AQUINAS COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Meeting: 10 July 2025
Time: 4.30pm
Venue: College

GOVERNORS PRESENT

Mr L Byrne, Ms H Donelon, Mrs C H Dove, Mr C Green, Mr B Hickey, Mr G Hynes, Mr A Martin, Mr T P McGee, Ms J Paton, Mr D Pearson, Dr A Smith,

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr A Bailey	Vice Principal
Mrs D Blackburn	Assistant Principal (Finance)
Ms J Dommett	Principal Designate
Mr A Moss	IT Manager
Mr T Conlon	Clerk to the Governing Body

Mr T P McGee in the Chair.

1. OPENING PRAYER

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

2. INTRODUCTION

Mr McGee welcomed Ms Dommett to the meeting. For the benefit of Ms Dommett everyone introduced themselves.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Mr R Harris, Mrs J Miller, Mr M Taylor and Ms C Phillips (Assistant Principal – Curriculum & Quality).

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. (i) GOVERNING BODY MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meetings held on 11 March 2025, 18 March 2025, 28 April 2025 and 7 May 2025, 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.

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

a) 11 March 2025 - Minute 4 Academisation

Mr McGee and Mr Pearson had recently attended a meeting with Salford Diocese to discuss further the possibility of the college joining in a MAT with Holy Cross and Xavarian colleges from the Salford Diocese. The preferred position/solution of Salford Diocese would be a horizontal MAT which could include Aquinas. However, Shrewsbury Diocese may be reluctant to endorse if they perceive that they will lose some control to a larger partner.

Bishop John from Salford Diocese had written to Bishop Mark, Shrewsbury Diocese outlining the reasons why it would be good for Aquinas College to be part of a horizontal MAT. There is a slight complication with Holy Cross due to the fact that it has university students. If Aquinas do not join the MAT Salford Diocese will go ahead with their plans for the two colleges. Salford Diocese are keen to start the process and there is an expectation that all schools and colleges within the Diocese will become an academy by 2030. The Catholic Education Service (CES) will look at the Instrument and Articles of Government and the DfE will need to approve Scheme of Delegation.

Mr McGee advised Governors that a meeting had been arranged for 8 September 2025 with Richard Wood, Director of School at Shrewsbury Diocese to discuss the matter further. He undertook to keep Governors informed of the outcome of the meeting. The college may need to make a commitment to proceed to stage one.

b) 28 April 2025 – Minute 5 Diocesan Protocols

i) The Chairperson advise Governors that the proposed Diocesan protocols would be superseded by a new Bishops Directive which will be issued later in the year.

c) 7 May 2025 – Minute 4 Safeguarding

The Chairperson advised Governors that Mrs Dove, Mr Hynes, Ms Paton and himself had agreed to attend the next induction training on safeguarding for new staff.

7. CYBER SECURITY

Mr Moss (IT Manager) advised Governors that both Mr McGee and Mr Conlon's email addresses had been compromised and that those in their contact lists may have received an email that had supposedly come from them. Governors may be targeted for personal phishing and need to be very careful. An auto divert had been put in place for any responses to the emails. The college has had to report the matter to the Information Commissioners Office.

As a result of this Governors will no longer be able to use personal email addresses for college business and must use their college email address. A system will be put in place so that a message will be sent to the personal email address asking Governors to check the college email account. Mr Moss advised Governors that they need to change their password on their college email account and suggested that a random three word password be used. He also reminded Governors not to use the password for their bank details. In addition it is proposed that a two factor authentication is implemented using the Microsoft authenticator app on their mobile phone.

Mr Moss circulated a paper that outlined the process for changing the password and the installation of the Microsoft authenticator app.

All staff at the college will undertake three on line tutorials each lasting about 7 minutes to cover Cyber security and AI. Governors were also encouraged to sign up for the tutorials. Ms Dommett added that Governors in her current school struggled to know when there was an email. The possibility of a link being set up would be explored. Mr Moss suggested that there may be an issue with Governors IT/phones having the necessary up to date kit. Mr Hynes asked there was any particular software needed. Mr Moss replied that Windows 11 has enough protection built in.

A discussion took place on the use of the Governors portal against that of providing paper copies of documents. It was agreed that portal would continue to be used.

Mr Moss reminded Governors that if they have any difficulties they can always contact the IT Helpdesk at the college.

8. (i) COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

(i) Audit Committee	2 June 2025
(ii) Resources Committee	25 June 2025
(iii) Teaching and Learning Committee	17 June 2025
(iv) General Purposes and Employment Committees	18 March, 27 March and 24 June 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.

9. (ii) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE COMMITTEE MINUTES

a) Audit Committee – 2 June 2025

i) Audit Review – Minute 6

Mr Pearson had attended the meeting to receive feedback from the auditors on the college's performance. Both internal and external auditors had reported that they have a good dialogue over the planning and timing of the audits. They added that there was a good working relationship with the college.

ii) Internal Audit Reports – Minute 7

All the Internal Audit Reports had received strong assurance. Wbg have agreed to provide training for the Audit Committee on Individual Learning Record (ILR).

iii) Internal Audit Plan 2025/2026 – Minute 10

RESOLVED: i) That Wgb be appointed as Internal Auditors for 2025/2026, ii) The Internal Audit Plan of 20 days be agreed and iii) That the fees for 2025/2026 which are exclusive of VAT and expenses be agreed at £9,000.

iv) Post 16 Audit Code of Practice – Minute 11

Governors were advised that the Financial Handbook for Colleges had now been issued.

b) Resources Committee – 25 June 2025

i) Charging Policy for Adult and Continuing Education Courses – Minute 5

RESOLVED: That the recommendation made by the Resources Committee in relation to the fees to be charged for Adult and Continuing Education Courses for 2025/2026 be approved.

ii) Health and Safety Report – Minute 7

Governors noted the Health and Safety report for the period 1 August 2024 to 7 May 2025.

iii) Teachers Pay Award – Minute 10

The Chairperson advised Governors that the NAS/UWT had accepted the college's offer to pay staff a one off unconsolidated payment of £350.00 for full time staff, pro rata for part time staff.

iv) Financial Benchmarking – Minute 13

Mrs Blackburn circulated a paper that showed how the college compares against each of the benchmarks detailed in the FE Commissioners letter. If Governors had any comments or wanted clarification they were asked to contact Mrs Blackburn.

v) Mr McGee advised Governors that the National Joint Council has made an offer to the teacher associations of a pay offer above inflation. A reply from the teacher associations had not yet been received.

vi) The budget for 2025/2026 and Authorisation of Two Year Financial Plan are separate items on the agenda.

c) Teaching and Learning Committee – 17 June 2025

i) In Year Progress – Quality Review Minute 6

Dr Smith advised Governors that the role of the committee was to look at a) the quality assurance of teaching and learning, b) performance data and c) improving targets and monitoring the progress of students. The last meeting of the committee had focussed on quality review and the in year progress made by subject areas.

ii) Committee Terms of Reference – Minute 8

Resolved: That the current Teaching and Learning Committee Terms of Reference be approved.

iii) Any Other Business – Safeguarding – Minute 9

Mrs Dove expressed some reservation about the Student Council's interest in establishing a Wellbeing Group for students. Mr Bailey advised Governors that it was a recurring theme with the Student Council in wanting to help each other. He added that students do contact the safeguarding team with matters concerning mental health and that the college is not keen to train students to deal with these matters. The college could undertake a short

survey at the start of the new academic year and that students could sign post other students on where to seek help.

Dr Smith felt that there may be naivety on behalf of the students in recognising the complications with safeguarding with peer to peer support.

d) General Purposes and Employment Committees -24 June 2025

i) Admissions 2025/2026 – Minute 6

Governors noted that the number of students who had accepted invitations to the Taster Days on 7 and 8 July 2025 was 1349.

The projection is for between 1330 and 1350 students in L6. The U6 could be around 1220 students. This would give a total of between 2550 and 2570 students excluding Pathway students (30/32), which is where the college wants to be. The funding for the year will be based on 2535 students.

Many of those students who are shown as undecided did put the college down as their first choice. There were no major concerns and the college was on track to achieve the numbers outlined above.

ii) Student Withdrawals – Minute 7

Governors noted that the number of leavers was 98 compared to 75 in the previous year. Very few students leave after the retention deadline. Students leave for a variety of reasons including mental health, behaviour, students on the wrong course and seeking employment. Lower prior attainment before coming to the college is one of the main issues.

The college retention rate is good at 91.4% compared to 89.9% in the previous year. Governors noted that within ill health the main reason was mental health. Governors noted that a student could be at the college for an additional year due to illness.

iii) Accountability Statement

The Accountability Agreement is a formal document outlining the college's strategic objectives aligning with national priorities and local need. Its purpose is to ensure transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in educational outcomes.

The Accountability Agreement had been updated and was sent to the DfE by the 30 June 2025.

10. BUDGET 2025/2026

Mrs Blackburn gave Governors an overview of the budget that had been presented to the Resources Committee at its meeting on 25 June 2025. Additional information had been received from the DfE and this had now been included in the budget papers.

Mrs Blackburn introduced a set of papers in relation to the proposed budget for 2025/2026 that had been circulated to Governors prior to the meeting. The papers contained a) a spreadsheet of cash income and expenditure b) the same converted into an accounting format and c) a written commentary. Mrs Blackburn outlined the process of moving from a cash budget to an accounting budget.

The DfE have now confirmed that the income from them for 2025/2026 will be £14,301,854 compared to £13,058,439 for 2024/2025 and is an increase of £1,242,415. The funding is based on 2,540 students compared with 2,424 for last year an increase of 116 students. An inflationary increase of 3.78% has been applied to all funding bands, now giving a top rate of £5,105 compared with £4,843 for 2024/2025. 97 % of students at the college are at the top rate of £5,105. The DfE funding above contains £372,000 for 62 High Needs students; this element of funding provides the first £6,000 additional support funding per High Needs students who need one to one support. It is not yet known how many High Needs students will join the college in September 2025. The total income for the 2025/2026 financial year is £16,927,427 compared to £15,499,972 last year an increase of £1,427,454.

In addition, the college has still to evaluate the cost of new High Needs students to the Local Authority. This covers the assessment of the additional costs over £6,000. The college estimates that the cost of moving from L6 to U6 for continuing students with high needs is £250,000. They are about to submit claims for new students starting in September 2025.

The Teacher's Pension Grant will continue until 31 July 2026 and is confirmed at £ 727,985, compared to £781,286 for 2024/2025 a decrease of £53,301. The DfE have rebased the starting figure. The SFCA and others are pressing for the grant to continue beyond July 2026.

The Teachers National Insurance Grant of £202,000 that the college will receive in September 2025 covers the period April 2025 to March 2026 which cuts across two financial years for the college. Murray Smith (External Auditors) have suggested that it all be included in the 2025/2026 financial year because it would not be regarded as material to the 2024/2025 accounts.

The draft budget shows a contingency reserve of £256,165 compared to £122,196 last year, an increase of £133,969. Whilst the initial trading surplus is £210,967.

All aspects of staffing and non pay costs will be monitored to ensure the running of the college as efficiently as possible. A 5% increase had been included in the staffing budget with various inflationary increase for non pay costs.

Mrs Blackburn drew Governor's attention to the Financial Health calculated from the initial budget where the overall outcome is that it is classed as Good at 210 within the range 180 to 230.

RESOLVED: That the budget for 2025/2026 be approved.

11. TWO YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Mrs Blackburn advised Governors that the two year financial plan has to be submitted to the DfE by the end of July 2025. The plan includes the outturn for 2024/2025, the budget for 2025/2026 and the forecast of 2026/2027. The college's financial health for the three years will be Outstanding, Good and Good.

Mr McGee advised Governors that the college was in a good financial position.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson be authorised to sign the Two Year Plan on behalf of the Governing Body.

12 (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 – Summer Term 2024/2025" which illustrates the opportunities provided and achievements of both staff and students.

RESOLVED - That the Principal's report be received.

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

Mr Pearson advised Governors that the report would focus on the key issues facing the college.

The main areas covered in the report were a) Introduction b) Chaplaincy and Core RE and RSc) Mission Ethos, d) Finance, e) HR, f) Adult Education and g) careers.

a) Introduction – Mr Pearson looked back on his 14 years as Principal and the challenges that the college had face over that period. He thanked Governors and staff for the their support and commitment to the college over that time. Mr Pearson also looked at the challenges that the college will face in the coming years including academisation, curriculum reform and new Ofsted Framework. He welcomed Ms Dommett (Principal Designate) and wished her well as the college looks to the future.

Mr Hynes asked if an action plan had been produced following the last inspection. Mr Pearson replied that an internal action plan had been produced but it would need to be reviewed in light of the new framework. Dr Smith added that a change of principal can trigger an inspection. Mr Pearson replied that there is some ambiguity about how frequently an inspection would be carried out. Whatever happens the college needs to be ready for an inspection within the next 18 months.

b) Chaplaincy – This would be covered under "A Celebration of Catholic Life at Aquinas – Summer Term 2024/2025". Mr Hickey felt that the college had made significant progress that had been reflected in the Denominational Inspection.

c) Finance - This had been dealt with under the budget for 2025/2026.

d) Human Resources - 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.

e) Adult Education – The report covered academic and leisure courses that had been run at the college during the 2024/2025 academic year. It also looked at the courses that were planned for the 2025/2026 academic year.

f) Careers – A series of careers events had been held during the summer term, including one to one career meetings and After Aquinas event, held in March 2025 and a Skills and Careers Day in June 2025. Feedback from students, parents, carers and organisations was included in the report.

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

Celebration of the Eucharist, Whole college Liturgy, Welcome Mass celebrations, Termly celebration of the Word, Termly Mass celebration for Staff, Weekly Adoration, Morning Prayer and Reflection, Special Services and Liturgies, Our "Theme Week" tradition, Mission and Catholic Life, Reasons for Living and Hoping, Retreats and Opportunities for Spiritual growth, Continued Professional Development, Looking forward with hope.

b) Core RE and RS

i) Guest Speaker, Tomi Komoly- Northern Holocaust Education Group to talk about his experience as a young child growing up in 1940s Budapest.

ii) Timothy Cho – from North Korea to Stockport. A talk about his journey escaping from North Korea.

iii) A Visit to Lourdes in July – 15 students spent 3 days walking on the Camino de Santiago pilgrim route between the French Pyreness and Pamplona.

c) "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 i) Shannon Mahlik, England U21 netball squad, ii) Emma Johnson, English Schools Cross Country, iii) Joe Jeans, Lent Walk fundraising for CAFOD, iv) Milena Oktas, national Special Olympics Cycling, v) Jamie Hargreaves, cycling through Europe, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, vi) Joseph Adams recognised in the Kings Birthday Honours for fundraising and vii) Lizzie Nicholls, creative workshops for the public in local venues.

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

Art, Design and Photography, Biology, Business, Careers, Chemistry, Criminology, Duke of Edinburgh Gold, English, Enrichment, India Project, IT/Computing, Law, Learning Support, Media, Modern Foreign Languages, Music, Pathways, Performing Arts, Drama and Theatre, Social Sciences, Sport and UPS, Theology.

Governors felt that the Principal's Report and A Celebration of Catholic Life at Aquinas was very informative and asked Mr Pearson to pass on to all staff the Governors appreciation of the excellent work that they are doing at the college.

15. CHAPLAINCY

The Chaplaincy Report had been included in the Principal's Report.

16. GOVERNING BODY MEMBERSHIP

The Chairperson advised Governors that vacancies exist for two Foundation Governors and one Co-opted Governor. Confirmation of the appointment of Theresa Ryan as Foundation Governor was still awaited from the Diocese. The Chairperson added that John Sullivan had attended the Resources Committee with a view to becoming a Foundation Governor.

17. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 2025/2026

i) Governors were asked to consider which Committees they would be interested in being members of for 2025/2026. A copy of the Committee Membership for 2024/2025 had been circulated for information. The only change was that Mr L Byrne becomes a member of the Teaching and Learning Committee.

ii) The following Chair and Vice Chairs were agreed

AUDIT

Mr A Martin (Chair)

Mrs J Miller (Vice Chair)

REMUNERATION

Mrs C H Dove (Chair)

Mr B Hickey (Vice Chair)

RESOURCES

Mr T McGee (Chair)

Mr B Hickey (Vice Chair)

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Dr A Smith(Chair)

Mr M Taylor (Vice Chair)

GENERAL PURPOSES

Mr G Hynes (Chair)

Mrs J Miller (Vice Chair)

EMPLOYMENT

Mr G Hynes (Chair)

Mrs J Miller (Vice Chair)

iii) That Mr B Hickey be appointed as the Health and Safety Governor.

iv) That Mrs C H Dove be appointed as the SEND Governor.

v) That Ms J Paton be appointed as the Governor representative on the JCC

vi) That Mr B Hickey be appointed as the Governor representative on the Mission Group

vii) That Mr M Taylor be appointed to serve on the Careers Group

viii) That Mr G Hynes be appointed as a Governor responsible for Personal Development.

18. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2025/2026

A schedule of meetings for the Academic Year 2025/2026 had been circulated to all Governors for information.

RESOLVED: That the schedule of meetings for the Academic Year 2025/2026 as circulated be approved.

19. CHAIRPERSON'S ACTION

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

20. CORRESPONDENCE

The Chairperson introduced the following correspondence that had been circulated to Governors prior to the meeting for information.

a) Letter from The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister of State for Skills – Celebrating Volunteer Week.
b) Letter from Shelagh Legrave CBE DL Further Education Commissioner – Good Governance. In accordance with the Code of Governance a Governors term of Office should not exceed 8 Years, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
c) Letter from Shelagh Legrave CBE DL Further Education Commissioner – Financial Benchmarking.
d) Letter from Roger Cotes, Director, Post 16 Regions and Providers Skills Group Governance Matters. Voting rights for Student Governors which will require the Instrument and Articles of the college to be changed. The CES are working with Dioceses across the country to agree a suitable amendment.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

i) Governors noted that this would be the last meeting that Mr Pearson would be attending following his decision to retire. On behalf of the Governing Body the Chairperson thanked Mr Pearson for his dedication and service to the college over the last 33 years, 14 as Principal and wished him and his family all the best for the future. In response Mr Pearson thanked the Governors for their support over the last 33 years.

ii) Governors noted that Mr Green had accepted a post with the Bishop Fraser Academy Trust and would be leaving the college in the middle of August 2025. On behalf of the Governing Body the Chairperson thanked Mr Green for his service to the college and as a Staff Governor and wished him well in his new post. In response Mr Green added that he had enjoyed his time on at the college and as a member of the Governing Body.

iii) The Chairperson thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for their support and commitment to the college and hoped that they would enjoy the summer break.

22. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on 25 November 2025 at 4.30pm.

Signed _____ Date _____

Chairperson