

Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held at 6pm on 23rd February 2023 via Zoom

Members Present: Eddie Weiss (Chair), Nick Bevan, Colin Hayfield

Apologies: Martin Tugwell

In Attendance: John McGrath (Vice Principal Corporate Services) (VPCS), Jenny Craig (Principal), Dakshita Takodra (Internal Auditors, TIAA), Anna Smith (Director of Governance)

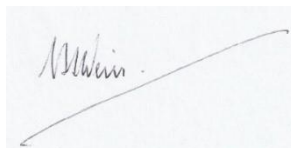
Minute No.	Agenda Item
AUD 01/23	<p>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest</p> <p>The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were Noted and there were no new declarations of interest relevant to the business of the meeting.</p>
AUD 02/23	<p>Minutes of the Committee Meeting held on 29th November 2022 and Matters Arising</p> <p>The minutes were approved as an accurate record and would be duly signed by the Chair. Of the matters arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding Internal Audit/Bursary Information: The VPCS informed the Committee that the Head of Department had confirmed all is satisfactory and provided assurance that independent testing through the finance department would be conducted with further final assurances provided at the next meeting (Action: VPCS). Remaining internal audits are scheduled to be conducted throughout the remainder of the academic year. All other actions had been completed.
AUD 03/23	<p>Internal Audit Report – Risk Management</p> <p>On behalf of internal auditors, TIAA, Dakshita Takodra (DT) took Members through the assurance review report following the risk management audit confirming an overall assessment of reasonable assurance. The Committee was briefed on the three medium level recommendations and the five lower level routine recommendations as detailed in the report.</p> <p>Regarding the medium level recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of risk management policy: DT offered, and the College welcomed, to share template versions and support reviewing the policy to ensure clarity over identification, recording and management of risks. 2. Review of departmental risk registers with due consideration to avoiding overburdening teams. The VPCS briefed the Committee on the level of maturity within the College since the merger with a higher degree of control exercised by senior management and noted the need to increase shared responsibility throughout the organisation. Assurance was provided that departments were managing and mitigating risks on a daily basis and many actions were being taken but were just not referred to in the risk management policy. 3. Review of risk management training for relevant officers across the College. The VPCS noted that since the report had been written evidence had been provided that training completed by Audit Committee Members had included risk management training despite training titles not reflecting this. <p>Discussion took place regarding the routine recommendation relating to the College's risk appetite statement (which will be included in the revised Risk Management Policy) with processes and communications of this differing across colleges.</p>

	<p>Going forward, as agreed at the last Corporation meeting, the risk register would be shared at each Corporation meeting.</p> <p>The Chair queried and DT confirmed that other than the points raised as per the report there were no significant concerns. She was fully satisfied that the risk register covered everything required and TIAA had received ancillary evidence of risk management being conducted throughout the College.</p> <p>Ultimately the Committee was satisfied that risk management was being managed well within the College and that owners, responsibilities, processes etc. involved simply needed to be integrated into the policy. It was agreed in terms of the strategic plan development, key risks would be identified in achieving outcomes; this would also be tied into timings of developing the new policy document.</p> <p>The Chair raised and the Principal provided reassurance in terms of student recruitment related to the estates strategy, reminding the Chair of the significant proportion of students currently attending Amersham and Flackwell Heath campuses who actually live in High Wycombe or Aylesbury. Changes for staff and key risks would be managed through the whole college change management plan. The Co-opted Member noted and it was agreed that the estates strategy should be considered as an opportunity to de-risk the College's position and in fact improve any risk currently being seen in the declining student numbers for the Amersham and Flackwell Heath campuses. DT confirmed such risks bring opportunities and the associated risk appetite and tolerance should be managed rather than mitigated to ensure the opportunities were realised.</p> <p>The VPCS thanked TIAA for their support throughout the audit process.</p> <p>The Committee Resolved to Endorse the internal audit report on risk management.</p> <p><i>6.35pm Dakshita Takodra left the meeting.</i></p>
AUD 04/23	<p>Risk Management Report and Risk Register</p> <p>The VPCS briefed Members on the two documents shared, namely the summary report showing what is listed on the risk register and matters of discussion at Corporation, and the risk register including greater detail behind each risk. The Committee were updated on each risk area as detailed in the report with points noted as follows:</p> <p>The College's reliance on subcontracting partnerships will ideally require some reduction over the longer term given the relatively significant amounts.</p> <p>In terms of risk relating to curriculum, as discussed at the recent Quality and Curriculum Committee meeting, staff have been more cautious in terms of predictions this year and the senior team is confident that achievement predictions are more accurate than last year, particularly relating to some of the subcontracted provision.</p> <p>The most significant risk within the curriculum are the staff recruitment challenges currently faced by the sector. This is being managed to the best of the College's ability and all students are being supported to achieve using all interventions available. Updated national achievement rates should be available in March which would give the College a better view of its position compared with sector benchmarks.</p> <p>In terms of student attendance, it was reassuring to hear at the Quality and Curriculum Committee that other colleges were seeing similar concerns with an increase in students with mental health and anxiety issues.</p>

	<p>All of these curriculum risks are being considered as part of the innovative thinking in the future strategic direction for the College.</p> <p>As discussed at the recent Finance Committee meeting, the College has approximately 30% of its workforce at or around the national minimum wage and rates increasing with a lack of government investment into the funding rate makes salary increases reliant on increasing student numbers.</p> <p>Ultimately, the College is balancing what it can maintain and manage operationally this year with what change is needed to see a positive impact for next year and beyond to help mitigate such risks.</p> <p>Staff morale was queried in relation to the current staff recruitment difficulties and it was noted that staff having to cover classes and/or take on other colleagues' workloads was challenging and could be demotivating. The VPCS commended the Principal on the amount of staff engagement undertaken relating to the strategic plan development and staff contributing and their engagement in the strategic direction is enthusing for the longer term vision. Query was raised and it was confirmed staff were financially compensated for any additional work undertaken.</p> <p>In terms of the budget and energy cost increases, the College would be on a flexible supply arrangement from April which would take advantage of market fluctuations which should help in the longer term. The Committee were also briefed on the capital expenditure required for IT investment and an Amersham campus legacy issue as discussed with the Finance Committee at its last meeting.</p> <p>The Committee Resolved to Endorse the Risk Management Report and Risk Register.</p>
AUD 05/23	<p>Any Other Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Audits: The VPCS informed the Committee that two further internal audits should be complete in time for reporting to the next Committee meeting.
AUD 06/23	<p>Date of Next Meeting 20th June 2023</p>

The Chair thanked all for attending and the meeting closed at 7pm.

Approved as an accurate record of discussions: 24th July 2023



Signed by Chair of Committee: