



**AQUINAS**  
**COLLEGE**

# Accountability Report 2023

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 **AQUINAS**  
**COLLEGE**

# Aquinas College Accountability Statement 2023

## The history of our college

Aquinas College opened in 1980 as the only Sixth Form College in the Diocese of Shrewsbury. This was in the building of the former St Michael's Secondary Modern School which was converted to house 250 sixth formers. Initially due to student numbers not hitting predictions the local education authority (LEA) predicted closure.

By late 2010 we were one of the most oversubscribed and overcrowded colleges in the country with 1900 daytime students and about 1,000 adults in the evening, and the Learning and Skills Council agreed to a £42M new building - largely funded by them. Since then, gradual growth has continued - peaking at 2,400.

Under the 1993 F&HE Act, Aquinas became a Designated Sixth Form College - no longer under the LEA. Our curriculum offer has also hugely expanded to meet the demands of our students and their aspirations.

The Catholic student population has generally increased as the college has grown. The open-hearted policy of welcoming all who wished to share in the overtly Christian ethos has continued. However, the continued oversubscription has meant we are not able to welcome all who want to come. We enrol students from 5 Catholic secondary schools from the Shrewsbury, Salford and Nottingham Dioceses and students travel from across Manchester, Cheshire and Derbyshire to study at Aquinas

### Our Mission

Aquinas College strives to be a Catholic college for the whole community. Christ is at the very heart of our philosophy. This is expressed in our commitment to the Gospel values of freedom, justice and love.

“I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.”

John 10:10

We affirm and value each member of our community, recognising the dignity and unique nature of each individual. In this way the presence of Christ is celebrated. We share in each other's strengths, support each other in our weaknesses and strive for the highest standards of achievement in all we do. We also encourage a questioning stance towards the values of our increasingly secular society.

In short, we aim to provide reasons for living and hoping.

### Strategic Aims 2023-2025

1. To provide an outstanding educational experience which promotes the cardinal virtues and prepares students for their next steps in life.
2. To deliver a broad and rich curriculum that develops the personal, spiritual and academic growth of all students “so that they may have life and have it to the full’ John 10:10

3. To ensure students and staff thrive at every stage of their journey, enabling them to Be More.

Our mission and strategic aims underpin the design of our curriculum and the ambitions we have for our students. Our curriculum intent is about how we set out, plan and sequence what we intend our students to learn and the factors which underpin the choices that the College makes with regard to the curriculum. In effect, at the whole-college level, it's about how we are meeting the needs of the local and regional context. It goes from macro level, whole-college level, to micro level, in the classroom.

### **Curriculum Intent**

Our curriculum provides students with an ambitious, broad and rich educational experience, enabling them to develop knowledge and skills over time. Our curriculum aims to promote academic excellence and enable personal development so that the College is responsive in meeting the needs of students. Their personal development, spiritual and academic growth are vital to preparing them for the next stages of their lives as global citizens. Study programmes and qualifications embed learning around citizenship and virtues, subject specific careers information and employer encounters, enrichment opportunities, and a focus on a range of transferable skills; such as – English, Maths and employability.

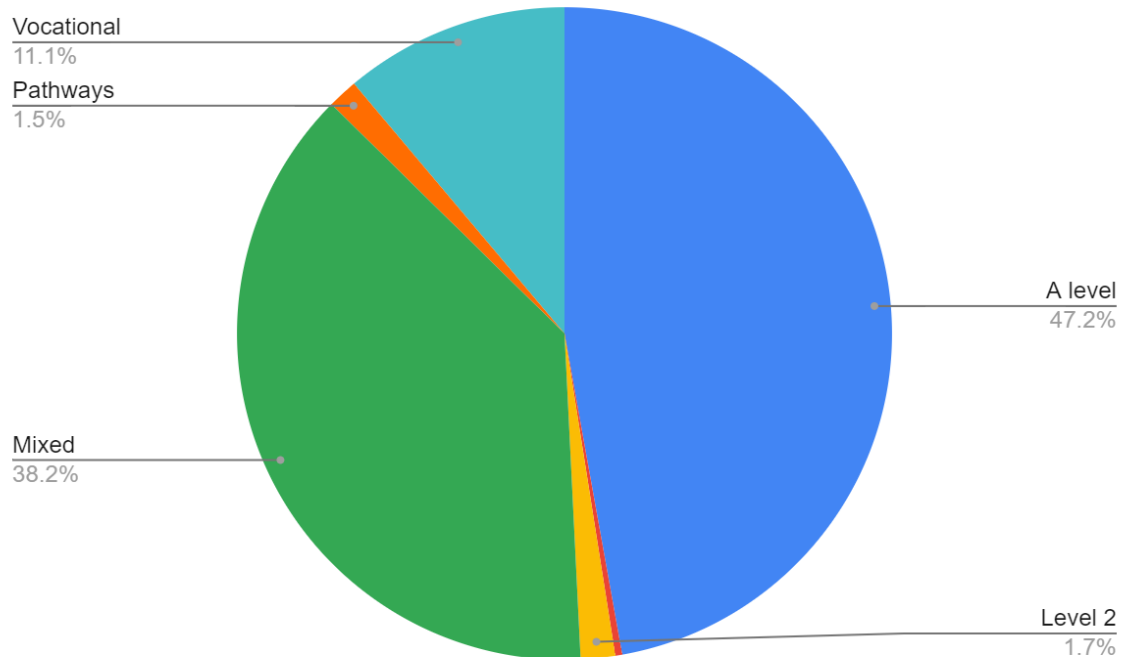
### **Context and Place**

In keeping with our mission we are not academically selective, welcoming all students for whom we have space and a suitable course. Our admissions policy gives priority to Catholic students, others from Catholic schools, and to siblings of past or existing students.

We offer close to 50 subjects at Level 3 with all the students undertaking a core studies programme. The core includes:

- Tutorial - our 10:10 programme
- General R.E. - As part of our Catholic mission we deliver lessons in line with the Catholic Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Regular assemblies
- Triple A programme - this is added to timetables of students with very high prior attainment
- Aspire - a programme for students without maths and/or English GCSE at grade 4 and above.

The majority of each year's intake follows A level courses, with a significant number of students now on mixed study programmes with vocational level 3 courses. We also have a number of students who re-sit GCSEs and study for a bespoke Level 2 programme to provide them with access to Level 3 courses in their second year or the qualifications and skills to apply for apprenticeships or employment. Our Pathways Department offers Entry Level and Level One courses to students with high needs.



In addition to the 16-19 year old students, the College has approximately 600 part time adult students. Our adult centre offers GCSEs in maths, English and languages as well as AAT courses and Access courses in health and social care.

In Greater Manchester, the Employment and Skills Advisory Panel (ESAP)<sup>1</sup> reflects an integrated approach to the labour market, underpinned by Greater Manchester's unique range of devolved functions across skills, employment support and health & social care. The GM ESAP brings together core partners/stakeholders from across that full landscape, in order to consider the labour market system in its entirety, rather than skills in isolation.

Greater Manchester encompasses the ten districts of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan. With over 124,000 businesses, more than 2.8m residents, and a further 7m people living within an hour's commute.

The city-region is economically diverse, with no particular dependence on any single sector or occupational group for its economic well-being. GM has some labour market assets of national and international significance, which are driving demand for a pipeline of higher level technical skills. However, 40% of GM employment is in the foundation and service sectors, where roles are often low paid and opportunities for productivity gains and in-work progression are limited.

<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/5802/gm-esap-local-skills-report-update-march-2022-final.pdf>

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) maintains a focus on those priority sectors highlighted in GM's Local Industrial Strategy, many of which also reflect national priorities. The 4 'frontier sectors' – those industries seen as fundamental to our future economic well-being are:

1. health innovation
2. advanced materials and manufacturing
3. digital, creative and media
4. 'clean growth'

The foundational economy – those sectors with significant employment volumes but not necessarily productivity-transformative potential are: retail, social care, and hospitality & tourism.

One of the overarching skills challenges is that Greater Manchester's population is lower skilled than the national average, especially in respect of the higher proportion of people with no/low qualifications, and the lower proportion of residents with level 4+ qualifications.

Links between disadvantage and low productivity are well-documented. As the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data shows, over a fifth of the neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester fall into the bottom 10% of most deprived neighbourhoods nationally in respect of employment and income. Meanwhile, in terms of skills deprivation, 13% of Greater Manchester neighbourhoods fall into the bottom 10%, although this masks significant variation between districts (in Oldham, for example, 30% of neighbourhoods are amongst the most deprived on skills). These matters, and inequalities more generally, were brought into sharper focus by the Covid-19 pandemic, with Greater Manchester experiencing some of the longest periods of the most severe restrictions in the country.

The Stockport Local Plan<sup>2</sup> has ensured that Stockport is one of the 6 locations identified in the GM Local Skills Report<sup>3</sup> and Labour Market Plan as a 'growth location.' The borough is identified as having the potential to drive inclusive economic growth, attract inward investment, capitalise on some of the city-region's innovation assets, and create jobs at scale, including in the high value frontier sectors. The Stockport Local Plan highlights the borough's zero carbon ambitions and presents the opportunity to enhance existing sectoral strengths and supply chains, and also set the platform for growth in new areas, such as Advanced Materials. Education providers including Aquinas are central to these ambitions, and we, along with colleagues in other providers will seek to ensure young people have the access to education, training and skills development required to support growth in both current industries and the planned future growth in new industries.

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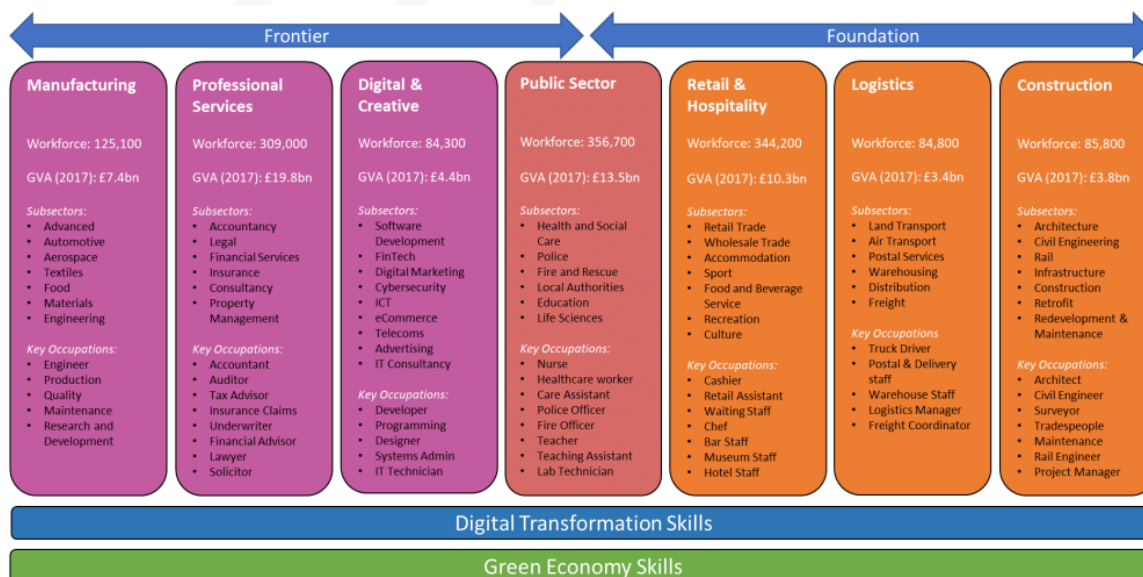
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/showcase/stockport-local-plan>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/5802/gm-esap-local-skills-report-update-march-2022-final.pdf>

## GM: Economy Sector Breakdown:

A number of key in demand occupations have been identified within each sector.



## Approach to Developing the Plan

There are two other colleges in Stockport - Stockport College and Cheadle & Marple College but they are all part of the Trafford College Group. Danny Pearson (Principal Aquinas) and James Scott (Principal and CEO Trafford), have had a number of meetings to discuss curriculum offer within Stockport and how best to meet the needs of young people and the local economy, while reducing unnecessary overlap and competition. Richard Mortimer (Head of Economy Work and Skills Stockport Council) is in the process of setting up the Joint Business Advisory Board which both college's will be members of to better facilitate curriculum planning. Initial meetings have taken place with Richard to establish how we as a college can support and benefit from such a body.

Careers advice and guidance to students is informed by the labour market information for GM<sup>4</sup> and this the GM Skills Intelligence Summary<sup>5</sup>. This intelligence is shared with students on a regular basis through a variety of platforms. We have also utilised the initial baseline report for GM Colleges which presents the main findings from the multiple streams of research conducted so far for the development of the Greater Manchester LSIP. Research conducted includes: multiple surveys of businesses; discussions with business leaders in round tables or one-to-one

<sup>4</sup> careers-labour-market-info-2022.pdf

<sup>5</sup> GM Skills Intelligence Summary Pack - Winter 2023.pdf

interviews; and analysis of other large data sets such as job postings information. This report is presented on a locality-led basis to ensure an effective 'fit' with local colleges.<sup>6</sup>

## **Aquinas College Skills Strategy Statement**

Our approach to the skills agenda is closely linked to our College Mission, Strategic Aims 2022-25 and our Curriculum Intent:

1. To provide an outstanding educational experience, in-line with our mission, which promotes the cardinal virtues and prepares students for their next steps in life.
2. To deliver a broad and rich curriculum that develops the personal, spiritual and academic growth of all students, "so that they may have life and have it to the full" John 10:10
3. To ensure students and staff thrive at every stage of their journey, enabling them to 'Be More'.

Ensuring that our students possess the skills, knowledge and understanding to secure positive destinations is central to the above and to Aquinas 'contributing effectively to meeting the skills needs of employers and the local, regional and national economy through the range of programmes that they (we) teach, the content and planning of that curriculum and their (our) engagement and collaboration with employers and stakeholders.'<sup>7</sup> We have developed an extensive network of contacts and stakeholders in all four key areas - civic, community, education and employment.<sup>8</sup>

Our curriculum offer, core studies programme, enrichment programme and pastoral systems exist to help students develop the skills needed to successfully progress to their immediate next steps; whether that be higher education, employment or training and their longer-term aims of paid employment and contribution to the economy<sup>9</sup>. We have a clear focus on 'soft skills' with all students as employer intel shows that many students with strong qualifications fail to secure employment at the interview stage.

Our Aspire Programme is part of core studies for Level 2 students, and students without either GCSE Maths or English Language. It has a clear focus on the employability and skills local employers are looking for in terms of functional literacy and numeracy. Our Pathways curriculum provides work placements for learners for whom it is appropriate and achievable, and student destinations are highly supported.

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<sup>6</sup> Initial Baseline Report - GM Colleges (Final) (2).pdf

<sup>7</sup>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook-eif/further-education-and-skills-handbook-for-september-2022#skills-needs> (293)

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas College Contacts Employers and Stakeholders Accountability Agree...

<sup>9</sup> Destination percentage of completing students pie chart.pdf

Our provision aims to create and maintain a close relationship between the curriculum and the world of work. The curriculum is planned and taught to ensure that all students have a meaningful encounter with an employer, work experience opportunities where possible, engagement with live briefs from employers (especially in practical and vocational subjects, and as part of our Level 2 provision,) and above all, that students develop the necessary skills to make informed and successful applications to employment, training and higher education.


In line with our context and intelligence gained from the draft LSIP 2023, we have prioritised embedding skills identified by The Skills Builder Partnership <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/> into all subjects and our core studies programme. Research by the partnership highlights that not only are the skills identified vital to any workplace, as previously mentioned, initial findings from the LSIP identify that employers face a soft skills barrier during recruitment (<https://www.gmlsip.co.uk/softskills>). Furthermore, we know that for the majority of our students who progress to higher education, “these skills unlock learning in the classroom, boosting academic outcomes, perseverance and self-belief. They halve the likelihood of being out of work, and increase earnings across a lifetime. They even boost wellbeing and life satisfaction.”<sup>10</sup>

The College’s curriculum offer is regularly reviewed to ensure it meets the interests and needs of students, employers, higher education providers and the local, regional and national economy. In recent years our curriculum has continued to evolve and new courses have been offered: Creative Media BTEC (equivalent to 1.5 A-Levels), CTEC Business Diploma L2 (4 GCSEs), WJEC Diploma in Criminology, BTEC Extended Certificate in Uniformed Public Services, A-Level Statistics – all areas of growth in the Greater Manchester area. Another key addition to our curriculum is the Core Maths qualification. Core Maths supports university and employer needs, and supports maths skills in students studying A Levels with high mathematical content, thereby increasing chances of access to STEM related courses.

These additions to our curriculum have increased the proportion of our Science and Maths provision which is important in trying to meet local skills shortages. According to LMI data at a local level, the main growth sectors across Greater Manchester are Business and Logistics, Construction, Health and Social Care, Manufacturing, Digital and Creative, Retail, Hospitality and Low Carbon as we move forward towards a greener economy. These growth areas are also reflected at a national level, with growth also in Education, Civil Service, Logistics and Engineering.

### **Accountability:**

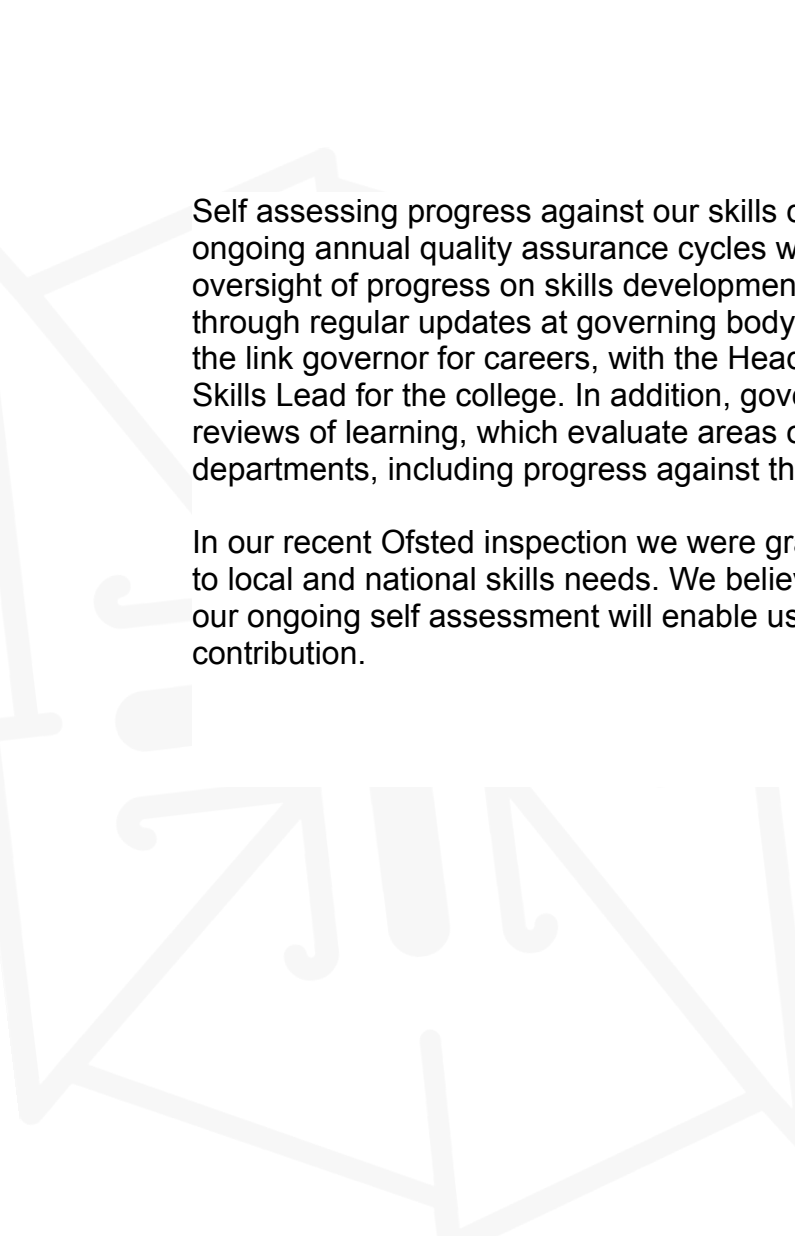
We have developed a detailed strategic plan for our skills provision

 Skills Development Action Plan and we have been self assessing against this plan and the skills framework. In doing so, we aim to support our students by providing a curriculum offer that impacts positively on their employability and future destinations.

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<sup>10</sup> Skills Builder Handbook for Educators: Teaching and assessing essential skills by Tom Ravenscroft, 2022





Self assessing progress against our skills development action plan will be part of the ongoing annual quality assurance cycles within college. Our governors will have oversight of progress on skills development and the careers provision at Aquinas, through regular updates at governing body meetings and also through the work of the link governor for careers, with the Head of Careers, Vice Principal Pastoral and Skills Lead for the college. In addition, governors have been involved in subject reviews of learning, which evaluate areas of strength and development in departments, including progress against the skills agenda.

In our recent Ofsted inspection we were graded as making a reasonable contribution to local and national skills needs. We believe that our strategic plan around skills and our ongoing self assessment will enable us to improve this judgement to a strong contribution.

# Aquinas College

## Accountability Agreement 2023

On behalf of Aquinas College Governing Body, it is hereby confirmed that the college plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives has been approved.

The plan will be published on the college's website within three months of the start of the new academic year and can be accessed in the about section of our website from the following link: <https://www.aquinas.ac.uk>

**Tom McGee**                      **Chair Governors**

Signed..... *Tom McGee* .....      **Date: 26.05.23**

**Danny Pearson**              **Principal**

Signed..... *Danny Pearson* .....      **Date: 26.05.23**