

AQUINAS COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Meeting: 13 May 2015

Time: 7.00pm

Venue: The College

GOVERNORS PRESENT

Dr P Beatty, Miss M Braithwaite, Mr P Carter, Ms H Delahan, Mrs B Donovan, Mrs R Hewitt, Mr J Horan, Mr A Martin, Cllr T P McGee, Mrs J Miller and Mr D Pearson (Principal).

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs D Blackburn Assistant Principal
Mr T Conlon Clerk to the Governing Body

Cllr T P McGee in the Chair

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Mr L Byrne, Ms C Calverley, Mrs H Dove, Mr B Hickey, E Rice and Dr A Smith.

2. PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

The Chairperson advised Governors that the purpose of the training session was to update Governors on a number of issues that the college was facing and how these were being dealt with.

3. DIRECTION OF THE COLLEGE

Cllr McGee advised Governors that the college would face many challenges in the next few years and these would include the following:

- i) Linear A levels
- ii) Transition protection funding would cease
- iii) Whilst the college hoped to avoid redundancies it could not be guaranteed

Whilst the college hoped to avoid redundancies it could not be guaranteed Nationally there are 93 sixth form colleges and a consultation exercise is currently taking place on the direction and purpose the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) and the underpinning question [for the college] is whether there is any merit in staying in the SFCA or whether a realignment to another body would be more beneficial.

With the current pressures facing sixth form college they broadly fall in to three groups:

- i) Those that are okay
- ii) Those who are not in a good position and
- iii) Those that may merge or close

The college falls into the group that are okay.

In response to a question from Miss Braithwaite, Mr Pearson advised Governors that the Local Authority were supportive of the college. Marple Hall had recently decided that it would like to have a sixth form but the Local Authority had not supported the proposal because it felt that was adequate provision within the authority.

Mr Horan asked if there was any provision for students with special needs on academic courses to reflect the more challenging nature of linear exams. Mr Pearson replied that it was difficult, the move to modular courses had been made to get more students to the level required and this had allowed greater support for those students with learning difficulties.

Mr Horan asked if there was any provision for students with special needs needs on academic courses. Mr Pearson replied that it was difficult, the move to modular courses had been made to get more students to the level required.

Mr Horan also asked if the two new recently elected Members of Parliament had been invited to visit the college. Mr Pearson advised Governors that he written to them to congratulate them on their election. He had not invited them to visit the college but would do so probably in the Autumn Term.

Cllr McGee advised Governors that Cheadle Hulme High School and Hazel Grove High School had established sixth forms at their schools because their students could not gain admission into Aquinas and they felt that there was no other provision locally that could meet their needs.

4. RETURN TO LINEAR A LEVELS

Mr Pearson circulated a paper, A Level Reform – Implementation which covered the following areas:

- i) The content of all AS and A level qualification is being reviewed. Universities are involved in this work through a process led by Mark Smith, ALCAB (the A level content advisory board) and/or awarding body advisory groups.
- ii) A and AS have been decoupled. This will come into effect as each subject is reformed. AS will then be a freestanding qualification which does not contribute to the A level grade.
- iii) AS and A level qualifications will be assessed at the end of the course.
- iv) AS qualifications are being designed to be taught alongside the first year of an A level course. Co-teachability.
- vi) The grading remains now for AS and A level. There will be a revised methodology for the calculation of A* at A level.
- vii) The change will begin in September 2015 and will be fully functional, for new students by September 2017. This means that that from 2015 to 2018 there will be a two tier A Level system.
- vii) Between September 2015 and July 2018 some students might be doing all Linear A Levels, some might do all modular A Levels and some (probably most) will do a combination of the two.
- viii) By September 2018 all students will be doing Linear A Levels.
- ix) Details were given of the subjects that would be Linear A Levels from September 2015.
- x) Details were given of the subjects that would be Linear A Levels from September 2016
- vi) All other subjects would be Linear A Levels from September 2017.
- vii) The College offers a number of BTEC/Level 3 Alternative Courses as an alternative provision to the more academic A levels. These courses have been very successful and will remain an important alternative when the Linear A Levels arrive.

Mrs Miller asked if the number of subjects on offer would be reduced. Mr Pearson indicated that the economies of scale means that the college can run some small classes, whereas the school sixth forms do not have this option and therefore the number of subjects they offer may be limited.

Mr Horan asked if the awarding bodies had given any assistance. Mr Pearson advised Governors that the awarding bodies were having to invest significant resources in the production of new specs all at their own cost. They are providing training and subject specialists to help assist staff but their resources were spread thinly.

The changes to A levels should lead to greater consistency in assessment. Revision would become more important for students. Miss Delahan felt that there would be two sides to learning a) understanding and b) remembering. Mr Pearson added that the awarding bodies had not yet set their fees for AS level but would be likely to try and recoup their investments by increasing their fees.

In response to a question from Ms Delahan, Mr Pearson advised Governors that students would take 3 A levels as the norm for university entrance. The college needs to be successful and have strategies to allow students to do their best and not drop out after year one. Other students may take a BTEC or a more achievable A level. It is important that students are on the most appropriate course for them. Cllr McGee felt it was important that staff make sure that the student has the right skills for the course.

Mr Pearson informed Governors that student retention at the college is good. Flexible courses will be offered and that the college needs to look at all possibilities and strategies.

Mr Horan asked what would happen to Government/Politics and Law that are popular courses at the college. Mr Pearson indicated that they become linear from 2017. A number of other courses such as communication, environment studies, leisure studies, applied business, performance studies and applied science may go.

5. ADULT EDUCATION

The college offers a mixture of leisure courses and courses leading to a qualification. The college cross subsidises the courses to cover heating, lighting and cleaning.

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that there are three elements covering the funding of courses as follows:

- i) SFA funded – academic courses – fees determined
- ii) Local Authority funded – leisure courses - fees determined
- iii) Full cost – academic and leisure courses – fees determined by the college

The college has been funded for all the courses it delivered in 2014/2015. The budget for 2015/2016 has increased from £59,000 to £84,000, although there is an underlying reduction of 20% to this funding nationally. Negotiations are taking place with the Local Authority to rationalise courses for September 2015.

The challenges facing the college are as follows:

- i) Funding cuts from both SFA and Local Authority
- ii) What curriculum should be offered?
- iii) Need to have a good success rate
- iv) Leisure courses demand and affordability
- v) Succession planning for staff
- vi) Stockport College will offer academic courses only
- vii) Cheadle and Marple College will offer academic courses (not GCSE) and leisure courses

For SFA funded courses there has to be a minimum level of performance. The college has been issued with a Notice to Improve because its success rate for GCSE courses fell below 75%. The college has an Action Plan in place to improve; if the college improves the Notice to Improve will be removed. If there is no improvement the SFA budget will be removed. Due to the small class sizes if anyone leaves a course it is high in percentage terms. Courses are offered because of demand.

Mr Pearson advised Governors that there are three issues facing the college a) funding uncertain, b) outcomes uncertain and iii) volatility. There is a need to review the position each year with Governors.

6. FINANCIAL HEALTH OF THE COLLEGE

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that the grading of the college's financial health will probably go down as a result of the introduction of Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP).

A detailed report will be submitted to the Audit Committee and the Resources Committee at their summer term meetings. The aim at this meeting is to give Governors brief outline of the implications for the college.

The SORP will detail how the accounts will be presented. The new framework will apply from July 2016 and will affect the 2015/2016 accounts. The main areas that will change are as follows:

- i) Treatment of Capital Grants
- ii) Holiday Pay Accruals
- iii) Pensions

The Financial Health of the college is determined by the following:

- a) Current ratio – assets/liabilities
- b) Performance ratio – surplus/income
- c) Gearing ratio – loans/balance sheet total

It was agreed that there was a need to liaise with other colleges in the sector. In addition advice would be sought from the Association of Colleges (AOC) and SFCF. Cllr McGee said it was important to do what is best for the college.

7. CHALLENGERS FOR 2016

Mr Pearson advised Governors that the challengers facing the college are as follows:

- i) Education Policy
- ii) National Funding
- iii) Devo Manc – possibility of post 16 funding being delegated
- iv) Local Issues –
 - a) Kingsway School to become an Academy
 - b) Colleges –difficulties at Stockport College and Cheadle and Marple College
 - c) Competition from Manchester colleges
 - d) Enrolment –maintain healthy target numbers
 - e) Staffing – Ed Lack appointed Principal of Connell College (Manchester)
Retirement of Eddie Moore (Vice Principal)

Solutions

- a) Respond to reforms
- b) Maintain reputation

- c) Improve marketing
- d) Efficiency savings
- e) Recruitment and restructure at senior level within the college
- f) Annual review of response to changes

8. INSTRUMENT AND ARTICLES OF GOVERNMENT

A copy of the revised Instrument and Articles of Government for the college along with the tracked changes had been sent to all Governors prior to the meeting. The revised Instrument and Articles of Government had been drawn up by Paul Barber (Director Catholic Education Service) and Christine Fischer (Legal Adviser Catholic Education Service). The Shrewsbury Diocese had signed a copy of the revised Instrument and Articles of Government to signify their acceptance.

RESOLVED: That the revised Instrument and Articles of Government be approved subject to the composition of the Governing Body be amended to read twelve Foundation Governors in the Schedule to the Instrument of Government.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

23 June 2015 at 4.30pm.

Signed _____
Chairperson

Date _____