

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

Minutes of the unreserved business meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee held on 4 June 2020 via Microsoft Teams, commencing at 5.05pm.

Present: Mrs I Allison, Dr K McCambridge, Mrs J Eve, Mr W McCluggage (Chair), Mrs M Hamilton, Mr W Hutchinson.

In Attendance: Mr B McGahan, Mr D Conliffe (DfE), Dr L Firth (65.11), Mr M Higgins, Ms D Kerr (65.7), Mr S Laverty, Mr B O'Neill (NIAO), Mr P O'Neill, Prof T Scott, Ms J Small, Mr N Taylor (Grant Thornton) and Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

65.1 Apologies/Welcome

The Chair welcomed Ms Small and Mrs Hamilton to their first meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee.

No apologies were noted.

65.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

65.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20 April 2020 were approved.

Proposed: Dr McCambridge Seconded: Mrs Allison

It was agreed to reorder the agenda.

65.7 Information Governance

Ms Kerr spoke to the Information Governance report for 1 February to 31 March 2020 and highlighted key pieces of work on policies and documentation, and internal audits. She reported the main focus of work for the sector working group was to provide additional guidance for staff working from home and to develop DPIAs for new support/service contracts.

Ms Kerr stated that roll-out of multi-factor authentication was in progress and highlighted measures being advised to staff to enhance security for working from home.

Members noted the Records Management Policy which had been approved by the SLT on 26 May.

5.29pm Ms Kerr left the meeting.

65.11 Risk Register

Calculated Grades Procedure

Mr O'Neill presented the Policy for Quality Assurance in Recording Grade Outcomes 2020 and outlined the background to the development of quality assurance systems by the Calculated Grades Task & Finish group.

Dr Firth summarised the development of the Calculated Grades app which would be used to track guidance received from awarding bodies and log College progress. She noted that the app would replace the paper process previously used and would provide assurance and a level of protection through robust evidence, in the event of any challenges.

Mrs Donnelly reported that Trade Unions had been notified and accepted the rationale for the app, given the benefits to students.

Members noted high staff workloads due to requirements of awarding organisations and the tight schedules that had been imposed, and were assured that staff had taken this on board and students would not be disadvantaged by the lack of procedural process. It was also noted that introduction of the LMS in September would provide an internal electronic system for recording of grades going forward.

On behalf of Committee, the Chair commended Mr O'Neill, Dr Firth, Ms Kerr and the staff for work carried out to minimise the risk from the current situation.

5.51pm Dr Firth left the meeting.

65.4 Matters Arising

1. Most recent DfE Partnership Agreement document had been circulated to Committee on 29 May. Mr Conliffe confirmed that DfE were not pushing for finalisation of documents at the current time.
2. Records management policy approved by SLT on 26 May – attached under Information Governance.
3. Opportunities for new learning would be presented to the GB meeting on 29 June.
4. Internal Audit inspection re ensuring contractors' compliance with Covid-19 regulations would be considered as part of audit plan for 20/21 under procurement. Members noted that cleaning staff had sanitised all rooms in the last 4 weeks, and campuses were now ready for operation.

65.5 Chair's Communication

None.

65.6 Correspondence

Two pieces of correspondence were noted:

- FE Returns timetable.

- Changes to Departmental Annual Reports and Accounts as a result of Covid-19. Members noted that the accounts submission had been extended to 30 November 2020.

65.8 Annual Accounts Timeframe

Mr Lavery took members through the PID for preparation and audit of the 2019/20 annual accounts and noted uncertainty around how Covid-19 would impact on the delivery of accounts and audit, as a key issue.

The PID was endorsed by Committee along with the associated Action Plan at Annex A.

Proposed: Mrs Eve Seconded: Mr Hutchinson

65.9 External Audit

Members noted the Letter of Understanding updating the relationship between the College and NIAO.

Mr O'Neill (NIAO) took Committee through the 2019/20 Audit Strategy, highlighting 2 significant audit risks and materiality.

The Chair made reference to the potential for budget pressure on the new build project resulting from Covid-19 and the possible impact on the Audit Strategy. Mr Higgins reported that the College was working closely with CPD, the legal team and Project Director to pre-empt any effects as far as possible.

Committee discussed, considered and agreed the actions detailed within the Audit Strategy, noting that specific issues were considered independently by both Resources Committee and by Audit & Risk Committee.

65.10 Internal Audit

Mr Taylor outlined the content of 2 Internal Audit reports covering absence management and IT security, both of which had gained a satisfactory assurance. He highlighted 2 Priority 3 recommendations which had been accepted by management.

Mr Taylor spoke to the Internal Audit follow up report noting that outstanding audit recommendations had been identified to be followed up at the next review.

Members noted the annual assurance report.

ACTION:

- SLT would report on return to work forms to Committee under matters arising, to ensure this item is covered off.
- Recommended implementation dates to be pulled forward on the IT recommendations to 30 September 2020, resources permitting.

Mr Laverty presented the NRC Progress Against Outstanding Issues report.

Members raised a number of queries in relation to accurate reflection of risk and actions commentary especially in relation to RTTCWG, GDPR, SLS and Brexit Transition.

ACTION: Mr Higgins would reflect responses in the update against recommendations – to be recorded in blue.

The Chair thanked Mr Taylor for work carried out for the College and recognised the capability issues experienced by Grant Thornton which had resulted in an early end to the service contract.

65.11 Risk Register

Mr Higgins took members through the Risk Register to May 2020, outlining the position on the 3 red risks. Members noted that it was proposed to remove Risk 12, as 4 additional members had now joined the Governing Body.

In noting a very comprehensive risk register with proactive action to address and reduce risk, Mr McGahan queried the wording for the risk descriptors, as some could be considered outcomes. Prof Scott noted a number of risks were confirmed at sector level and that the feedback would be taken on board.

Mr Conliffe noted that NIFON were coordinating risks shared across colleges, however, individual college Risk Registers were owned by that college's Governing Body.

ACTION: A review of risk descriptions would be carried out for the next meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee with cognisance given to ISO 31000.

As Chair of NIFON, Mr Higgins would also take an account of this issue to the members.

Committee noted the 2019/20 Assurance Statement, with no significant non-compliance issues having been reported to the Department at 31 March 2020.

Committee noted the update on the property maintenance project being carried out by the Procurement Sub Group, being Chaired by Mr Higgins on behalf of the sector. Members were advised that a new procurement framework would be in place in the next academic year.

65.12 Registers

Committee noted the Freedom of Information, Whistleblowing and Information Governance registers.

It was also noted that the one Direct Award Contract (DAC) which had been awarded during 2019/20, had been endorsed by CPD.

ACTION: A note of CPD endorsement for the DAC to be included on the register.

65.13 Any Other Business

The Chair thanked Mr Taylor and the team at Grant Thornton for help and services provided and wished them success for the future.

65.14 Date of Next Meeting

A draft 2020/21 meetings schedule would be considered at the Governing Body meeting on 30 June.

There being no other business, the meeting concluded at 7.16pm.

Mr W McCluggage  Date 23.09.20

Chair

Mrs K Wallace 

Secretary