**Catholic Education – National and Diocesan Structures**

1. **Overall Context**

A **Diocese** is a portion of the people of God entrusted to a bishop. It constitutes a particular Church in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists.

The **diocesan bishop** governs the particular Church entrusted to him as Vicar of Christ: he has proper, ordinary and immediate jurisdiction, exercised by him personally in Christ's name.

In order to assist him in carrying out his responsibilities, he has a **diocesan curia**: offices, departments and officers appointed to assist him and to act in his name in the governance of the diocese. This usually includes a **Diocesan Education Service**, or **Schools' Commission**, and a **Diocesan Department of Religious Education** or a **Director of Religious Education**. It also includes a **Diocesan Financial Secretary** and, in some dioceses, a **Chief Operating Officer (COO)**. The precise structure differs in each diocese, and over time, as the diocesan bishop determines what best serves the needs of the diocese for the time being. In many, but not all, dioceses the departments or offices described above are combined.

The **Bishops' Conference** of England and Wales is the permanent assembly of the bishops of England and Wales.[[1]](#footnote-1)  It exists to enable the bishops to collaborate pastorally in order to provide for the common good and to address issues which affect the faithful throughout the territory of the Conference. In particular, the Conference is the forum where the bishops decide on any collective policies or actions they wish to enter into, especially in relation to representations and negotiations with the State.

Although the Bishops' Conference has some specific responsibilities entrusted to it (for example, the issuing of general norms concerning religious education in schools) in general, it is not the superior of the bishops and other ordinaries that constitute its membership. The Bishops' Conference exists to serve the bishops, not to replace them.

The Bishops' Conference has a number of **departments** and **agencies**. Departments are responsible for setting policy or recommending policy to the plenary meetings of the Conference. Agencies are responsible for enacting the Bishops' policies. Departments and agencies relate to the Bishops' Conference through their episcopal chairman. The **Department of Education and Formation** is the department which makes or develops policies in relation to Catholic education. The **Catholic Education Service (CES)** is the Conference's agency for education. The episcopal chairman of the Department of Education and Formation is also the chairman of the CES.

1. **Responsibilities in the field of Education**

In relation to schools, canon law gives direct responsibility to the Bishops' Conference for issuing general norms for Religious Education (can. 804). This is currently discharged by the issuing of the Religious Education Directory by the Department. Other than this, responsibility for regulation and supervision of Religious Education remains with the diocese.[[2]](#footnote-2)

General diocesan responsibilities for Catholic schools include the recognition of Catholic schools and the use of the title 'Catholic'; oversight, supervision, inspection, visitation and general regulation of Catholic schools, including religious education and the employment of senior leaders, teachers of religious education and chaplains.

It is possible for some of these functions to be organised on a cross-diocesan or even national basis, but this requires the unanimous agreement of all the diocesan bishops concerned.

**The CES as the Education Agency of the Bishops’ Conference**

CES has two principal tasks: representing the views of the bishops collectively to the governments and other national agencies; and supporting dioceses in carrying out their educational functions.

The CES’s representative function is carried out directly on behalf of the Bishops’ Conference.

The CES’s role in supporting Dioceses is carried out in a number of ways. It includes model documentation and guidance for Dioceses and Catholic schools which Dioceses are free to use. It also includes advice, guidance and assistance on particular matters, particularly specialist ones, as a result of a request from the diocese concerned.

The CES is governed by its Management Committee. This consists of the Bishops of the Department for Education and Formation and two other members appointed by the episcopal Chairman. The CES Management Committee is accountable to the Bishops’ Conference through its Chairman (currently Bishop Marcus Stock).

1. **Groups of People Mandated by Diocesan Bishops**

There are a variety of national groups engaged in Catholic Education. Of these, one special category is those whose authority derives from the fact that its members have all received a particular mandate from their diocesan bishops.

These include Diocesan:

• Schools' Commissioners

• Directors of Religious Education (for schools)

• Financial Secretaries and Chief Operating Officers

• RE Advisers

• Inspectors (now accredited nationally on behalf of all diocesan bishops)

• Inspection co-ordinators

Some of these groups have organised themselves into national bodies, meetings or conferences and such bodies also possess a special status, by virtue of their membership. Traditionally, the CES has related to these groups primarily through those bodies where they exist. The diocesan mandate given to each of its members does not give the body any external function nationally, but it does make them important consultative bodies within the national Church. Indeed, it is primarily through these bodies, or a combination of them, that consensus might lead to a unanimous decision of diocesan bishops to organise certain functions on a cross-diocesan or national basis (such as the National Inspection Framework).

***The National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers - NBRIA***

The **National Board of Religious Inspectors** held its first meeting on 11th & 12th May 1875 at St Chad’s, Birmingham. This was a meeting of all the diocesan inspectors, called to address changes to the inspection system at that time. The Board’s membership, and its name, were subsequently enlarged to include Advisers as well as Inspectors, including those working in catechesis outside school (e.g. in parishes, with adults etc.). Membership of NBRIA is currently automatic (ex-officio) and comprises all *‘professional education advisers and inspectors in religious education, mandated and appointed by the local bishop to work in the diocesan education service’*. On matters requiring a vote, there is a single vote per diocese. The Board elects its own Chair, and has a President appointed by the Bishops’ Conference (currently Bishop Philip Egan). NBRIA also convenes regular meetings of the Diocesan **Directors of Religious Education** and specialist groups of advisers (Primary, Secondary etc.). At its AGM in 2022, NBRIA voted to establish an Inspectors’ section open to all Inspectors who are members of the new National Inspectorate.

***DSCs’ Conference***

The first meeting of the associated **Diocesan Schools’ Commissioners** of England and Wales was held on 29th & 30th March 1949 in St Peter’s Hall, Westminster, chaired by Bishop Beck. Representatives of the Diocesan Schools’ Commissions have met regularly ever since to discuss the workings of the 1944 settlement and its various developments. Membership is open to *‘officers appointed by diocesan Bishops to be their Schools’ Commissioners’* and is decided by each individual diocese. On any business requiring a vote, there is a single vote per diocese. The Conference elects an Executive Committee every three years, and the Executive Committee elects a Chairman from among its number. The remit of the Executive Committee is primarily to plan the DSC Conferences. Traditionally, the CES also used this forum as a representative sounding board between Conferences, but, since the Pandemic, this has largely been superseded by the meetings of all DSCs convened by the CES (currently fortnightly). The Conference invites the Chairman of the Department of Catholic Education and Formation to be its President (currently Bishop Marcus Stock).

***National Conference of Diocesan Financial Secretaries***

The **Conference of Diocesan Financial Secretaries** has now held regular meetings for many years. The Financial Secretary and/or Chief Operating Officer (COO) of each diocese is a member, and the Bishops’ Conference appoints a Bishop as an Episcopal Adviser to the Conference. A working relationship has been built up between the CES and the Financial Secretaries and COOs through this Conference. In recent years many dioceses have introduced the post of COO in addition to the Financial Secretary (which is a canonical post). Sometimes these are held by the same person, and sometimes by different people. In the last few years, the COO has become the line manager of the Diocesan Schools’ Commissioner in the majority of dioceses.

1. **Formatio**

In 2017, the Bishops’ Conference gave the CES a mandate to develop a national strategy for formation of leaders, teachers and governors in Catholic schools. To develop and implement this strategy, the CES established a collaborative partnership between dioceses, Catholic universities and (now) larger Academy Trusts.[[3]](#footnote-3) This has been set up as a separate charity. It is governed by a national Steering Group on which dioceses, universities and academy trusts from all four regions, plus a few national bodies, are represented. The Steering Group are the charity trustees and set the overall strategy for the work of Formatio. The Steering Group is assisted by four regional hubs, which bring together all the dioceses, the larger Academy Trusts and the Catholic university in that region. The regional hubs exist to enable consistent delivery of the Formatio strategy in each region. (Episcopal Trustee: Bishop Alan Williams SM).

1. **Other National Groups**

***Catholic Association of Teachers, Schools and Colleges (CATSC)***

Formed in 1986 by the amalgamation of the Association of Catholic Schools and Colleges (1897), and the Catholic Teachers’ Federation (1907), membership is open to all Catholic schools, colleges and academies. (Link Bishop: Bishop Marcus Stock)

***Catholic Independent Schools’ Conference (CISC)***

The first national meeting of Catholic independent schools was convened in 1989, and the Conference was formed the following year. There is an annual Conference and a Secretariat supporting independent Catholic schools. In recent years CISC has welcomed the non-maintained special schools into membership, and, with the CES, convenes regular meetings of the Catholic special schools.

***Association of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges (ACVIC)***

ACVIC came about as a result of Catholic sixth form colleges moving to the FE sector in 1993. It holds two regular conferences each year.

***Association of Catholic Chaplains in Education (ACCE)***

Founded in 1993 to support chaplains in Catholic schools. (Link Bishop: Bishop Mark Davies)

***Association of Teachers of Catholic Religious Education (ATCRE)***

Originating within CATSC, ATCRE established itself independently in 2018, and offers free membership and support, and an annual conference for all those teaching RE in Catholic schools. (Link Bishop: Bishop Alan Williams SM)

***National Association of Religious Orders in Education (ROE)***

Founded in 2019 to support religious orders engaged in providing Catholic schools and colleges.

***Catholic Academy Trust Training Collaborative (CATtColl)***

Founded as a result of conversations between trust leaders at the first CEO / CSEL Conference in 2021. Currently 21 trusts across 15 English dioceses. Wanting strong partnership with *Formatio* to support formation delivery nationally.

*Updated and Appendix added following discussion at DSC Executive in February 2023*

1. It also includes other Ordinaries of particular Churches in England and Wales and territories closely associated with them. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Bishops' Conference also has a slightly wider direct remit in relation to Catholic Higher Education (canons 809-811, 821) and the Apostolic See retains a direct role in relation to Ecclesiastical Faculties. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Certain larger schools in Wales. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)