

ACADEMIES PACK: DOCUMENT 2

A Policy for Schools wishing to consider conversion to Academy Status in the Diocese of Salisbury

The Aim of this policy is to inform Governing Bodies of the implications and processes involved in conversion to academy status.

It is a key aim that the values of collaborative, cooperative and peer-led ways of working be embodied in the prospective Academy Trust from the start, and should begin in the way we formulate this proposal.

The Background is that a significant number of Schools have asked the Board of Education to find a structure to enable them to move forward, given the present Government's determination to use Academies as the basis for all future provision.

The heart of the proposal is the desire to retain the family of Church Schools, with its clear Christian ethos, and to make that ethos foundational to further development of Church-supported education. It is intended to be an empowering, collaborative and cooperative model which enhances the shared ethos on the basis of facilitation, supported by a number of service level agreements. It is not intended as a top-down, top-slicing model which controls delivery; i.e. it will not take any funding or control away from the Academy.

Becoming an Academy

In recognition of the trust deeds which provide the foundation of the ethos of all our church schools, any church school wishing to convert to academy status needs to obtain the consent of the DBE. We are committed to ensuring that all our church academies remain distinctively Christian in character and so we expect the following:

- that the academy will maintain and develop the religious character of the Church of England school, working in close partnership with their parish/benefice/deanery and their local community
- that the academy continues to be committed to the wider family of church schools and to developing its relationship with the local, national and international Church
- that the new academy will work in support of other schools (not only the required relationship with at least one other school) and not to the detriment of other local schools
- that Collective Worship and Religious Education in the new academy continue to follow the guidance of the DBE
- that the SIAS inspection framework will continue to be used to assess and monitor Christian distinctiveness

In addition we have set up a single Umbrella Trust: The Diocese of Salisbury Education Trust (DSET) – a company limited by guarantee. All Church of England Schools in Salisbury Diocese converting to academy status under the 2010 Academies Act will be required to appoint this trust as a Corporate Member of their Academy Company.

We have now secured the agreement of the DfE that it is acceptable to them for us to continue to hold land and buildings in trust, thus obviating the need for a 125 year lease with all its attendant legal costs and complexities. This is applicable to both VA and VC schools seeking to convert.

As is currently the case with VA schools, we will continue to appoint a Diocesan surveyor to every new church academy who will work with the governors to maintain and develop the school's facilities to help secure the best quality education for our children and young people.

Further details of the specific conditions required to convert are found in Document 2: Advice on consideration of Academy Status.

The Structure

We have met with a number of headteachers and governors of church and community schools and examined various structures for adopting the Academy model that works at a local level.

As a result the Diocesan Board of Education has decided to respond to these requests from Schools and has taken legal advice on the most appropriate model to use. The result of this is DSET. It is a condition of conversion that DSET will be a Corporate Member of your Academy Company. DSET will relate to Academies in the same way the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) currently does to our church schools.

This is designed to ensure that the support schools get from the Diocese is best suited to Academy needs, as this new body can be a light, active Trust Company. In addition, we intend to establish a forum of academy principals/headteachers to guide and inform the Trustees of DSET. The majority of members of DSET will be appointed by the DBE, but will include experienced primary and secondary Headteachers. The Diocesan Director of Education will be an ex-officio (i.e. a member by virtue of the job held, not as an individual) member of the Company,

The DBE will continue in its present form, retaining its policy and statutory roles, and continue its present relationship with those schools which remained Voluntary or Foundation. In such schools, PCCs will continue to nominate foundation governors as under current arrangements.

Functions of DSET, the Umbrella Trust

The core purpose of DSET will be to secure the ethos and identity of church academies by appointing “foundation” governors, facilitating collaboration and co-operation between the academies so as to raise standards.

We expect DSET to support schools in their core purpose, with specific focus on:

- raising standards
- placing spirituality at the heart of education
- sharing resources
- identifying and sharing good practice
- achieving economies of scale
- supporting governors with additional responsibilities which come with academy status
- working alongside academies to help manage the risks associated with independence

Working within the principle of koinonia (the Christian concept of fellowship by sharing that which is in common) the academies in DSET will be full and equal partners, committed to supporting the Christian distinctiveness of the other academies, whilst reflecting a church school ethos which has spiritual development at its centre within their own academy.

DSET could provide additional subscription services, subject to local demand. These could include human resources and payroll, legal advice, facilities management and school effectiveness services.

Multi-Academy Trusts

Schools wishing to convert as part of a multi-academy trust (MAT) may do so and DBE will support this by helping them find local partner schools and setting up the trust. Government funding for academies in a multi-academy trust is allocated to the trust not to the academy. The trust will therefore expect to top slice an agreed amount of money to provide services across the schools in the trust and the extent of this can be negotiated as we set up the multi-academy trusts.

At the time of writing, the DfE does not currently allow VC convertors to join a multi-academy trust with VA convertors; we are working with them to attempt to resolve this! Our recommended solution for the time being is for the VC schools wishing to join a multi-academy trust convert to VA category before converting to academy. Local collaborative working among church and community schools can be achieved through using of trading companies,

Role of the DBE staff working alongside Academies and the Umbrella Trust

The Board of Education staff will work with local Headteachers, Chairs and other leaders from the schools to identify needs and resources and create links and accountabilities. The Board will continue to provide school effectiveness advice in relation to RE, Collective Worship, Christian values and distinctiveness, as well as school buildings services in relation to capital projects, buildings, and consultancy and other services through trading subsidiaries.