

This type of Local Ecumenical Partnership covers joint schools and is appropriate where the nature of the institution is to be ecumenical and is to be acknowledged as a resource for at least two different church constituencies. Other forms of educational partnerships are not usually formal LEPs, though they may share some of their characteristics.

### **Joint Schools**

An ecumenical school is precisely that: a school whose mission is to express the real, though still imperfect, communion which exists between the denominations which share in its governance. It is not a quick-fix for various problems which church schools might be facing: e.g. falling school roles or the diocesan schools commission's financial difficulties or accommodating the local education authority's restructuring plans. **Unless a joint school is truly an ecumenical venture it may later fail with widespread negative consequences.**

Before plans are formulated for an ecumenical school there has to be a good working relationship between the churches. In practice, since almost every instance of an ecumenical school within England will be a joint endeavour of the relevant Church of England and Roman Catholic dioceses, it has to have the unquestioned support both of the diocesan bishops and their respective board of education and diocesan schools commission.

The issues which must be agreed between the dioceses will include at least the following:

- The school's Mission Statement expressing the school's purpose and vision.
- The Instrument of Government expressing the school's ethos, the composition of its governing body, the financial responsibility of each diocese and preferences regarding the appointment of teachers
- The Admissions Policy
- Principles governing the development of religious education
- Policy for acts of collective worship

- Framework for spiritual development
- Policy for chaplains and chaplaincy

Local Education Authorities (LEAs) can be suspicious of ecumenical schools because of their relative novelty and rarity, and because they fear the competition they may present to county schools. LEAs are generally more welcoming of the transformation of an existing single denominational school into a joint school, than of the construction of a new ecumenical school. Negotiations with the LEA and with central government should be conducted jointly by both dioceses' schools officials.

### **Adult Education and Formation**

There are many examples of co-operation in lay and ministerial training and formation. There are partnerships between colleges – especially those with Christian teacher training backgrounds around the country – some of which have become integrated institutions.

A particularly fruitful area of partnership has been where denominations have ‘pooled resources’ in seeking civil accreditation of courses. This is an example of ecumenism enabling mission – though of course the criteria of expediency must also be matched by genuine ecumenical commitment

There are also examples of joint courses in ministerial training. Such partnerships have developed formally at Ushaw College and Oscott College, but more informal partnerships exist at other seminaries.

Partnerships of these kinds tend to be quite individual. Nevertheless parallels can often be found. When considering such a partnership, it is a good idea to consult with others already engaged in similar work. The Bishops’ Conference Committee for Christian Unity and the CTE Group for Local Unity may be able to help find such people. In respect of ministerial training and formation, there is an Ecumenical Strategy Group for Initial Ministerial Training on which the Bishops’ Conference is represented.