



Minutes of a meeting of the Audit Committee held on Tuesday, 20th September 2022 at 1700h by Microsoft Teams

Present: Robert Milburn (Chair); Elaine Clinton, Norma Boyes; Denise Rollo (from Minute No 22/22)

Apologies: Lee Todd

Also present: Ryan Borthwick (External Auditor); Patrick Clark (Internal Auditor); Karen Wilson (Deputy Principal); Jane Murray (Clerk)

18/22 Minutes

Resolved – that the Minutes of the meeting of 20th June 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

19/22 Declarations of Interest

None received.

20/22 Internal Auditor's Annual Report

The internal auditor gave an overall reasonable assurance for 2021-22, which he explained was the highest level he could give under auditing practice guidelines. He felt that overall there had been a comparatively low number of recommendations and noted that in the follow up report, they had been able to report that 100% of recommendations had been implemented.

The Chairman thanked the internal auditor for what was felt to be a good, clean audit summary and reflective of discussions throughout the year.

One of the audits during the year had been a mock ESFA funding audit. The Deputy Principal reported that the ESFA were currently carrying out an audit of the same period and she would be reporting back on the outcome.

21/22 Chairmanship

Noting that the Committee links approved at the Board in June had included Robert Milburn as Chair for the next two years (from 23 November 2022), this was endorsed by the Committee.

22/22 Regularity Audit

The Clerk presented the regularity audit questionnaire for recommendation to the Board for signature. In particular, she drew attention to a few issues arising.

The first was to note that the Public Interest disclosure allegation, which had been dealt with in year (which the Audit Committee, Board and Auditors were already

aware) had not been further pursued by the complainant on receipt of the report and the Industrial Tribunal Case, of which this had formed part had now been resolved.

Denise Rollo joined the meeting

There had been two instances where pressure of business had led to the tender procedures not being wholly followed, but that value for money had been fully demonstrated (with reports for both attached).

The Committee received assurance that a renewed focus in respect of the need to recognise and follow financial regulations had commenced with managers at the start of term and would be monitored.

The Deputy Principal added that she was also checking with colleagues on the Finance network in respect of their tendering rules, given the pressures of bidding for and completing within tight timescales for funding projects to see whether there was scope for more flexibility.

The sub-contracting audit and certificated was received noted by the Committee, there being no recommendations arising.

It was felt by the Committee that the regularity questionnaire was fair and reasonable.

Resolved – that the regularity audit be recommended to the Board for approval and signature.

23/22 Risk

The audit committee had requested to look at individual risks in more detail (rather than the whole risk register at one time). The first session was focusing on the staffing risk. The ability of the sector to recruit and retain staff was a challenge throughout the sector.

The issues:

- Relatively high staff turnover into better paid jobs, particularly within the admin grades (noting that the experience seemed to be more money for less work with one former member of staff looking to return);
- More staff wanting to retire post-Covid;
- Some business roles of a very specialist nature with some staff within sight of retirement;
- Specialist staff recruitment particularly challenging in terms of pay

It was felt that the College needed to do better in promoting the terms and conditions which were good; holiday provision; flexible work scheme; excellent pension scheme.

It was felt that improvements could be made to the way in which new staff are introduced to the department and it was asked what measures could be taken. It was felt that some managers needed to better understand their role in supporting a new member of staff, perhaps through a reduced workload initially or ensuring that resources have been left and that they are familiar with the systems.

In more general discussion, it was suggested that progression routes were made clear on joining, with good CPD. It was asked where it wasn't working out, whether there was room to move within the organisation.

It was suggested that where staff were key to operations that there was a plan in place to ensure continuity to these more specialist roles.

In respect of 'associate lecturers' there was a need to develop this more and put in a framework, but felt that it could be a productive partnership to work with more employers directly in the area.

Moving forward, it was asked whether staffing KPIs could be included for monitoring purposes in reports to the Board (or Audit) and asked for regular reporting to the Board on progress being made (through HR reports and the KPIs for example).

The meeting closed at 1800h.