

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 16 December 2024 on MS Teams commencing at 4.20pm.

Governing Body members of the Audit & Risk Committee met with representatives from NIAO and RSM, along with the DfE representative, at 4.00pm, prior to the full Committee meeting.

The Chair welcomed Mr Doyle to the meeting, along with Mrs McGovern and Mr Murphy who were attending as observers.

Present: Mr D Small (Chair), Mrs L Crilly, Mr B Devlin, Dr P Graham, Mr D Macauley, Mrs P Martin

In Attendance: Mr D Blair, Mrs K Costley (NIAO), Mr B Doyle (RSM), Mr M Higgins, Mr S Laverty, Mr K Leckey (item 83.5), Mrs C McGovern, Mr I Murphy, Ms P Wilson (DfE)

Apologies: None

Secretary: Mrs K Wallace

83.1 Declaration of Interests

None.

83.2 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The draft minutes of meeting on 30 September 2024 were approved.

Proposed: Mrs Martin Seconded: Dr Graham

83.3 Matters Arising - None

83.4 Chair's Communication / Correspondence

The Chair and members thanked Mrs Crilly for agreeing to take up the position of Audit & Risk Committee Vice-Chair.

The Chair referred to the Committee Self-assessment Summary Report 2023/24 presented, noting that members had concluded that the Committee and governance performed effectively.

In relation to a number of requests for training, Mr Small thought that audit & risk training provided by NIAO, which he had recently attended, could be useful. The Principal encouraged members to attend annual training provided by DfE, which would be delivered in January 2025 this year. He also advised that outcomes from the external survey currently underway would be combined with feedback from the self-assessment survey to inform further action.

Committee noted the Local Government Auditor's report and the reports on Fraud and Managing the Schools' Estate, recommendations from which would be considered to ensure they are covered in College internal controls.

Members also noted that the NIAO report on public sector accounts had been shared with governors on release, on 10 December 2024. The Chair highlighted recruitment challenges being experienced across FE, particularly in the area of finance.

In relation to the Ombudsman's report presented, the Chair noted issues around basic process of poor record keeping and non adherence to procedures/process. The Principal confirmed that lessons were shared with relevant staff.

Mr Leckey joined the meeting at 4.26pm.

83.5 Health & Safety Update

Mr Leckey took members through his presentation and outlined key issues including total accidents and incident rates for staff, trainees and students; insurance liability claims 2021-24; and lessons learnt. He noted the 2024 internal audit on Health & Safety had received satisfactory assurance and that no incidents had been subject to Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR).

The Chair highlighted the importance of H&S for corporate responsibility and for the College and was content on assurances given on both. He also noted no actions resulting from the College's most recent compliance visit.

Mr Laverty drew attention to the College's low level of H&S incidents and noted that options for future sector-wide insurance would be reported on in the next few weeks. Mr Leckey confirmed that interaction with Marsh Insurance was efficient and effective but acknowledged the importance of value for money (VFM) to the College.

Mr Leckey left the meeting at 4.52pm.

83.6 Internal Audit

Mr Doyle presented the Annual Internal Audit Report, summarising 5 audits carried out over the year, all with satisfactory opinions, and providing overall satisfactory assurance on the system of governance, risk management and control. Members noted that the report on Student Enrolments and Admissions was provided for information, having been previously circulated on 3 October. It was also noted and agreed that the GDPR audit had been deferred to a future date.

The Chair queried the status of the records disposal policy and processes. The Principal advised that DPO group with SERC were leading reviewing this and a new sector wide retention/deletion schedule was awaited.

Progress of the new disposal schedule would be followed up.

Mrs Martin queried arrangements in place for data protection following the resignation of Mrs Kerr and was keen to know how this would be managed.

Mr Laverty advised that duties had been reassigned across the College. Members were also informed that the new Data Protection Officer (DPO) is Dr Catherine Guy.

Dr Graham referred to information being communicated to governors in real time, particularly in relation to staff changes and reassignment of work.

The Chair also reported earlier requests from members that committee meetings take place as scheduled going forward, with additional meetings taking place if necessary. The purpose would be to maintain appropriate involvement and focus by the committee.

The above issues on meetings and up to date communications would be taken into account going forward.

Mrs Martin queried whether college policies and the status of policy reviews could be considered for audit in 2024/25.

The Chair questioned the number of reports which would come to the next meeting, given that the substantive business would relate to accounts.

Mr Laverty would review the possibility of including a Corporate Policy audit in 2024/25 and revert back to Committee.

Internal audit reports for consideration at the next meeting would be circulated as they became available. Going forward, reports would be shared with the Education Committee following consideration at Audit & Risk.

Mr Doyle drew members' attention to the Emerging Issues report, particularly in relation to cyber, and to the report on the Internal Audit Code of Practice.

Members noted that a number of areas in the report do not apply to NI, including delegated limits.

The Chair welcomed the assurance provided by the positive internal audit reports and thanked Mr Doyle for his presentation.

83.7 External Audit

Mrs Costley referred to the challenging timetable for submission of accounts, outlined in the next paper and noted that any concerns on the draft set of accounts would be dealt with at review.

5.18pm Mr Murphy left the meeting.

83.8 Accounts Update

Mr Laverty advised that, following significant work pressure for colleges arising from preparation for the March accounts position, a sector wide lessons learnt exercise would be carried out moving into 2025. This would focus on the impact and management of resources, with an estimated completion date of mid-January 2025.

Mrs Martin acknowledged the difficulty of this process and thanked staff for their work towards same. However, she also expressed concern that normal business be resumed as soon as possible.

Mr Blair took members through a summary of key points to the accounts.

The Chair encouraged members to read through the draft accounts and revert to Mr Laverty/Mr Blair with any queries or comments before submission to NIAO later in the week.

The formal recognition and appreciation of Committee to the Finance team would be passed on to staff by the Principal, who summarised the rationale for the recruitment, retention and support of staff going forward. He also acknowledged an enhanced relationship with DfE and NIAO over the year.

The Chair welcomed the assurances provided and recognised substantial efforts made. He was keen that the timetable for submission to NIAO and DfE be adhered to and thanked Mr Blair and Mr Laverty for their work.

83.9 Draft Audit & Risk Committee (ARAC) Annual Report 2023/24

Mr Laverty outlined the progression schedule for this report, which was draft at this stage. It was planned to present a final report at the next ARAC meeting.

Members noted that the Committee's opinion is reflected in the biannual assurances to the Department, which the Principal presents to the GB.

A statement that 2 members of the ARAC also sit on the Education Committee would be added to the opening sentence.

83.10 Any Other Business

The Chair wished everyone a Happy Christmas and asked that any information updates be circulated to all Committee members.

83.13 Date of Next Meeting Monday 24 February 2025.

The meeting concluded at 5.52pm.

Mr D Small *DSmall*

Date: 5 March 2025

Chair

Mrs K Wallace



Secretary

Action Log

Item No		Person Responsible	Date Due	Actioned
82.11 (30.09.24)	Dr Graham and Mrs Brown to work on providing more clarity within risk definitions to better reflect progress being made by the College	Mrs Brown	24.02.25	Ongoing
83.4	TOR to be updated	Secretary	24.02.25	
83.6	Progress of the new disposal schedule to be followed up with SERC.	Chief Executive/DPO	24.02.25	
83.6	Information on staff changes/reassignment of duties to be communicated to members in real time going forward.	Mrs Murdoch	Going forward	
83.6	Meetings to take place as scheduled going forward. Additional meetings to take place as necessary.	SLT	Going forward	
83.6	Mr Laverty would review the possibility of including a Corporate Policy audit in 2024/25 and revert back to Committee.	Mr Laverty	24.02.25	
83.6	Internal audit reports for consideration at the next meeting to be shared as available.	Mr Laverty/Mr Blair	Immediate	
83.6	The opening sentence to include that 2 members of the ARAC also sit on the Education Committee.	Mr Laverty/Mr Blair	Immediate	
83.6	IA reports be shared with Education and Resources Committees after consideration by the ARAC.	Secretary	Going forward	