

AQUINAS COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Meeting: 18 March 2025

Time: 4.30pm

Venue: College

GOVERNORS PRESENT

Mr L Byrne, Ms H Donelon, Mrs C H Dove, Mr C Green, Mr R Harris, Mr B Hickey, Mr G Hynes, Mr M King, Mr T P McGee, Mr A Martin, Mrs J Miller, Ms J Paton, Mr D Pearson, Dr A Smith and Miss M Warren O'Neill.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr A Bailey	(Vice Principal)
Mr R Peacock	(External Governance Reviewer)
Mr T Conlon	(Clerk to the Governing Body)

Mr T P McGee in the Chair.

1. OPENING PRAYER/REFLECTION

The meeting began with a prayer and a moment of reflection in Gaelic led by Mr McGee.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

For the benefit of the Student Governors everyone was asked to introduce themselves.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received and accepted from Mrs D Blackburn (Assistant Principal Finance).

4. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

5. STUDENT GOVERNORS

It was noted that Mr M King and Miss M Warren O'Neill had been elected as Student Governors. 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 to advise either Mr Pearson or Mr Bailey of their decision. Both would be members of the Teaching and Learning Committee.

6. APPOINTMENT OF A NEW PRINCIPAL

Mr Pearson and Mr Bailey left the meeting whilst this item was discussed.

Mr McGee advised Governors that the Employment Committee had met earlier in the day to consider the applications received for the post of Principal at the college. The committee had been supported by

Mr D Cunningham (Shrewsbury Diocese), Mr R Peacock (External Adviser) and Mrs L Barlow (Director of Personnel).

The Employment Committee had agreed that Mr A Bailey and Ms J Langstaff be interviewed for the post of Principal on 26 and 27 March 2025. Details of arrangements for the interviews would be circulated to Governors in the next few days. It was hoped to involve as many Governors as possible in the process.

Mr Pearson and Mr Bailey re-joined the meeting after this item had been discussed.

7. EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The report prepared by Mr Rob Peacock on Governance at the college and the response from the college had been circulated to Governors prior to the meeting.

Mr Peacock advised Governors that purpose of the review was to determine how effective the Governing Body and its committees are, it is not an audit of Governance. He thanked Governors and staff for their contributions to the review which had been undertaken during the period May – December 2024.

His conclusion was that the college had an effective Governing Body that embraced the inclusiveness of a sixth form college, there was a warm friendly atmosphere within the college and that Governors were focused on the best outcomes for students.

A discussion took place on the various points raised in the report with particular reference to reserves that were held by the college and the possibility that these could be lost if the college were to academise.

Mr Peacock was thanked for his informative report.

RESOLVED: a) That the report and the college's response be publicised on the college website and
b) That an action plan be drawn up to address the points raised in the review.

8. ACADEMISATION

Mr McGee advised Governors that since the 11 March Governing Body meeting the CES has confirmed that a meeting will be held on 30 April 2025 to which all Chair of Governors and Principals of Sixth Form Colleges have been requested to attend. Options being discussed will include horizontal MATs across Diocese.

The Training Session on 7 May 2025 will provide an opportunity for a more strategic discussion and can reflect on the views exchanged with the CES at the meeting on 30 April 2025.

9. (i) GOVERNING BODY MINUTES

RESOLVED – i) That the minutes of the meetings held on 28 November 2024 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.

9. (ii) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GOVERNING BODY MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

10. (i) COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(i) Audit Committee	10 February 2025
(ii) Resources Committee	11 February 2025
(iii) General Purposes and Employment Committee	21 January 2025
(iv) Teaching and Learning Committee	4 February 2025
(v) Remuneration Committee	4 March 2025

(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.

10. (ii) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE COMMITTEE MINUTES

a) Audit Committee – 10 February 2025

i) Internal Audit Reports – Minute 7

Mr Martin advised Governors that Wylie and Bissett had completed their first two pieces of work

- a) Staff Recruitment and Retention (Strong Assurance) and
- b) Cyber Security (Substantial Assurance)

ii) A discussion took place in relation to staff using their own computer, laptop or phone for college business. One solution is that staff registered their devices with the college but they would be handing control to the college as the college could block any device that was not sufficiently up to date. This is not considered a reasonable solution. The other way forward is to issue staff with college owned devices, which would be very expensive. The college is currently reviewing the impact of this. Students are exempt and can use their own devices in college.

b) Resources Committee – 11 February 2025.

i) Budget Update – Minute 8

The Governors noted the budget had been re-forecasted at the end of January 2025 and that the budget is running as expected and the projected outturn was quite positive.

ii) Future Funding Methodology

Governors noted that there were no changes to the funding methodology for 2025/2026. Details of the college funding for 2025/2026 should be known later this month. It is anticipated that the funding will increase by about £500,000 due to a growth in student numbers. Student numbers are based on the October 2024 census date. Government priorities for funding will also be announced.

iii) Capital Build – Minute 10

Governors noted that the building had been signed off on 11 December 2024 and that it had been occupied from 13 January 2025. The new classrooms are now in use and all tutorial and some RE lessons are taking place there. It will also be used for examinations. No decision has yet been made on which departments, if any, will move into the building.

c) General Purposes Committee and Employment Committee – 21 January 2025

i) Admissions 2024/2025 - Minute 6 This would be covered in the Principal's report.

ii) 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 2023/2024 academic year. It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of students taking a gap year or going into employment.

iii) Employment Committee – Minute 5

Mr Pearson advised Governors a member of staff had opted to go to an Industrial Tribunal claiming unfair dismissal due to disability. The Tribunal hearing is scheduled to place between 2 – 9 June 2025.

d) Teaching and Learning Committee – 4 February 2025

Dr Smith advised governors that committee had received detailed reports on a) Leadership and Management SAR and Quality Review meetings, b) Updated In Year Progress, c) Destinations Report and Curriculum Issues.

e) Remuneration Committee – 4 March 2025

i) Succession Planning – Minute 7

Governors noted the senior management structure at the college and the details of the areas of responsibilities that the Senior Leadership Team covered. Mr Pearson added that he is looking to broaden the SLT from 6 to 8, with additional new posts at Director level from the teaching staff. The additional posts are likely to be a) Leader of Curriculum and b) Leader for Quality. However, a number of immediate options were being considered around strengthening the strategic approach of the college. It was anticipated that these initial moves would be advertised internally and appointments made within the next 4-6 weeks if that proved practical.

A discussion took place on the various management structures with in sixth form colleges. It was noted that some colleges have a Principal, Deputy Principal and Vice Principals, whilst others have Principal and Deputy Principal or Principal and Vice Principal. It was felt that in view of the pending appointment of a new Principal, now was the time for the college to clarify its senior management structure. Mr Pearson was asked to ascertain what the differing senior management structures were in Catholic Sixth Form Colleges and in sixth form colleges in general.

ii) Senior Postholders Remuneration – Minute 8

The Committee noted that the pay award for teachers had been 3.5% payable from 1 September 2024 and by 5.5% from 1 April 2025 based on salary levels at 31 August 2024.

The Committee had recorded their thanks and appreciation to Mr Pearson and all the college staff for their hard work and commitment to the college.

RESOLVED: That the recommendation made by the Remuneration Committee in relation to the pay of Principal and Vice Principal be approved.

11. BUDGET 2024/2025 HALF YEAR FORECAST

Mr Pearson advised Governors that the budget had re-forecast at the end of January 2024 and he circulated a paper that updated the budget position. The main points to note are as follows;

- i) The staffing budgets had been re-forecast to include the pay settlement for 2024/2025. The pay award for teaching staff was 3.5% from September 2024 and 5.5% from April 2025 and the college paid the award in February 2025 as advised by SFCA. The pay award from September 2024 to March 2025 was not subsidised by the Government. Schools had received a subsidy for the full pay award. It was only after a Judicial Review that pay award was subsidised from April 2025. The DfE have said that sixth form colleges will not be treated differently in the future. The cost of meeting the 5.5% pay award from September would be an additional £240,000. The pay award for support staff has been finalised and will be paid in March both backdated to September 2024.
- ii) The high needs budget income has been increased from £350,000 to £510,000.
- iii) The Employer's National Insurance contribution will increase from 13.8% to 15% from April 2025 but the NI free amount that can be earned each month will fall from £738.00 to £417.00. That means that the college will have to pay an additional £600.00 for all staff who earn more than £738.00 a month. This equates to an additional £75,000 for the period April to July and around £300,000 in a full year. This should be subsidised by the Government but no details have been received.
- iv) The budget is running as expected.

RESOLVED: That the budget position for 2024/2025 be noted.

12. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

Mr Bailey advised Governors that a number of amendments were needed to the Accountability Statement. Once complete it would be posted on the college website. It was agreed that it be placed on the agenda for the Training Session on 7 May 2025.

13. GENDER PAY REPORT

Mr Pearson introduced the Gender Pay Report that had been circulated to Governors prior to the meeting. He advised Governors that the Gender Pay Report has to be on the Government Website by the 31 March 2025. 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.

14. CAPITAL BUILD

Mr Green advised Governors that the building was signed off on 11 December 2024 and the building had been occupied from 13 January 2025. The new classrooms are now in use and all tutorial and some RE lessons are taking place there. It will also be used for examinations. No decision has yet been made on which departments, if any, will move into the building.

The move into the building has gone smoothly and feedback from staff and students has been positive. There are a number of snagging issues that have still to be resolved within the next couple of weeks. To ensure that the building performs to the required standard, the college's performance consultants will conduct a detailed evaluation, including remote monitoring over the next 12 months.

It was agreed a) that there would be an official opening of the new block before the end of the academic year and b) that a future meeting of the Governing Body be held in the new build.

14. (i) PRINCIPAL'S TERMLY REPORT

The report of the Principal, copies of which were circulated, was presented and discussed. The report was supplemented with an additional booklet "A Celebration of Catholic Life at Aquinas – Spring Term 2024/2025" which illustrates the opportunities provided and achievements of both staff and students.

RESOLVED - That the Principal's report be received.

14. (ii) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S TERMLY REPORT

a) Admissions

Governors noted the information in relation to the admissions process for 2025/2026 with particular reference to the number applications which were around 3076, for 1300 places. There had been a large demographic upturn in Stockport and Greater Manchester. Mr Pearson advised Governors that offers to students had been sent by February half term.

The predicted number for U6 in September 2025 is 1250 students. The maximum that the college can comfortably cope with is higher now we have the new building. And in the way that we currently operate, 2600 students is manageable. Next year we are looking in region of 2560 - 2580. Therefore, the aim is to have a L6 of just over 1300 for September 2025.

b) Staffing

Governors noted the staffing appointments that had been made for January 2025 along with the leavers at the end of the Summer term 2025. Due to an increase in student numbers the college is looking to expand the number of teachers for History and Economics. He thanked all staff for their commitment, diligence and hard work.

c) Student Development

The college is focussed on providing opportunities for students to continue their personal development. In lower sixth, students are building their skills and considering future options, whilst in upper sixth students are preparing for the final push on coursework and exam preparation as their final assessments loom.

14. (iii) A CELEBRATION OF CATHOLIC LIFE AT AQUINAS

The report detailed examples of the rich catholic life of the college. It gave a flavour of the opportunities on offer and the achievements of students. It gives a picture of how students are living out the mission of the college.

a) Chaplaincy Report - The report covered the Spring term of the 2024/2025 academic year and gave details of the various activities that had taken place at the college including the following:

SVP and Mini Vinnies at Our Lady and the Apostles Church, Hyning Hall Autumn Retreat, Celebrating the Liturgy with staff and students, Jubilee Year Launch and Thomas Aquinas Feast, CAFOD Young Leader Programme and Youth SVP – Showing Passion and living life to the full.

b) Core RE and RS

As part of the Jubilee Year celebrations students had the opportunity to visit the college Chapel to see a book of 1st class and 2nd class relics which were borrowed from Xaverian College.

U6 students are learning religious freewill and predestination, and L6 are applying the ethical theory of natural law to euthanasia.

c) One of the strategic aims of the college is to ensure students and staff thrive at stage of their journey, enabling them to “Be More”. The article covered the stories of Henry Taylor’s swimming successes, Jay Hutchinson competing in cross country and fell running championships, Emma Johnson competing in cross country championships, Shannon Mahlik selected for England Roses U17 Netball squad and Captain for the European Championships, Aiden Rhode who presented at TEDx at the University of Manchester on sustainability (or lack of it) in the film industry and Sacha Conway Holroyd who will be attending the 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

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

Art and Design, Photography, Business, Applied Business, Economics, Careers, CRY screening, Duke of Edinburgh Award, English, Enrichment, Geography, Geology, History, India Project, IT and Computing, Learning Support, Mathematics, Media and Film, Modern Foreign Languages, Music, Performing Arts, Physics, Politics, Pathways and Sports departments and Theology.

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.

14. POLICY REVIEWS

Governors had reviewed the following policies:

<u>Policy</u>	<u>Committee</u>	<u>Governor</u>
Lettings	Resources	Ms H Donelon
Critical Incidents	Resources	Mr T McGee
Sustainability	Resources	Mr B Hickey

RESOLVED: That the policies outlined above be approved.

15. GOVERNOR TRAINING SESSION

Governors noted that the training session was scheduled for 7 May 2025 at 4.30pm. It was agreed that the following items would be included in the training session.

- a) Academisation Update
- b) Safeguarding Update
- c) Accountability Statement

16. CHAIRPERSON'S ACTION

The Chairperson advised Governors that there had been no action since the last meeting.

17. CORRESPONDENCE

No correspondence was brought forward for Governor's consideration.

18. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

a) Teachers Pay Award

The college has been approached by the NASUWT and NEU unions who have requested that the college pay the pay award in full from September 2024. Mr Pearson advised Governors that the college has always honoured the nationally agreed pay awards and would not want to break from national bargaining. He added that some colleges have agreed to pay the difference but it is about affordability and some colleges cannot afford to pay the difference and it will create an unlevel playing field for pay.

Mr Harris felt that staff did not understand the complexity of the pay award across all sectors, including academies. Dr Smith added that the Government have made a mess of the situation and need to tackle the issue of academisation.

After a full discussion it was agreed that the request from the teachers' unions for the college to pay award in full from September 2024 be referred to the Resources Committee.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

- a) Diocese Protocols - 28 April 2025 at 4.30pm
- b) Governor Training Session - 7 May 2025 at 4.30pm
- c) Summer Term Meeting - 8 July 2025 at 4.30pm

Signed _____
Chairperson

Date _____