

Aquinas College Governing Body

Meeting: 8 March 2022

Time: 4.00pm

Venue: Virtual

Governors Present

Dr P Beatty, Miss M Braithwaite, Mrs C H Dove, Mr C Green, Mr R Harris, Mr B Hickey, Mr P J Horton, Mr G Hynes, Mrs C Knights, Mr J Mairs, Cllr T P McGee, Mr A Martin, Mrs J Miller, Mr D Pearson, Miss T Prempeh, Mr M Quinney, Dr A Smith and Mr M Taylor.

In Attendance

Mr A Bailey (Vice Principal)
Mrs D Blackburn (Assistant Principal Finance)
Mr T Conlon (Clerk to the Governing Body)

Cllr T P McGee in the Chair.

1. Opening Prayer

The meeting began with a moment of reflection led by Cllr McGee.

2. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Mr L Byrne. Cllr McGee thanked those who attended the funeral of Leo's wife.

3. Student Governors

It was noted that Miss Terra Prempeh and Mr McElroy Quinney had been elected as Student Governors.

4. Declaration of Interests

Governors and Staff were asked to declare any interest, which they may have in any of the item on the Agenda for this meeting. No interests were declared.

5. Committee Membership

The Chairperson advised Governors that the Student Governors could decide between themselves who will be a member of the General Purposes Committee and the Resources Committee and that both are members of the Teaching and Learning Committee.

6 (i) Governing Body Minutes

RESOLVED – i) That the minutes of the meetings held on 23 November 2021 copies of which had been circulated previously, (a) be approved and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record and (b) be authorised for publication in accordance with the College Instrument and Articles.

7. (ii) Matters Arising from the Governing Body Minutes

a) Electrical Fault – Minute 19 (d)

Miss Braithwaite asked if a claim had been submitted to the insurers following the electrical fault. Mrs Blackburn replied that a claim had been submitted and that the broker was dealing with the matter on behalf of the college.

8. (i) Committee Minutes

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the following Committee meetings, copies circulated previously,

(i) Audit Committee	7 February 2022
(ii) Resources Committee	8 February 2022
(iii) General Purposes and Employment Committee	25 January 2022
(iv) Teaching and Learning Committee	1 February 2022

(a) be approved and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record and (b) be authorised for publication in accordance with the College Instrument and Articles.

8. (ii) Matters Arising from the Committee Minutes

a) Audit Committee – 7 February 2022

i) Appointment of Auditors for 2022/2023 – Minute 11

A discussion took place on the appointment of Internal and External Auditors for 2022/2023. Members noted that there was no legal requirement for the college to appoint internal auditors but the college had appointed internal auditors to give greater assurance to the Audit Committee so that an Annual Audit Opinion can be given to the Governing Body. No information had been received in respect of the fees for both Internal Audit and External Audit for 2022/2023.

RSM (Internal Audit) will not undertake on site visit at the moment but had indicated that once lockdown had ceased, they may have one auditor on site for 12 days. Mrs Blackburn had some reservations on that approach.

Some members felt that it was important to have an internal audit service to provide third party assurance to the Governing Body.

RESOLVED: i) That Murray Smith be appointed as External Auditors to the college for 2022/2023 and ii) That the college go out to tender for the provision of an Internal Audit Service for the college from 2022/2023.

ii) Co-opted Governor Minute 12

Governors noted that Mr Anwar had indicated that he would have to step down as a co-opted governor on the Audit Committee due to pressure at work. The college would seek to appoint a new co-opted governor as soon as possible.

b) Resources Committee – 8 February 2022.

i) Budget Update – Minute 7

The Governors noted the latest budget position. Cllr McGee sought clarification on the loss that the canteen had made. Mrs Blackburn replied that the canteen is now busy following the return of students to the college. A review of the timetable will be undertaken to see if these losses can be reduced. In addition, there have been some price increases from January 2022 to help minimise the loss. Hopefully things will be back to normal next year.

The Student Governors joined the meeting at this point. For the benefit of the Student Governors, everyone introduced themselves.

c) General Purposes Committee and Employment Committee – 25 January 2022

i) Impact of Covid – Minute 6

The committee had considered how the college had operated during the Spring Term and the number of staff and students who had been absent. Governors also noted the admissions process for the 2022/2023 academic year.

ii) Admissions 2022/2023 - Minute 7

Governors noted the information in relation to the admissions process for 2022/2023 with particular reference to the number of category 2 students that had been interviewed. Mr Pearson advised Governors that offers to students had been sent by February half term. In the last few years the target has been for the college to grow by 20 students each year but the college is reaching a point where it is full to capacity and there is pressure on the accommodation for some subject areas.

The predicted number for U6 in September 2022 is 1185 students. The maximum that the college can comfortably cope with is 2400 students. Therefore, the aim is to have a L6 of 1250 for September 2022. This would give a total of around 2400 students by census date in October. Some subjects have grown and the most popular subject is now criminology with around 236 students in L6. The college have been considering a number of strategies to deal with the increasing student numbers. These include efficiencies in college but that would increase class sizes, a possibility of a new build or looking for some accommodation outside of the college.

iii) Student Destinations – Minute 8

The Governing Body noted the information on the destination of students who had left the College at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year. The report was an overview of last year and not a comparison with other years.

d) Teaching and Learning Committee – 1 February 2022

i) Section 48 Inspections – Minute 6

Governors noted that the Diocese had informed the college that it would have a Denominational inspection in the next academic year. Mr Pearson added that Sixth Form Colleges need an annex to the code of inspection but this has not yet been finalised.

ii) Executive Summary of Leadership and Management SAR and Quality Review Meetings Update – Minute 7

Governors noted that the college was approaching this in a different way this year in terms of the quality cycle. Key elements of this were the student experience and learning assessment. The Leadership and Management SAR and Quality Improvement Plan have been submitted to Ofsted. The key areas for development are Learning, Training, Progression, Wellbeing and Performance.

Mr Pearson advised Governors that he would provide details of the college's strengths and weaknesses to allow them to hold the college to account. There will be a shift to more data analysis when examinations return. It will be more important to compare the college with other colleges.

9. Budget 2021/2022 Half Year Forecast

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that the budget had been re-forecasted at the end of January 2022. The main points to note are as follows;

a) The staffing budgets had been re-forecasted to include the pay settlement for both teachers and support staff. The support staff budget is showing a reduction of around £43,000 because a higher pay award had been included in the budget. There is a contingency of around £70,000 in the staffing budgets.

b) Building maintenance is showing an increase due to the excess on the insurance claim for the power outage in September 2021. A claim is being finalised at around £71,000 but the college have to pay the first £20,000.

c) The high needs budget income is still being finalised at the budget stage so a prudent estimate of income is included which is often exceeded. The budget has been increased by £72,000.

d) As a result of the electrical outage two main switches in the server room failed. A decision was taken to replace the switches at a cost of £22,000.

e) Old Apple Macs in the art department have been replaced with higher specifications PCs, this has led to an increase in spending of £22,000.

f) Canteen costs - Due to a number of circumstances including the uncertainty about students returning to college, price inflation and increased staffing costs the anticipated loss has increased from £14,000 to £37,000.

The re-forecast carried out increased the contingency reserve from £225,491 to £294,165. The surplus on the budget has increased from £361,000 to £474,480.

RESOLVED: That the budget position for 2021/2022 be noted.

10. (i) Principal's Termly Report

That the report of the Principal, copies of which were circulated, was presented and discussed. In introducing his report Mr Pearson advised Governors that the college remains at high risk of disruption due to the Covid virus. The college is awaiting further guidance on whether testing should continue. There has been no change in the pattern of absences with around 20 students and 1 member of staff isolating each week. If the final restrictions are removed it is hoped that the college will return to a more normal position.

RESOLVED - That the Principal's report be received.

10. (ii) Matters Arising from the Principal's Termly Report

a) Examinations

It appears that the summer series of examinations and assessments will go ahead and begin a return to more routine processes for the future. The threat of the virus remains and it is likely that some student will miss examinations due to isolating. The college has received advance notice of amendments to each final assessment in an attempt by Ofqual to level the playing field and make some allowances for the disruptions suffered. The awarding bodies for each subject have determined how they might simplify elements of the assessment to make the process less onerous. In most cases this involves highlighting topics that will not come up in assessment.

Cllr McGee asked how staff were feeling about this year's examinations. Mr Harris said that staff had been preparing by holding mock examinations. Staff have looked at various scenarios but accept that examinations are the most likely way forward. Cllr McGee added that the students will not have taken an examination before. Mr Harris replied that there is a need to prepare students for examinations. Mr Pearson advised Governors that further mock examinations would be held in May and added that students had obtained good marks on assessment but it is now down to the examination. Mr Quinney said that students do not know what examinations are like. Cllr McGee said that students in years 10,11 and 12 had not experienced public examinations.

Mrs Knight felt that there was concern amongst students about the grade boundaries changing. Mr Pearson replied that between 2019 and last year's grades, there is a difference. Analysis in the college would suggest that there are likely to be more grade A*, A and B grades. This year will see a move back to the norm. There will be a problem in comparing results from different years. Mr Hickey felt that students who had not taken a GCSE examination will have a problem with catch up. Mr Pearson replied with grade inflation there is a skills/experience deficit. He added that entry requirements have not been raised and generally there was optimism that students were coping well.

Mr Bailey advised Governors that retention from L6 to U6 had been an issue due to a combination of mental health problems and the difficulties some students had encountered, some students have dropped down to 2 subjects and there has been some leavers as a result of mental health issues. He added that it is important to get students on the right course for them to succeed. Mr Harris added that the college is supporting students with getting back to taking examinations. Mr Quinney and Miss Prempeh felt it was important to build a college community to help students.

Mr Hynes asked how the drop in the retention rate compared with other colleges. Mr Bailey replied that other colleges were experiencing similar issues and we regularly compare within our consortium. Some students may move from A levels to BTECs and avoid becoming retention issues. Mr Hynes asked where the leavers were going.

Mr Bailey replied that the college monitors the position and reports are made in college and that there is a mixture of reasons why students leave. The college can let Governors have a breakdown. Dr Smith suggested that the data be provided to the next Teaching and Learning Committee.

b) Accommodation Pressures

Due to the increase in student numbers the college is facing pressure on the accommodation for teaching. The college has been coping by making small adjustments to the curriculum, timetable or classroom allocation but the increase in student numbers last year has accelerated the need to find a more permanent solution. Mr Pearson advised Governors that he would prepare a background paper for discussion at the Governors' training session in May.

c) Funding

This year's funded number will be 2415 and next year's target is 2400 students. Due to the improvement in the funding rate per student and a prudent approach to budgeting the college will be able to cope with a reduction in student numbers. The funding increases next year will mean that the college has to deliver more hours in a student's study programme. The highest funding band currently requires a delivery of 540 hours, most typically made up of 3x150 hours/subject and 90 hours of core delivery including general RE and tutorials. This will increase to 580 hours in an attempt to recognise that students will benefit from more time addressing their needs after the disruption they have suffered. The college already recognises this need and has added an additional 36 hours (12 hours/subject) to the study programme. This means that only minor adjustments are needed to the timetable to meet the requirement of 580 hours.

d) Lesson Learnt Through Covid

The college has improved its efficiency and productivity by changing how it has adapted to the challenges of Covid. Most external meetings have continued but they have been virtual which has reduced the amount of time lost to travelling. Some aspects will return to face to face meetings. The consultation evenings have worked more efficiently on line and although some would like the experience on site, parents and carers will benefit from less waiting time. Possibly the greatest benefit is how quickly staff and students have become familiar with google platform, allowing access over the cloud to specific google classrooms for each class. This has greatly improved the college's setting and collection of work on line and is an area that the college will develop further.

e) Teaching Staff

Mr Pearson advised Governors that the teaching staff have been finding creative ways to use the extra time and one key learning and teaching focus has been based on improving how students respond to feedback in order to progress. This fits well the strategic aims in supporting students to better understand how they learn. The college will continue to work hard at developing its approaches to staff wellbeing and are exploring a framework to audit its approach and direct the work in this important area.

Mr Hynes asked had the college experienced any difficulties in recruiting staff due to the fact that there were fewer people seeking teaching posts. Mr Pearson replied that it is a very competitive market and that there had been some difficulty in certain subject areas and particularly in getting supply staff, but generally we do well in this area compared to others.

f) Inspections

The college was last inspected by Ofsted 5 years ago. Therefore, an inspection is due anytime, but it will probably be in the next academic year. In addition, the college has been informed by the Diocese that a denominational inspection will take place in the next academic year. This will be carried out across 3 days by 3 inspectors.

Dr Smith asked when the annex for denominational inspections for sixth form colleges would be available. Mr Pearson replied that the Catholic Education Service had asked him to convene a meeting to progress this. He added that training would also be needed for inspectors to undertake inspections in sixth form colleges. Cllr McGee added that the college will need to prepare for the inspection.

Mr Pearson replied that the college's Mission Group had undertaken an audit across the college and will prepare an action plan. In addition, there will be progress made at the Mission Day to be held in the summer term.

g) Staffing

Mr Pearson reported on the resignations and appointments that had been made to the college and thanked all staff for their commitment, diligence, and hard work. Particular reference was made to the resignation of Sheila Lahan, Deputy Manager (Adult Education) who had worked at the college for nearly 20 years.

h) Adult Education

Governors noted that both the academic and leisure course had continued in the Spring term. Planning was also underway to improve the marketing of courses for the next academic year. Alison Proudlove has been appointed as Deputy Manager (Adult Education) to replace Sheila Lahan.

i) Careers

Governors noted the work that was undertaken by the Careers Department with particular reference to Careers Guidance, U6 Consultation Evenings, National Apprentice Week, Enrichment Programmes for the Spring term and After Aquinas Careers Event. Mr Taylor added that there are lots of different options for students to follow and the college works to support the students.

j) Governors noted the activities in the following areas within the college:

Trips and visits, Mathematics, Music, Financial Studies and Film and Media, Performing Arts, Science, Pathways and Sports departments, UK – Japan friendship Enrichment Programme and AQ Magazine.

The Governors thanked Mr Pearson for his informative report and asked that he pass on to all staff the Governors appreciation of the excellent work that they are doing at the college.

Dr Smith said that the Principal's report had been in a HTML format and he had been unable to open the report and had requested a paper copy. Mr Pearson said that he would ensure future reports are not in that format.

11. Governor Training Session

Governors noted that the training session was scheduled for 11 May 2022 at 4.30pm. It was agreed that the following items would be included in the training session.

- a) Denominational Inspections
- b) Strategic Issues and Priorities
- c) Governance Review

Mr Pearson advised Governors that ACVIC had established a small group of principals and chairs of Governors to look at the framework for Governance Review.

12. Chairperson's Action

The Chairperson advised Governors that the only action since the last meeting was to send out regular updates to Governors to keep them informed of developments at the college.

13. Correspondence

No correspondence was brought forward for Governor's consideration.

14. Any other Competent Business

- a) Gender Pay Report

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that the Gender Pay Report has to be on the Government Website before the end of March 2022. The report is also on the college website and it will be submitted to the next meeting of the Employment Committee for information.

RESOLVED: That the Gender Pay Report be agreed.

16. Date of Next Meetings

- a) Governor Training Session - 11 May 2022 at 4.30pm
- b) Summer Term Meeting - 28 June 2022 at 4.30pm

Signed _____
Chairperson

Date _____