



Minutes of a meeting of the Audit Committee held on Monday, 8th February 2021 at 5.00 pm by Microsoft Teams

Present: Robert Milburn (Chair); Norma Boyes; Denise Rollo; Stuart Williams; Elaine Clinton

Also present: Patrick Clark, Internal Auditor (Iccsa-Ets); Karen Rae, External Auditor (Armstrong Watson); Karen Wilson, Deputy Principal; Jane Murray, Clerk

01/21 Minutes

Resolved –that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2020 be received and signed as a correct record.

It was asked whether there had been any developments in respect of pensions from the last meeting. There had been some recent communication around the MacLeod ruling and pension cap, which the Deputy Principal was still digesting and would report back on the impact. She also reported that the issue was now being raised in the Houses of Commons.

02/21 Declarations of Interest

None received.

03/21 Internal Audit: Payroll

The Audit, which covered a variety of inputs and controls, including starters; leavers; amendments and expenses, gave substantial assurance and of the 2 errors that were found, were not materially significant. The main recommendation was to make sure there were written procedures in place for each stage of the process.

The Committee was pleased to note the strong report, bearing in mind the recent change of payroll provider and gave their thanks to all concerned.

Business continuity in the current pandemic situation, reinforced the need for written procedures to be put in place and this was being actioned. However, it was noted that a default payroll was always the safety net (as it had been during the transition period).

04/21

Student Journey – Engagement and Intervention

A review of attendance and retention, and in particular, the College's intervention processes when attendance falls below expectation, given the importance of both in relation to the well-being of young people and the impact on College finances.

This audit looked at a sample of 20 students on amber and red to establish whether they were on track with targets and where behaviours had slipped below expectations, that controls were effective and interventions were in place.

The Audit gave substantial assurance, with one medium recommendation.

At the time of the audit – although accepted that it was early in the academic year – attendance was not quite meeting targets, in particular English, Motor Vehicle, Engineering; Service Industries and Maths. The recommendation noted that alternative strategies should be explored where attendance was being affected by online learning in these areas.

It was also recommended that motivational interviews (when a student drops into amber) should be clearly recorded as such, and that smart targets should also be clearly recorded.

Asked why those particular areas had been affected, the Deputy Principal suggested that the issues particularly concerned lower level learners and it was known that some were not making progress online. It had been intended to bring more of those learners back into college when the lockdown was announced. IT kit was not the reason, but rather that some students could not get motivated online and, it was felt, all providers were having very similar issues.

The challenges were understood. It was asked, however, what impact there had been on retention and felt that retention was slightly higher than last year.

It was felt that, overall, this was a good report, but it was requested whether a closer look at attendance issues, particularly in light of English and maths, could be provided to a future Board meeting.

05/21

HR Strategy & Staff Utilisation

This report provided substantial assurance with one medium recommendation and one low recommendation.

Staff utilisation looked good (noting that English and maths sessions were scheduled later in the academic term, affecting figures for staff utilisation in the early part of the academic year).

The medium recommendation centred around checking the timeliness of staff reviews and it was acknowledged that a new software system would assist in ensuring this. The second low recommendation made some suggestions for inclusion in HR reporting.

The Committee thanked staff for a good report, which they felt demonstrated that there was a good grip of staffing matters. It was asked how new starters were observed and confirmed that there were observations at 3 and 6 months and it was requested that the report be amended to reflect this (by a foot note if necessary) which was agreed, as it appeared from the report that they were missed off the observation cycle.

06/21

Audit Tracking

A recommendation in respect of risk assessments for work placements remained open as some were still overdue (noting pandemic challenges).

Health and Safety training was anticipated to go online this month.

Property Strategy was subject to a full government-funded review and was a fair bit of specialist work. Need to look at alternative uses for some of the building, given low utilisation.

Procedures in place for cash handling although staff not handling cash at the moment.

Sub-contracting recommendation would be actioned if it was decided to expand sub-contracting again in respect of our adult education budget.

Student journey had been discussed, but work is ongoing to ensure proper recording and adequate interventions.

It was noted that English and maths audits had taken place the previous week and would be reported in due course.

After checking that the auditors had nothing to raise without staff present, the Chair closed the meeting at 1820h.