

NATIONAL NETWORK OF DIRECTORS OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

THE PURPOSE OF THE GROUP

The National Network of Directors of Professional Standards from Anglican dioceses across Australia has aimed to meet face-to-face each quarter for 2 days at a time. Over the last 2 years or so this has not been able to occur because of the impact of Covid and therefore shorter more regular Zoom meetings have been scheduled.

The group serves a number of functions including:

- To facilitate communication, cooperation and collaboration between Directors as needed.
- To allow information sharing between Directors as appropriate.
- To provide opportunities for Professional Development and upskilling for Directors.
- To provide opportunities for debriefing and advice in a collegial setting.
- To discuss the challenges commonly faced by Directors in their roles.

A particular function of the network is to enable appropriate and confidential communication between network members about allegations of child sexual abuse, adult sexual misconduct and other professional standards concerns they have received.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP

The group comprises the following 13 persons, representing all 23 dioceses.

Ruth Bailey, DPS for the Diocese of Riverina

Peter Barnett, from Safe Ministry Resources, DPS for the Dioceses of Canberra-Goulburn, Bathurst and North West Australia

Phillip Bonser, DPS for the Diocese of Grafton

Lachlan Bryant, DPS for the Diocese of Sydney

Tracie Chambers-Clark, DPS for the Dioceses of Perth, Bunbury

Paula Davies, DPS for Dioceses of Adelaide, Willochra and The Murray

Philip Gerber, DPS for the Diocese of Armidale

Greg Milles, DPS for the Dioceses of Brisbane, North Queensland, Northern Territory and Rockhampton

Cathy Rose, DPS for the Diocese of Newcastle

Cheryl Russell, DPS for the Diocese of Gippsland

Claire Sargent, DPS for the Dioceses of Ballarat and Wangaratta

Annette Sims, DPS for the Diocese of Tasmania

Katrina Thomas from Kooyoora, DPS for the Dioceses of Melbourne and Bendigo

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this Report is to update the General Synod about developments since the last meeting of General Synod, and in particular to advise the General Synod about some of the challenges commonly faced by Directors in their roles that may not be well known or acknowledged. The report also recommends a course of action to the General Synod in response to these issues.

HISTORY OF THE NETWORK

The Professional Standards Directors Network was formally convened by General Synod Standing Committee motion (SC2005/1/046):

Moved Garth Blake, Anne Hywood seconding, and RESOLVED

That Standing Committee:

- i. approves the setting up of a General Synod Network of Professional Standards Directors under the *Strategic Issues, Commissions, Task Forces and Networks Canon 1998*;
- ii. approves the role of the network to be to provide mutual assistance, encouragement and support to each other, to facilitate inter-diocesan co-operation, assist with implementation of the National Register; to ensure as far as possible a consistent national implementation of misconduct and abuse protocols, and to communicate with the Professional Standards Commission and the Standing Committee on operational issues; and
- iii. asks the network to elect a convenor.

A number of Directors were already in DPS roles before 2005 and have advised that the network has actually been meeting informally since before that time, perhaps as early as 2002. It is possible therefore that the network will pass its 20th year in operation this year.

REVIEW AND PLANNING DAY FOR THE NETWORK

The network recently took the opportunity to engage Tim Dyer, from the Johnmark Extension, to assist in a Review and Planning Day for the network.

This was a worthwhile exercise and provided an opportunity to consider how the network has been functioning in the face of particular challenges over the last 2 years or so (particularly due to isolation and inability to meet in person due to Covid) and also to consider future directions for the network in fulfilling its functions and conducting its meetings and business over the coming years.

ISSUES THE NETWORK FACES

The network identified a number of issues at the Review and Planning Day which are listed below.

- **Recruitment** – The challenges of finding individuals with the right skill set.

- **Longevity and Wellbeing** – The challenges of navigating the burnout inherent in the position contrasted with the importance of knowledge and skills related to the role which takes years to acquire. Retaining a DPS is important for consistency and saves money in the long term. High turnover is expensive and is a systemic loss.
- **Isolation** – Many DPSs are isolated. This is partly an occupational requirement (for independence from the power structures and potential interference of Dioceses) and also a financial and human resourcing issue (some Dioceses are less willing or less able to resource their Professional Standards office) but can also be for geographical reasons.
- **Maintaining trust** – Changes within the network in terms of personnel or as a result of external pressures can create instability. As the network changes, relationships change and members transition, so maintaining a high trust environment through regular face to face contact is critical.
- **Maintaining systemic independence** – Working in a DPS role presents a challenging environment where it is critical for DPSs to undertake their work with integrity and impartially. The network enables DPSs to strengthen their resolve for good process and systemic independence.
- **Frustration and discouragement** – A number of DPSs acknowledged feeling undervalued, unsupported or unappreciated in their roles. There is a disconnect between the treatment of some DPSs and the fundamental importance of their work to the safety and welfare of the church. There is a correlation between these factors and the ability of a DPS to remain in their role for a sustained period of time.

FURTHER ISSUES CONSIDERED

Further matters arising at the Review and Planning Day are listed below.

- Trust and co-operation are foundational to the value of the network for members. This can only be developed as members get to know one another. Face to face meetings and time together is important to enable the network to function well.
- Developing a clear rationale for the network may be needed to encourage Dioceses to value it, support it and resource each DPS to participate in the network.
 - The network is a significant repository of knowledge, skills and experience not available elsewhere.
 - The abuse crisis which gave rise to Professional Standards offices is not over and the issues have not gone away.
 - There is a solid business case for resourcing Professional Standards offices. It will cost more in the long run to neglect this area.
 - An organisational health indicator is how well the 'shadow' or darker parts of organisational life is handled. A commitment to health is a commitment to Professional Standards.
 - A network charter may assist to formalise this rationale.
- Creating and maintaining an environment in which the sharing of information and processes is enabled. For example, changes and developments in national and state legislation, the National Redress Scheme (particularly working with protected information), the National Register and threats of defamation.

- Consider more extensive reporting of learning from the network to the Safe Ministry Commission indicating areas that might need further exploration or work.
- Professional supervision is recommended for all of those in DPS roles.
- Consideration given to how the network provides pastoral care for members who may be in tension in their roles and potentially within their Dioceses due to workload, process issues, resourcing and institutional pressures.
- Creating a mentoring system for a newly appointed DPS to be matched with a more experienced DPS for the first 12 months.
- Whether the Network should consider appointing a chaplain for Network members.
- Whether the Network should seek financial support or resources from General Synod to help it to achieve its functions should that become necessary.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

In order to better response to the issues identified above, the network resolved as follows.

- Face to face meetings 3 times a year for 2 days in duration would be a suitable rhythm for the network (February, June, October).
- Face to face meetings to be co-ordinated or convened by a member with an agreed agenda published prior to the meeting.
- All DPSs are encouraged to attend, and Dioceses should make participation in the network a priority for directors, in order to make the network meetings worthwhile.
- Face to face meetings to be complemented by opt-in monthly Zoom meetings which would be less formal and allow for greater support and mutual engagement.
- A motion should be promoted to General Synod to endorse all Dioceses having their Director of Professional Standards fully participating in the network and to be properly resourced to undertake their role. This includes provision for skilled professional supervision to be provided to their Director of Professional Standards.
- The network will undertake further work on a charter and the development of a mentoring system.

GENERAL SYNOD RESPONSE

The following motion will be promoted at the 18th Session of the General Synod by the Network of Professional Standards Directors.

This General Synod:

- i. Affirm the importance of all Dioceses in the national church having robust child protection and professional standards systems in place for the safety and wellbeing of church members.
- ii. Encourage all Dioceses to have or appoint a Director of Professional Standards who is able to fully participate in the Network of Directors of Professional Standards and to be properly resourced to undertake their role, including the provision of skilled professional supervision.

- iii. Encourage all Dioceses to do their utmost to prioritise the support and resourcing of the office of their Professional Standards Director commensurate to the importance of their work in child protection and professional standards.

Lachlan Bryant

On behalf of the Network of Professional Standards Directors

4 March 2022