



Revising the Constitution of the DBE

Rationale

Diocesan Boards of Education (DBEs) fulfil a vital role in education and are expected to be able to play a full and effective role in support of Church of England schools. DBEs across the country are being challenged by 'A Diocesan Board of Education for the Future', commissioned by the National Society and put together by senior leaders in Church schools in July 2013, to move towards smaller, more focused boards. Boards need to be of an appropriate size to encourage discussion of detailed and technical issues; a large body tends to debate in general terms whereas a smaller body tends to examine issues in greater depth. The DBE of the Future report recommends that, as the work of DBEs becomes more professional and more complex, Boards should become smaller and more focused, with more scope to co-opt members to bring a diverse range of skills and expertise.

Recommendations laid out in A Diocesan Board for the Future:

19. *The current DBE Measure necessarily results in a large DBE, being as a minimum 21 members in size and potentially 31 or more. This is the consequence of a DBE Measure which seeks to make the DBE representative, while also including expert support. The legislation does provide for an alternative composition to be agreed by the Synod (with approval from the Secretary of State); some dioceses have made use of this process to good effect.*

20. *In the 20+ years since the Measure was introduced, the fashion in corporate and charity environments is towards smaller, more focused boards. Research by the Cass Business School in 2012 looked at the hallmarks of good governance and identified boards of 11- 15 as representing current best practice.*

21. *Given that the representative model has not necessarily achieved a closer relationship between Synod and the DBE, the urgent need is for Board members who can fulfil a role akin to non-executive directors: there to support and challenge, but understanding the distinction between their role and that of the DDE. Accordingly, more emphasis should be placed on sourcing people with the right skills and expertise. This might result in an advertisement and interview process and perhaps term limits and end of term reviews of board member performance (all of which are increasingly common in the charity sector). A list of skills and expertise required should be maintained and used to ensure that the right mix of board members is established. A key role is that of the chair of the DBE and a suggested role description is included at Appendix 1.*

22. *The National Society (NS) intends to seek a change in the Measure, to enable Boards to restructure more effectively and will also consider whether it is appropriate to move away from the language of 'Board of Education' to something which reflects a more dynamic and proactive education provision..*

School Governance model

A smaller, more skills-focused DBE would then be in line with most public sector boards with an emphasis on streamlining and ensuring they have the skills they need to work effectively.

For example, all school governing bodies of England and Wales are required to reconstitute themselves by September 2015. Government expectations of what the priorities should be for deciding the constitution of the governing body are to be found in the Constitution of Governing Bodies of Maintained Schools 2012 Regulations. Key recommendations on size of governing body are that 'Governing bodies should be no bigger than they need to be to have all the skills necessary to carry out their functions' and 'Smaller governing bodies are more likely to be cohesive and dynamic, and able to act more decisively'.

The document outlines skills considerations; a further area which DBEs should reflect in their own practice. Oxford is a very large and diverse diocese and the ODBE needs to continue to reflect this in the Board's composition.

Executive Summary

At present the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education has a membership of up to 31 people if all co-options are taken up. The DBE has passed a motion proposing that the DBE should be constituted as follows:

1. The Bishop of Oxford
2. In the event of the Bishop not taking the Chair of the Board, 1 nomination from the Bishop to chair the Board.
3. One member of the Senior Staff – nominated by the Bishop
4. One further nomination from the Bishop of Oxford
5. 10 members elected by Diocesan Synod from the Archdeaconries as follows:
 - a. Oxford Archdeaconry – 1 member of Diocesan Synod, Lay or Ordained
 - b. Berkshire Archdeaconry – 3 members, 1 of whom must be a member of Diocesan Synod – of the 3 members 1 must be Lay and 1 must be ordained
 - c. Bucks Archdeaconry – as for Berkshire
 - d. Dorchester Archdeaconry – as for Berkshire
6. Not less than 4 and not more than 8 persons co-opted by the Board. Four of the co-options should be people who have experience of church schools in the diocese or have experience of other areas of work with which the Board is concerned. The remaining 4 places should be used to ensure that the Board has the right skills mix in order out carry out its work.

This structure gives a maximum of 22 members.

Timescale	
28.9.13	Recommendation to review constitution of DBE approved by DBE
15.7.14	Proposal to revise constitution agreed in principle by DBE
24.11.14	Meeting of the DBE Executive Committee to finalise proposed constitution
5.12.14	Proposal to revise the constitution approved Bishop's Council
21.3.15	Proposal to revise the constitution presented to Diocesan Synod for approval
March 2015	Subject to approval by Synod, application submitted to the Secretary of State
July/August 2015	Prepare election papers
September 2015	Elections held
Jan 2016	New Board commences

Proposal

The Synod is asked to approve the revisions to the Constitution of the DBE as set out in the above paper.