because of the partnerships that characterise the QBC. First, in 2017, the primary partnership between ACU and the Archdiocese made possible this new chapter in the history of the QBC (first founded in 1981). Second, the existence of the QBC and its close association with ACU made the co-funding by Mater of the Senior Lectureship in Healthcare Ethics an option. The recruitment of a high-calibre researcher in the form of Dr Bridget Pratt to fill this role in turn led ACU to agree to sponsor first two, and then, due to the quality of the applicants, three doctoral stipends specifically in bioethics. This 'growth through partnership' model is bearing fruit not only for the QBC, but also promises to have increasing impact on the Australian and international bioethical landscape.

The 'growth through partnership' also extends internationally. Dr Pratt, in partnership with colleagues at universities in Africa, Europe, South America and North America, secured a substantial Wellcome Trust Discovery Award to investigate solidarity in global health. The full amount of funding that will come to ACU commencing in 2023 is over \$600,000, and includes funding for 20 percent of Dr Pratt's salary for five years, a post-doctoral researcher to work on the project at the QBC for two years, and for ACU to host an international symposium.

This year has also been a productive year in terms of research outputs—seven in total. This is thanks largely to the very impressive work of Dr Pratt, which includes six new publications in high-quality journals and more accepted or under review. Dr Ademola Fayemi, one of our new doctoral students, who already holds a doctorate in philosophy, also published his first article with an ACU by-line.

The partnership with Mater has also led to a significant research collaboration, headed by Dr Pratt. The project considers sustainability in healthcare infrastructure development, involves both theoretical and empirical components, and will use the development of Mater's new Springfield hospital as a case study to develop a tool to assist ethical decision-making about social and environmental goods in planning healthcare infrastructure developments.

Education, be it in formal ACU units or in professional development continues to be an important

part of the work of QBC. I have taught Catholic Sexual Ethics this year and Dr Pratt has developed a new Digital Health Ethics unit for ACU Online and continues to deliver the post-graduate healthcare ethics unit for the School of Philosophy. In addition, Dr Pratt has developed a series of lectures that she will be giving as part of her professional development work with Mater. In the professional development space, I have continued to provide a variety of workshops and lectures to stakeholders in Catholic health and aged care and Catholic education. I have also engaged with CHA and other stakeholders to address the ongoing question of how to build bioethical capacity in the Catholic sector in Australia through educational pathways, including an opportunity to make a short presentation to the CEOs of CHA members. This remains a challenging area and I will continue to promote the various possibilities that have been developed at ACU including the Master of Theological Studies with a specialisation in bioethics.

The staff of the QBC are making a growing impact through their engagement. Here are some highlights. Dr Pratt was invited to deliver the prestigious Hutton Lectureship in Ethics at the University of Cincinnati on the topic “Confronting the Global Crisis in Knowledge Production”. Dr Pratt also sits on Mater’s human research ethics committee and clinical ethics committee. I continue to work on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, as a Vatican- appointed commissioner, and in September 2022 attended the WCC Assembly at the invitation of the Commission to promote its work on moral discernment and disagreement in the churches. I have also begun my term on the Australian Health Ethics Committee, the peak health ethics body in Australia. My work chairing the writing group tasked with revising the Catholic Health Australia Code of Ethical Standards continues, with substantial progress having been made and an opportunity to present some of this progress at the CHA national conference in Brisbane in August 2022. I have also been part of another writing group established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to develop guidelines for pastoral workers in the context of VAD. At the end of 2021, I wrote a piece for *The Conversation* on an ethical problem with the way in which the Victorian government was implementing its vaccine mandates, a position that the government subsequently changed.

Looking to the next five years, I believe that the QBC will continue to deliver on its objectives of research, teaching, engagement, and consultation as set out in its founding agreement. I believe that there will be opportunities for further growth by attracting third-party funding to build bioethical capacity in the Catholic sector in Queensland. And above all, I believe that the next five years will see the emergence of the impact of the growth through partnership achieved in the first five years.

David G. Kirchoffer
Brisbane, 30 September 2022