

# The Gaudete Trust England A MPJP Case Study

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This paper provides a brief case study of the MPJP, the Gaudete Trust, which sponsors schools in dioceses across England. This paper is one of six case studies produced by the ACU Inclusive Governance in a Synodal Church (IGSC) project in 2025.

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### ***Process of establishing MPJP***

Since the emancipation of the Catholic Church in the United Kingdom in 1830, education has played a central role in its engagement with society, particularly through the establishment and administration of both private and state-funded schools by Catholic religious institutes. Over time, these schools have been required to evolve and adapt in response to legislative developments within the national education system, as well as internal transformations within the religious institutes themselves.

One such development occurred when, following a meeting with the Catholic Education Services<sup>2</sup> (CES) in 2018 of religious institutes actively involved in education, the idea emerged to form an association for trustees and founders of religious institutes' schools and colleges. The goal was to support religious institutes with governance roles, encourage collaboration, share resources, and strengthen their collective voice with national Catholic education bodies. By July 2019, with backing from key Church leaders, the National Association of Religious Orders in Education (ROE) was officially launched, representing and supporting nearly 30 religious institutes in their educational mission. ROE is a community of practice, not a civilly or canonically incorporated body, which hinges its long-term success on engaging lay people, with almost half of its Executive currently comprising lay members. It was through ROE that the MPJP of the Gaudete Trust (GT) developed.

Like the creation of ROE, the GT was formed through a process of collaboration and consultation, over a three-year period, finally being fully established in 2023. Initially there were nine religious institutes involved in the collaborative process. Four of these were involved in a supportive capacity and with an eye to their possible future need to belong to such a trust. -The five founding institutes are: the Province of France and England of the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel (FICP); the European Province of the Congregation of Christian Brothers (CFC); the Anglo-

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<sup>2</sup> The Catholic Education Service (CES) is the official agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for education. It plays a central role in representing and supporting Catholic education across the UK, particularly in England and Wales.

Hibernian Province of the Congregation of La Sainte Union des Sacre Coeurs (LSU); the Province of Europe of the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ); and the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St Paul the Apostle (SP). Between these, there lies the governance of sixteen state schools, as well as two independent (private) primary schools.

The name 'Gaudete' was chosen as a reflection of the Trust's joy in Gospel values, the heritage of religious orders, and its commitment to helping young people flourish and live fully, as Jesus envisioned, as they state below:

Our name – Gaudete – was chosen after much reflection. This collaborative trust is a new venture for Religious Orders in England and Wales, so we wanted a name that makes people stop and think about its meaning. It is a name that tells us to rejoice!

We rejoice in the Good News of the Gospel.  
We rejoice in the Holy Spirit who is enabling us to create something new and is teaching us what true collaboration means.  
We rejoice in the rich heritage of Religious Orders in education.

But most of all we rejoice in our young people for whom this trust was built, and we want them, as we say in our vision of education, to be able to rejoice in the person they are and so achieve the fulness of life of which Jesus spoke.<sup>3</sup>

GT operates as both a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered with the Charity Commission of the United Kingdom, and a Public Juridic Person (PJP), established by the Catholic Conference of Bishops of England and Wales (CBCEW), with the one set of statutes being used in both contexts to cover all legal, financial, and spiritual responsibilities of educational trusteeship previously held by the individual religious institutes.<sup>4</sup> The statutes were drawn up with the assistance of Paul Barber, the current Director of the Catholic Education Services (CES), who also advised them to apply to CBCEW for its establishment, rather than the Apostolic See (DICLSAL), as it would be a quicker and more succinct process.<sup>5</sup>

## ***MPJP overview***

The formation of the GT reflects a recognition that religious institutes can no longer work in isolation and must embrace collaboration to sustain their educational mission. The initiative aims to preserve and pass on the rich charisms of religious

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<sup>3</sup> Charter of the Gaudete Trust accessed April 9, 2025 <https://www.thegaudetetrust.com/about-us/>

<sup>4</sup> Constitution of the Gaudete Trust accessed April 12, 2025 <https://www.thegaudetetrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CIO-Constitution-for-The-Gaudete-Trust.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Interview with IGSC Researchers, March 27, 2025

orders as a gift to the whole Church, by supporting the religious institutes to continue their legacy in Catholic education. This provides a way of ensuring that the spiritual and educational contributions endure even when they can no longer directly manage schools, perhaps due to dwindling numbers within the Congregation or maybe a redirection of focus for their ministry.

There are several levels of governance within the Trust. There are six Members within the Trust, one appointed by each of the five founding religious institutes together with one Member representing the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW), which erected the Statutes of the MPJP. The Members uphold the mission of the GT, appoint and remove Trustees, and can amend its Constitution. Trustees, numbering between five and fifteen and with at least two-thirds being Catholic, are responsible for setting the GT's vision. They appoint Foundation Governors and Single Academy Members and Directors, advise on key leadership appointments such as Head teachers, oversee educational performance, and employ central staff, including those in the Education Office.

Governors and Academy Directors shape the educational character of their schools in line with the GT's vision and the charism of their founding religious institute. They oversee leadership at school level and submit annual reports to the Trustees. The GT Education Office, led by a paid Education Officer, supports schools in upholding Catholic values, provides professional development, and promotes collaboration through the GT Education Network. Together, this governance model ensures accountability, strong leadership, and the continued expression of each institute's distinctive educational charism. The Trust is neither involved in the day-to-day running of the schools nor accountable to the Government for the educational standards of the school.

### ***MPJP's current situation***

It is important to note that the GT is a relatively new foundation, and therefore, is still in a somewhat evolutionary state. For this reason, in order to benefit from the Members' wisdom, for the first two years the Trustees invited the Members to join with them as they met to reflect, discuss, and evaluate matters. This has ensured that strong relationships have been able to develop, with a sense of solidarity and support.

The GT states that its approach to Catholic education is shaped by three foundational spiritual narratives. Firstly, the "Enduring Story", which is the life, ministry, and Gospel values of Jesus. Secondly, the "Expressive Story", which reflects the vision and prophetic spirit of the Trust and its founding religious institutes, and finally, the "Evolving Story", which calls for ongoing interpretation, contextualisation, thus building upon the founders' legacies to meet the needs of

today's world.<sup>6</sup> These three stories guide the development of distinct characteristics in leadership, governance, curriculum, teaching, pastoral care, and professional development. These characteristics will be shaped collaboratively with trustees, governors, staff, and students as part of the Trust's ongoing formation.

At its heart of all future developments must be the synodal principles of collaboration and discernment through listening, because out of this the GT came into being. As part of its foundation, the GT organised a conference for those in key leadership roles such as Head teachers and Chairs of Governors, which was well attended and appreciated, as it created a strong sense of belonging: "the beginnings of a sense of family."<sup>7</sup> The hope is that this familial culture will spread throughout the schools. One way this has been fostered is through the organisation of a Sixth Form conference, with KS5 students from across the schools coming together to explore the theme of pilgrimage in the Jubilee year.

### ***MPJP's relationship with other Church bodies***

GT draws upon the inspiration offered by Pope St. John Paul II's call for religious institutes to look forward with hope<sup>8</sup> and Pope Francis's exhortation for religious life to "awaken the world."<sup>9</sup> Motivated by the work of Le Chéile Schools Trust in Ireland, the Trust positions itself as being a space of ecclesial innovation: an "alternate spaces where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive."<sup>10</sup> It aims, therefore, to be a model of collaborative Catholic education that is both faithful to tradition and responsive to contemporary needs within society and the Catholic Church in the UK. In doing this, it draws upon the principle that time is more important than space, as stated in *Evangelii Gaudium*. "It is not about achieving objectives quickly, but instead about thoughtful reflection bringing people with us."<sup>11</sup>

As previously noted, the GT maintains strong partnerships with key ecclesial bodies, including the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW), the Catholic Education Service (CES), and the ROE network. These collaborations provide valuable access to resources and shared expertise, enhancing the Trust's ability to preserve the charisms of its founding religious congregations while making a meaningful contribution to the wider educational mission of the Church.

To uphold its authoritative status, however, it was essential for GT to be constituted as a MPJP. Since each founding religious institute is already a PJP, the Trust's administration required oversight by a PJP. As GT trustee Sr Brenda Wallace

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<sup>6</sup> The Characteristics of the Gaudete Trusts accessed 12 April 2025 <https://roe-uk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/The-Characteristics-of-The-Gaudete-Trusts-Education.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Maureen Mee, Interview, 27 March 2025

<sup>8</sup> Message for World Day for Consecrated Life, January 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Meeting with USG, 29 November 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Address to All Consecrated People, Francis, 21 November 2014. Accessed 12 April 2025

<sup>11</sup> Maureen Mee, Interview, 27 March 2025

explains, this avoids the need to continually assert how “we're always acting in the authority of the Major Superior of the Religious Order [...] one of whom has no presence in England and Wales at the moment.”<sup>12</sup>

Trustee Sr Brenda Wallace further emphasised that GT’s MPJP status offers a degree of independence from the CBCEW—even though a bishop is a Member of the Trust. This broadens the scope of Catholic education in the UK while preserving the “partnership” model encouraged by Cardinal Nichols.<sup>13</sup> GT can thus enrich the work of the CES by drawing on the diverse charisms of its founding institutes—an important contribution, given that “the charism is a gift to the Church, not just the founders.”

### ***MPJP’s plans/hopes for future***

The Trust’s strategic approach includes investment in succession planning and leadership development, particularly among lay educators. It emphasises theological formation and spiritual capital as central to sustaining Catholic identity. In doing so, it continues the legacy of the founding religious institutes who, over time, have entrusted their educational missions to committed lay people.

Initially, the impetus was to appoint trustees with strong credentials within Catholic education, in order to generate confidence in the new Trust amongst parents and schools, as well as establishing a strong foundational base for governance. For example, three of the foundation trustees have been awarded Honours by the Queen for their services to education. The GT are now looking to widen the experience of the Trustees, to cover more fully the financial and legal aspects of the Trust. There is also the hope that in the future other religious institutes might join the GT, which would develop the scope of the Trust and broaden its perspective.

### **Conclusion**

The Gaudete Trust (GT) plays a significant role in sustaining the contribution of religious institutes to Catholic education in the United Kingdom. By assuming key responsibilities—legal, financial, and leadership-related—the Trust enables these institutes to continue shaping Catholic schools in accordance with their foundational values. It seeks to uphold a unified Catholic vision across its network, while simultaneously honouring the distinctive charisms and traditions of each founding religious institute. Central to its mission is the provision of a robust Catholic education for young people, safeguarding parental choice, and ensuring that schools retain their formative religious identity.

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<sup>12</sup> Brenda Wallace, Interview, March 27, 2025.

<sup>13</sup> The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, in his forward to “New Thinking, New Scholarship and New Research in Catholic Education. Responses to the Work of Gerald Grace.” Edited by Sean Whittle 2021.

The Trust fosters the wellbeing and success of each member school through a model that resists unnecessary competition or comparison. Instead, it encourages mutual support and the celebration of diverse expressions of Gospel values. By facilitating the sharing of spiritual and pedagogical richness among its schools, the GT supports institutions in remaining faithful to their founding inspiration. It adopts a collaborative and adaptive approach to leadership, responsive to the evolving needs of the educational and ecclesial landscape. Moreover, the Trust actively engages in partnerships with wider Catholic and educational bodies and prioritises the formation and development of its trustees and staff.

As a case study for the IGSC project, the Gaudete Trust offers valuable insight, particularly in terms of its synodal origins. Its establishment was the fruit of a collaborative discernment process among religious institutes, wherein members collectively read the "signs of the times" within their religious institutes and the broader context of Catholic education in the UK.<sup>14</sup> This process was marked by a willingness to engage in dialogue, to listen deeply, and to embrace change—not individually, but together. It exemplifies a synodal methodology of consensus-building that echoes the words of Sr Natalie Becquart XMCJ, Undersecretary to the Synod of Bishops: "Though we might go more quickly when we travel alone, we can travel much further if we travel together."<sup>15</sup>

The second point of interest regarding the GT is the uniqueness of its position as seemingly the only MPJP erected by the CBCEW. As indicated earlier, they have drawn upon the work of the *Le Chéile* Schools Trust in Ireland as an initial source of inspiration and direction, but in the focus group discussion, their desire was articulated to belong to a wider network of MPJP's, the hope being that it could be a place to foster exchange, mutual learning, and shared reflection across similar initiatives.

In conclusion, the Gaudete Trust represents a pioneering model of how religious institutes might continue their vital and historic contribution to Catholic education in the UK—a legacy spanning over two centuries. As a newly founded body still in the early stages of development, it offers a compelling example of innovative, collaborative leadership in service of Gospel-rooted education.

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<sup>14</sup> Francis, Morning Meditation in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae 23 October 2015

<sup>15</sup> Salford Diocese Seminar, Synodality in the Universal Church, 21 January 2022.

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