

## AQUINAS COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Meeting: 26 November 2024

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, Miss R Lobo, Mr A Martin, Mr T P McGee, Mrs J Miller, Mr D Pearson and Dr A Smith.

### IN ATTENDANCE

Mr A Bailey	Vice Principal	Mrs D Blackburn	Assistant Principal (Finance)
Mr R Peacock	External Governance Reviewer		
Mr T Conlon	Clerk to the Governing Body		

Mr T Conlon in the Chair

#### 1. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

It was proposed, seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED: That Mr T P McGee be elected Chairperson for the ensuing academic year.

Mr T P McGee in the Chair.

#### 2. INTRODUCTIONS

Mr Peacock outlined his career background and advised Governors that he was undertaking an external review of Governance at the college. The purpose of the review was to determine how effective the Governing Body and its committee are, it is not an audit of Governance. For the benefit of Mr Peacock those who had not already met him introduced themselves.

#### 3. FOUNDATION GOVERNOR

The Chairperson advised Governors that Ms H Donelon had been appointed as a Foundation Governor at the college. Ms Donelon was welcomed to the Governing Body.

#### 4. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRPERSON

It was proposed, seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED: That Mrs J Miller be elected Vice Chairperson for the ensuing academic year.

#### 5. OPENING PRAYER/REFLECTION

The meeting began with a moment of reflection led by Mr T P McGee.

#### 6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Ms A Lindsay, Ms J Paton, Miss A Smith and Mr M Taylor.

7. ELIGIBILITY AND REGISTER OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Governors were asked to complete the Declaration of Eligibility, Register of Pecuniary Interest and Code of Conduct Forms that had been circulated and to return them to the Clerk as soon as possible.

8. 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. There were no interests declared.

9. OPEN GOVERNMENT

RESOLVED: That the Governing Body would continue to adopt the Open Government policy. Governing Body meetings and its committees would be open to the public, subject to the exclusion of observers for confidential items.

10. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

A copy of the proposed committee membership had been circulated to all Governors prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED: a) That the committee membership as circulated be approved and b) that Mr B Hickey be appointed as Vice Chair of the Remuneration Committee.

11. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR GOVERNORS

It was agreed that all Governors (except Student Governors) are required to complete and sign the Code of Conduct for Governors issued by Shrewsbury Diocese. Completed forms should be returned to the Clerk as soon as possible.

12. CODE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

A copy of the Association of Colleges (AOC) Further Education Code of Governance had been circulated to all Governors prior to the meeting. The Catholic Education Service (CES) had recommended that Catholic Sixth Form Colleges adopt the AOC Code of Governance. Governors were reminded that is a condition of funding that a Code of Governance is adopted.

RESOLVED: That the AOC Further Education Code of Governance be adopted by the college.

13. REVISED BISHOPS' MEMORANDUM AND DIOCESAN PROTOCOLS

A copy of the following documents had been circulated to all Governors prior to the meeting:

- a) Letter from the Acting Director of Schools, Shrewsbury Diocese.
- b) Bishops' Memorandum on the Appointment of Staff in Catholic Schools.
- c) Diocesan Protocols for maintained schools and academies within the Diocese of Shrewsbury.

The Chairperson recommended that a subgroup of Governors be established to look at the implications for the college in respect of the above documents. The subgroup would then report back to the Governing Body at its training meeting in May 2025.

Governors were asked to let the Chairperson know if they wanted to be part of the subgroup to look at these documents.

14. GOVERNING BODY MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2024, copies of which had been circulated previously be, (a) approved and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record and (b) authorised for publication in accordance with the College Instrument and Articles.

15. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GOVERNING BODY MINUTES

There were no matters arising that were not covered by the agenda for the meeting.

16. COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(i) Audit Committee	4 November 2024
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(ii) Resources Committee	5 November 2024
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(iii) General Purposes and Employment Committee	2 July and 8 October 2024
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(iv) Teaching and Learning Committee	1 October 2024
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(a) be approved and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record and (b) authorised for publication in accordance with the College Instrument and Articles.

17. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE COMMITTEE MINUTES

a) Audit Committee – 4 November 2024

Mr McGee as Chairperson of the Governing Body had attended the meeting at the request of the External Auditors to receive the Financial Statements Audit and Management Letter.

i) Draft Statutory Accounts – Minute 6

Governors noted that the College's Annual Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31 July 2024 would be considered at this meeting.

ii) External Audit Completion Report – Minute 7

Governors noted that the draft Management Letter from Murray Smith LLP indicated that, subject to carrying out a post balance sheet events review, there will be an unqualified opinion on both the Financial Statements and Regularity Audit for the year ended 31 July 2024. Murray Smith LLP felt that the college had been well prepared for the audit and that they had been impressed by its organisation.

iii) Internal Audit Strategy 2024/2025

Governors noted that the Audit Plan for 2024/2025 would consist of 18 days with addition of contingency as necessary.

iv) Risk Management – Minute 12

Governors noted that the Annual Report on Risk Management would be considered at this meeting.

v) Audit Committee Annual Report – Minute 14

Governors noted that the Audit Committee Annual Report would be considered at this meeting.

b) Resources Committee – 5 November 2024

i) Health and Safety Report 2023/2024 – Minute 6

Governors noted that the number of incidents and staff absences due to illness and that the number of days lost was 11 compared in the previous year to 107 days and this related to 3 members of staff. The main cause of absence had been due to musculoskeletal disorders (8 days).

ii) Management Accounts – Minute 7

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that the Management Accounts were now on the Governors Portal.

iii) Budget 2024/2025 – Minute 8

Governors noted that the Budget for 2024/2025 would be considered at this meeting.

iv) Draft Statutory Accounts – Minute 9

Governors noted that the College's Annual Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31 July 2024 would be considered at this meeting.

v) Capital Build – Minute 11

This would be covered in the Principal's Report to Governors.

c) General Purposes and Employment Committee – 2 July and 8 October 2024

i) Admissions 2024/2025 – Minute 6

Governors noted that at the start of the term the actual number of students on roll was 2569 students comprised of 1317 in L6, 1220 in U6 and 32 Pathway students. and that the college is funded for 2424 students. Mr Pearson added that on the census date in October the number was 2534 students which is about 110 more students than funded but the college had planned for some growth.

### iii) Admissions 2025/2026 – Minute 7

Mr Pearson advised Governors that the number of applications received to date is in line with what the college would expect at this time of the process. Mr Pearson advised Governors that the Open Days had been held on Saturday 21 September 2024 and 19 October 2024. In addition, the college had also been scheduled to attend school events and whilst they would avoid large open events they would still attend year 10/11 assemblies at secondary schools.

The closing date for applications (which are online) for 2025/2026 is 30 November 2024. All category 1 students will have a telephone interview before Christmas 2024. Applications from category 2 students who have submitted their application forms by 30 November 2024 will then be assessed. All applicants will be notified whether they are being considered for interview. Students who are to receive further consideration will receive a letter before Christmas 2024 inviting them to an interview in January/February 2025. The telephone interviews for category 1 students have already started.

The total number of applications for 2025/2026 could reach between 2500 – 2700 for 1300 places. A report will be presented to the GP Committee in January 2025.

### d) Teaching and Learning Committee – 1 October 2024

#### i) Results Overview – Minute 6

Governors noted that the 2024 results at the college had been outstanding. The number of high grades had increased by 1% and the number of U grades had reduced from 36 to 21. The positive value added was up to 0.07. The college had also out performed statistical neighbours and were pleased with an excellent set of results.

Governors record their appreciation of the work of the staff at the college.

#### ii) Curriculum Issues – Minute 8

Mr Pearson outlined the latest position in relation to the proposed Post 16 Level 3 Reforms. Under the previous Government plans, it would have meant that September 2024 would have been the last time that the college can offer some of the Applied General subjects that it currently offers. The current Government had made a promise to pause and review the removal of the Applied General and introduction of Alternative Academic Qualification (AAQs). However, the position has changed and a review is now expected to be completed by the end of the year and it is not expected that there will be any nasty surprises and is unlikely to affect courses for September 2025. Any changes are more likely to be from September 2026.

Discussions have begun about suitable programmes of study, prior attainment levels and entry requirements as well as learning and teaching approaches for students with weaker prior attainment. The college is also engaging with feeder schools to understand their curriculum offer and consider how the college can complement this in the pathways that are offered. Mr McGee added that Year 11 students apply to the college on what is hoped will be available and that the college was 90% confident of what it will be able to offer. Mr Pearson was confident that the college will be able to offer all courses for the next two years.

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that at recent AoC meeting, FE colleges had reported that they were trying to get T levels off the ground but this was proving difficult. Students are not getting the work experience that is part of the qualification, they leave the course with an academic qualification only.

Mr Hickey asked what was the message from universities and employers of any courses that may be devalued. Mr Pearson replied that universities and employers organisations were lagging behind.

Governors noted that Secretary of State for Education had made early years a priority in the recent budget announcements.

Mr Pearson advised Governors that an update will be provided at the next Teaching and Learning Committee on 5 February 2025.

### iii) Denominational Inspection – Minute 9

The Denominational Inspection took place on 3 and 4 October 2024 and focussed on Catholic life and mission together with religious education and the college's approach to collective worship. The inspection team was very complementary about many aspects of the college. The result was that aspects of the RE provision at the college are Outstanding.

### iv) Quality Reviews

Mr Pearson advised Governors that the Quality Review meetings had been held in college during the week commencing 30 October 2024 and thanked those Governors who had attended the meetings.

## 18. APPROVAL OF STATUTORY ACCOUNTS

A copy of the College's Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31 July 2024 had been circulated to all Governors prior to the meeting. Both the Audit Committee and the Resources Committee had discussed these at their November 2024 meetings. Members of the Audit Committee and Resources Committee had recommended that the Governing Body approve the Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31 July 2024. Mrs Blackburn reported on the key aspects of the Statutory Accounts.

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that there had been changes in the pension assets of the Greater Manchester Local Government Pension Fund of £2,527,000 to £0.00. The valuation is actuarially reviewed every year. This "asset" has been increasing over the last few years and as the asset will never actually be realised by college, the college had to request a ceiling asset report this year. This report has returned an asset value of £0 and so the cumulative assets of £3.3m has had to be written off in the statutory accounts. The Statement of Comprehensive income (profit and loss account) on page 28 of draft Statutory Accounts for 2023/2024 shows the net impact of this change, moving an operating surplus of £1.25m in the management accounts to an accounting loss of £1.27m. Governors noted that there are Government proposals to merge all Local Government pension funds. The GMPF has a surplus, unlike many other pension schemes.

Mr Hickey referred to the increase in Employers National Insurance Contributions from April 2025, which will result in additional cost for the college. Mrs Blackburn added that the Employers costs on the GMPF may change in 2026.

The college's financial health would be reported as "outstanding" to the ESFA in December 2024.

RESOLVED: That the College's Annual Report and Financial Statement for the year ending 31 July 2024 be approved and that the Chairperson be authorised to sign them on behalf of the Governing Body.

19. BUDGET 2024/2025

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that the main changes to note since the budget was approved in June 2024 were:

- a) A pre- contract agreement of £440,000 had been agreed with Stockport MBC in respect of High Needs Income, this is likely to rise to £460,000. £350,000 had been included in the budget. Another £ £110,000 is due from other local authorities.
- b) Pay Awards – An initial announcement for the pay award for school teachers for 2024/2025 was 5.5%. The Government has decreed that FE institutions will not receive the additional 3.65% support to subsidise an increase of similar magnitude for our sector. Many colleges will not be able to support a pay award of 5.5% and the initial offer from the SFCA is around 2%. The college have included 5% for the pay award in the budget. The current estimate for the minimum wage for April 2025 is between £11.82 and £12.39 per hour, £12.42 has been included in the budget (Government confirmed at £12.21). Currently a £50,000 reduction in actual teaching cost is being shown compared to the budget set in June 2024.
- c) Employer's National Insurance - An increase of 1% in the Employer's NI would cost the college an additional £45,000.
- d) Facilities Costs – It is not yet known what the additional costs for the new building will be, therefore, there may be some movement in the overall costs.

The budget would be reviewed in January 2025

RESOLVED: That the budget position be noted.

20. GOVERNING BODY SELF ASSESSMENT 2024

A copy of the details of the Governors Self – Assessment returns for the academic year 2023/2024 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The Chairperson advised Governors that the average overall score was similar to last year and was around 4.7. He thanked Governors for their support in completing the Self – Assessment forms.

Governors were encouraged to have a look at the webinar sessions arranged by the Diocese and SFCA to enhance their personal development.

The Chairperson advised Governors that he, the Principal and the Governing Body Clerk would meet to discuss the points raised and report back to Governors.

RESOLVED: That the Governors Self - Assessment returns for the academic year 2023/2024 be received.

21. GOVERNORS ATTENDANCE RECORD 2023/2024

Details of the Governors attendance at both Governing Body meetings and Committee meetings during the academic year 2023/2024 had been circulated to all Governors prior to the meeting.

The Chairperson thanked all Governors for their support at the various Committee meetings and at the Governing Body meetings.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report on Governors attendance for the academic year 2023/2024 be approved.

22. i) PRINCIPAL'S TERMLY REPORT

That 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 – Autumn Term 2024/2025". Mr Pearson advised Governors that the committees review and consider the many issues that are highlighted in his report.

RESOLVED - That the Principal's report be received.

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

a) Examination Results 2024 - The results in the summer were some of the best that the college has ever had. This was because of the college's learning and teaching approach coupled with high quality teaching and the hard work of the students. 80% of students got their first choice for university/college. The Value Added was in the highest 25% performance in the country.

b) Admissions - The number of students on roll on the census date in October the number was 2534 students which is about 110 more students than anticipated.

c) Denominational Inspection - This took place on 3 and 4 October 2024 and focussed on Catholic life and mission together with religious education and the college's approach to collective worship. The inspection team was very complementary about many aspects of the college. The inspection had been rigorous and challenging. The result was that the RE provision at the college is Outstanding. Mr Pearson thanked those Governors who were involved in the inspection.

d) Strategic Issues – The following areas are challenges that the sixth form sector is facing:

i) Pay settlement for teachers not being fully funded, ii) recruitment of teachers is difficult, iii) uncertainty in funding, iv) academisation and v) education reform

A detailed discussion took place on academisation during which the following points were raised:

i) There is a wish by the government and the DfE for all schools and colleges to become academies by 2030.

ii) A school or college must join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

iii) Catholic schools must work within their Diocese, Shrewsbury Diocese have a staged approach to schools becoming academies and joining on a geographically organised MAT within the Diocese.

iv) When these plans were made Catholic Sixth Form colleges were unable to become academies and so were not part of the Diocesan plan.

v) The law changed in 2022 to allow Catholic Sixth Form colleges to become academies but by then the Diocesan plan was established and the college was not part of it.

It was felt that there are number of options open to the college and these are as follows:

a) to remain as a sixth form college,

b) to ask the Diocese to include the college in their model and assign the college to a MAT, which they are reluctant to do.

c) to become an academy in a MAT with colleges from other Diocese, which Shrewsbury Diocese may be reluctant to endorse if they perceive that they will lose some "control" to a larger partner.



d) to ask ACVIC to speak to the CES to see if they would sanction a stand alone academy.

e) to ask the CES what other options are open to the college.

The college has had informal discussions with Holy Cross and Xavarian colleges about a cross Diocese MAT. Loreto College cannot academise with others as they are part of a religious order.

Mr Pearson added that no Catholic Sixth Form college was currently in the process of becoming an academy. Dr Smith felt that the college was more independent than schools in the Diocese. Mr Hickey asked what was the legal implication of being a stand alone academy. Mr Pearson replied that in the last 3 / 4 years there had not been any stand alone academies and at the moment the college could not legally become a stand alone academy. It was not known what view the Acting Director of Education at Shrewsbury Diocese has on the college becoming an academy.

The worry is that by doing nothing the options open to the college will reduce over time. Mr McGee felt that the college needs to be proactive and to agree a way forward after a response from ACVIC and the CES. It was agreed that the views of staff be sought to aid with the discussion. It was agreed that a meeting be arranged in March 2025 with a single item agenda of academisation to focus on the options and the consequences of any action. Academisation would also be on the agenda for the Governor Training session in May 2025. In the meantime Mr Pearson undertook to engage with other stakeholders to refine options open to the college.

Miss Lobo asked would there be any implications for students. Mr Pearson replied that students would not likely see any difference.

Mr McGee thanked Governors for their contribution to the discussion on this very important issue for the college.

#### f) Staffing

Governors noted the staffing appointments that had been made for September 2024 along with the leavers at the end of the Summer term 2024.

g) Governors noted the reports from the following areas:

Adult Education, Careers, Mental Health and Wellness Awareness day.

In addition the following booklets were circulated: AQ college magazine, Positive Feedback, Reflection and Prayer booklets.

#### (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 first term of the 2024/2025 academic year and gave details of the various activities that had taken place at the college including the following:

- |  |                                 |                                    |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| i) Catholic Life Assemblies Celebrations         | ii) Introduction to the chapel  | iii) Welcome Mass and Welcome Mass |
| v) Youth SVP – Cultural Day event & Volunteering | iv) CAFOD Young Leaders Program | vii) Autumn Retreat 2024           |
|  | vi) Theme Weeks                 |                                    |

## b) Mission and Ethos

The Mission and Ethos at the start of the year focussed mainly on preparation for the Denominational Inspection. In addition planning focused on preparation for the Jubilee Year “Pilgrim of Hope”. It is planned to introduce all students to the concept of pilgrimage through the BBC sounds podcast called “Herves Way” which follows the story of a man who completes the Camino de Santiago. Grounded in the Catholic virtue of Hope, students will be asked to walk a pilgrimage from the college to Our Lady’s in Edgeley.

## c) Core RE, RS and Inspection feedback

This had been covered under the Principal’s Report.

d) “Be More” – One of the strategic aims of the college is to ensure students and staff thrive at every stage of their journey, enabling them to “Be More”. The article covered the stories of Jay Hutchinson who represented England in the Junior Home Counties Fell Race Championships, Harry Wake who organised a debate for L6 students, Harry Wake and Aeden Jackson who competed at Inversity hackathon at The Crown Estate, Eve Carroll who represented Manchester City’s Women’s first team against PSG, Milena Oktas who attended the Special Olympics annual national cycle competition in Yorkshire, Joseph Adams, former Pathways student with Downs syndrome who ran 100km (62 miles) across Europe in six days.

## e) Governors noted the activities in the following areas within the college:

Biology, Business, Applied Business, Economics, Careers, Chemistry, Duke of Edinburgh Award, English, Enrichment, Environmental Science, Euroweek, Fundraising, Geography and Geology, India Project, IT/Computing, Law, Learning Support, Mathematics, Media, Music, Pathways, Performing Arts, Social Sciences and Sport.

## 23. SAFEGUARDING POLICY/KCSIE

Mr Bailey advised Governors that the amended Safeguarding Policy was on the Governors Portal and changes to the policy had been highlighted. He also reminded Governors that they need to read the KCSIE document. In addition, all Governors need to sign that they have read the KCSIE document, the Clerk to the Governing Body will issue a note for Governors to sign. Mr Bailey also advised Governors that the Prevent document will be presented to the next Safeguarding meeting.

## 24. RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY AND ANNUAL REPORT

Mrs Blackburn outlined the key elements of the report to Governors. It was noted that the risk management process was well established in the college with regular reports to the Senior Management Team. In addition, Risk Management was a standard item on the Audit Committee Agenda.

RESOLVED: That Risk Management Annual Report for 2023/2024 and the amended Risk Management Policy be approved.

## 25. AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Governors were advised that the Audit Committee had considered its Annual Report for the financial year 2023/2024, a copy of which had been circulated to all Governors prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Committee's Annual Report be received.

26. AUDIT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

A copy the revised Committee Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee had been circulated to Governors prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the revised Committee Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee be approved.

27. POLICY REVIEWS

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy had been reviewed by the General Purposes Committee and had be recommended for approval.

RESOLVED: That The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy be approved.

28. GOVERNORS EMAIL ADDRESSES

Mr Green circulated a guide that he had prepared to assist Governors in accessing their college emails and the governors portal. Governors were encouraged to use the guides and to feedback any comments to the Clerk to the Governors.

29. CHAIRPERSON'S ACTION

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

30. CORRESPONDENCE

No correspondence was brought forward for Governors consideration.

31. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Certificate Evening

Mr Pearson reminded Governors that the Certificate Evening is on Monday 16 December 2024 at 7.30pm at the college.

32. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18 March 2025 at 4.30pm.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson

Date \_\_\_\_\_