

MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4th MARCH 2024 AT 5PM AT THE KINGSWAY CAMPUS

Present:	Karen Banks	External Governor
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Rachael Owen	External Governor
In Attendance:	Jonathan Creed	Associate Director, ICCA (Internal Audit)
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Catherine Shaw	Clerk to Governors

The Committee met with the Auditors in the absence of the College's senior managers to ascertain whether there were any matters they wished to raise. The Auditors advised they had no issues of concern and good working relationships continued.

Julie Holland (Deputy Principal, Finance & Resources) joined the meeting. The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Jayne Edwards (External Governor). The meeting was declared quorate.

2. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None declared.

3. **MINUTES**

3.1 **To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20th November 2024**

(previously circulated)

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

Resolved - The minutes of the meeting held on 20th November 2024 were **approved** as a correct record.

3.2 **To review the action log and to consider any matters arising from the minutes**

(previously circulated)

The action log was reviewed and the Committee noted that all outstanding actions had been completed.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

4. **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS**

4.1 **16-18 Student Journey from Enquiry to Enrolment** *(previously circulated)*

The Internal Auditor advised that this audit had taken place in line with the annual internal audit plan. A review had taken place of the College's 'student journey' focusing on the systems to capture enquiries, interview and assessment processes, application process and enrolment for 16-18 year old students. The objective of the audit was to provide management and the Audit Committee with an independent assurance opinion that the College had in place efficient processes which supported the College in achieving its recruitment targets. The Internal Auditor highlighted several aspects of the comprehensive report which included key headlines relating to:

- Planning the curriculum provision
- Marketing the provision
- Capturing enquiries
- Applications – ways in which a prospective student can make an application and processes undertaken via the College Management Information System (MIS)
- Entry criteria, interview and assessment
- Enrolment – all relevant staff had access to the 'Enrolment Handbook' and received appropriate training
- Careers, Advice and Guidance – all staff involved in the admissions process were trained to ensure all applicants received information, advice and guidance appropriate to their needs and in line with Gatsby benchmarks.
- Monitoring and reporting – a continuous monitoring system tracked changes in student numbers.

In conclusion, the Internal Auditor provided College Management and the Audit Committee with substantial assurance that the areas of the control environment tested during the audit were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses; no recommendations were made to enhance the processes and systems that had been audited.

A discussion took place whereby it was clarified that student retention would form a separate tranche of the student journey and whilst not a specific focus within this audit, the Committee was directed to pages 18 and 19 of the report whereby curriculum areas and attrition rates were noted. A Governor commented on the high level of detail contained within the report and queried the relatively low level of sampling undertaken throughout the audit. In response the Internal Auditor advised that the purpose of the audit was to review the overarching business processes covering the many strands from enquiry to enrolment and whether holistically the approach was effective. The Committee was assured that the auditors had broad experience in undertaking an audit of this nature and the outcome for the College was extremely positive in respect of benchmarking purposes.

The Chair commented on this very favourable report and requested that it be circulated to the members of the Quality and Standards Committee for information purposes within its remit.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

4.2 **Mid-year review Internal Audit Plan 2023/2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Internal Auditor presented the mid-year review and confirmed that there was no reason to deviate from the plan which had been approved for 2023/2024. He advised that audits were currently taking place in respect of (i) Exams and (ii) Marketing. It was anticipated that the outcomes from those two audits would be presented at the next Committee meeting.

A discussion took place with a focus on the Exams internal audit and potential implications relating to the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report and the annual internal audit plan being on track for completion.

5. **RISK MANAGEMENT** (*previously circulated*)

The Deputy Principal outlined the risk management activity that had taken place since November 2023 and highlighted the following aspects from her report:

- The Key Strategic Risk and Assurance Mapping reports were reviewed at the Risk Management Group (RMG) meeting on 6th February 2024.
- The RAG rating for Key Risk 4 (Information and Business Critical Systems) had been reduced to amber as all systems had been upgraded.
- The RAG rating for Key Risk 6 (Compliance with Legislative/Regulatory Framework) had been reduced to green, as a new College Financial Handbook was due to be published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to incorporate the changes resulting from the classification of FE colleges to the public sector. The Committee received assurance that the impact of AI on data protection regulations was to be closely monitored.
- The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) recommendations had been updated following the Board's approval of the College Self-Assessment Review (SAR) 2022/2023 and QIP 2023/2024. This would enable Governors to directly monitor progress against the agreed actions and gain assurance that the Risk Management Action Plan (RMAP) incorporated Ofsted-related risks.
- No material non-compliances had been brought to the Management's attention.

The Deputy Principal concluded that the RMAP continued to be monitored by the RMG and updated, as appropriate. She invited any questions from the Committee with several being raised and responded to.

In relation to Key Risk 4 and students moving to multi-factor authentication a Governor queried any potential adverse impact for students. In response, the Committee was advised that this change had largely been implemented at Cronton College to reduce the risk of a successful cyber-attack on College systems. Governors were assured that devices were to be loaned to students that did not have a smartphone to ensure all learners were able to use multi-factor authorisation and adhere to College requirements in this respect.

The Clerk clarified the level of risk and implications should the Audit Committee become inquorate and that this issue had been discussed by the Search & Governance Committee at its meeting that had taken place earlier in the day.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

6. ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

A discussion took place:

Resolved – the following reports were to be presented to the Board at its next meeting on 18th March 2024 together with an overarching summary report:

- Internal Audit reports
- Risk Management

7. DATES OF FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Resolved - The Committee **noted** the following meeting dates:

- Board – 18th March 2024
- Audit Committee – 17th June 2024

The Chair thanked all attendees for their attendance and contribution at the meeting. The meeting was closed at 5:45pm.

Signed: ...Office copy signed by Karen Banks.....

Chair of Audit Committee

Date: ...17th June 2024.....