

Audit Committee

Meeting of 14 March 2024

Present:

Richard Lockhart (Chair, Non-executive member)
Seonaid Crosby (Vice Chair and Non-executive member)
Sue Stahly (Non-executive and Senior Independent member)
Rehela Hussain (Non-executive member)
Shelagh Fraser (Support Staff member)

In attendance:

Jackie Galbraith (Principal)
Alex Linkston (Chair of the Board of Governors and Non-executive member)
Ashley Bickerstaff, (Azets Internal Auditors)
Brian Battison (Audit Scotland)
Simon Earp, (Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement)
Jennifer McLaren (Vice Principal, Finance and Estates)
Beth Brownlee (Head of Student Experience and Improvement)
Bill Dunsmuir (Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure)
Emily Purdie (Health and Safety Officer)
Jenny Stalker (Board Secretary and Governance Advisor)

Presentation from the Student Association Development Officer, Micole Cochrane: LGBT Charter Going for Gold

The committee was given a presentation on the LGBT Going for Gold Charter. The committee was impressed with the project planning and systematic approach that had been taken to achieve the award and highlighted the high degree of support and commitment given to the project by all staff involved.

The project has driven significant change across the college, including system changes that enable students to be able to select pronouns at the point of enrolment and to change their name in-course. The committee noted specific services implemented as part of the project, including the Ask Ally service which is already well used by students for advice and support.

The Committee asked if the college uses data on staff and students in LGBT categories to ensure we address all the needs of all staff and students. It was confirmed this data is available for analysis and can be shared with members.

The committee complimented the Student Association on the success of this achievement and noted the hard work completed to achieve the Charter. The committee noted that retention of Gold Charter status is based on a 3-year review and there are planned initiatives included in the action plan to ensure we have evidence of continuing progress at the end of the 3-year period.

The Principal acknowledged the Student Association Development Officer's leadership and commitment to driving the project through to completion. The committee gave thanks to the Student Association Development Officer and the project team.

1 Committee Administration

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were noted from Tony Sharkey (Vice Chair of the Board of Governors), David Eardley and Gillian Callaghan, (Azets Internal Auditors). The Chair welcomed Ashley Bickerstaff, (Azets Internal Auditors) who was in attendance to present the Azets IT Report. Apologies were also noted from Sarah-Jane Linton, (Vice Principal Learning and Attainment).

1.2 Declarations of Conflicts of Interest

There were no declarations of conflicts of interest noted.

1.3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting of 30 November 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 30 November 2023 were accepted as a correct record.

1.4 Matters Arising

The committee noted that actions 1 and 2 from the meeting of 30 November 2023 have been completed and that action 3 will be completed as part of the agenda for the meeting of 6 June 2024.

2 Matters for Committee Attention

2.1 Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure Report

The Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure drew the committee's attention to the key points in the paper, including upgrades to improve the connection with the JANET network, replacement of fibre connections across the college and upgraded CCTV.

Committee attention was drawn to the cyber assessment risk table highlighting status against the NIST framework. Discussion took place on actions to be taken to mitigate high risk areas.

The committee noted the Teams telephony project is in progress and work on the data portal to include the ability to analyse data on intersectionality is continuing.

Progress is being made on the development of a centralised timetabling system and the committee was informed the college is collaborating with other colleges to seek out best practice. The committee noted the positive input from faculty staff which is helping to move this forward.

The committee enquired about the timescale for completion on the MFA project and was assured this is in hand for completion by June 2024, with a 3-month contingency extension built in.

The committee commented that this is a reassuring report and thanked the Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure's team for their positive work.

The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement informed the committee the college will meet with the Scottish Funding Council who want to visit the college to learn from our information systems developments. The committee agreed an update on this visit would be useful.

Action 1: Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement

To report to the Audit Committee meeting of 6 June 2024 on the outcomes of the Scottish Funding Council visit

2.2 Health and Safety Quarterly Report

The Health and Safety Officer introduced the paper.

The increase in the number of students coming forward asking for mental health support was noted. One RIDDOR incident resulted from a member of staff who had an accident resulting in a more than 7-day incident report. The committee noted a fire risk assessment was carried out with two identified actions.

The committee noted that comprehensive auditing of faculties has recommenced and that policies and procedures, which were still under review at the last meeting, have now been reviewed and updated.

The committee noted the Health and Safety Officer was invited by College Development Network to attend the UK National Association of

Colleges quarterly Health and Safety Forum, enabling sharing good practice with other colleges.

The Health and Safety Officer is working with the Active Campus Co-ordinator to support staff physical and mental health. The committee noted the Mental Health awareness training carried out for managers and the achievement of the Epilepsy Friendly Award.

The committee heard a new system is being explored which would help reduce the volume of health and safety paperwork and provide a data dashboard to record and report incidents.

The committee asked if there is a need to refresh First Aiders to be able to address the types of incidents students are presenting with. The Health and Safety Officer confirmed the current first aid team are comfortable they are able to deal with these incidents. The Principal highlighted these additional concerns are coming from an increased number of younger school students.

The committee noted general progress and plans to complete on actions by the summer. The committee agreed the report gives the committee reassurance and was content to note the report.

2.3 Internal Audit: Progress against Plans and Reports

(i) Internal Audit Review of IT Strategy Report

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates introduced the paper and handed over to Azets who discussed the programme of work, governance and oversight of the strategy.

One area of improvement highlighting the need for a long-term financial plan for information technology developments was discussed. The committee noted that information technology is critical to all aspects of college work and annual planning is not effective. The difficulties of allocating finance on a longer-term basis was noted. Azets confirmed a plan could highlight longer term developments with identified risks but with the caveat that the plan could change in line with financial allocations. The committee discussed good practice that could be identified from other organisations. The Principal noted we already have organisational plans that are linked to finance requirements.

The committee highlighted that end users should be consulted on the plan to manage expectations.

The committee noted the Internal Audit Report

Action 2: Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement

Develop a 5-year Information Technology financial plan to deliver on the Information Technology strategy.

(ii) College Rolling Action Plan Update

The committee was content the three outstanding recommendations were completed within the timescale agreed.

The action plan update was noted.

2.4 Sector Update Internal and External Auditors

There were no points of update from Internal or External Auditors to this meeting.

The committee noted there is a meeting of college internal and external auditors at the end of March 2024 and that an update from this will be brought to the 6 June 2024 committee meeting.

2.5 Key Performance Indicators

Complaints Report

The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement referred to the slight uptick in complaints which centred around a college closure due to adverse weather and complaints from four evening students who were unaware of the closure.

The committee noted that information is posted on the college website and through social media but the issue arose due to the students not being fully enrolled at the time. The committee was informed changes have now been made to the Business Continuity Plan to improve communications.

All complaints were completed and resolved within the required timescale.

The committee noted the report.

2.6 Business Continuity Planning Report

The committee was informed about the training exercise on a cyber security attack carried out for the management forum by the Chief Information Security Officer on 28 February 2024. The event was found to be useful with good learning points identified.

The committee noted Boxphish training is now available for staff and students.

The committee noted that further Business Continuity activities are planned including an event with Dr Elaine Cook, Depute Chief Executive Education, West Lothian Council Education Services on lessons learned from the handling of incidents in West Lothian Schools.

It was noted the period of reporting should read December 2023 to March 2024.

The committee noted this report.

3 Matters for Committee Information

3.1 Industrial Action

The Principal updated the committee on the continuing industrial action and the college approach to staff who withhold results under Action Short of Strike.

It was confirmed the Chairs Committee and Finance and General Purposes Committee have discussed this in detail and firmly endorse this approach.

The committee noted lecturers refusing to submit results from the week after students finish will have 100% of salary deducted. The Principal confirmed the down week in May has been changed to a teaching week to allow staff more time to complete on teaching and

assessment. The Principal confirmed that local EIS branch views had been shared with the Finance and General Purposes Committee at the meeting of 7 March 2024 and that meetings with the local branch are continuing.

The committee asked what lecturing staff feedback has been received regarding this approach. The Principal confirmed that staff views were mixed with a small number of staff feeling annoyed that the college is taking this approach and other staff agreeing with salary deduction because they do not agree that colleagues should withhold student results.

The committee noted the Principal's update and expressed the hope that the industrial dispute will be resolved soon and this action will not be required.

4 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

5 Review of Committee and Supporting Papers

The committee noted the supporting papers are useful and agreed the quality and quantity of the papers are very good.

The Complaints report format was highlighted as particularly useful due to the inclusion of trend analysis.

The committee agreed the Health and Safety Report is good but would benefit from the inclusion of trend analysis comparing statistics from 2019 and 2023.

The committee agreed Internal and External Auditors should be asked if benchmarking data on college sector themes can be provided, particularly around financial health.

Action 3: Board Secretary and Governance Advisor

To request trend analysis and benchmarking data for inclusion in future reports.

6 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting of Audit Committee will be Thursday 6 June 2024, commencing at 10.30 am.

Note: There were no matters discussed during the meeting, during which Members declared any conflict of interest, or the Board Secretary and Governance Advisor was aware from the Register of Interests that discussion could give rise to such a conflict.

Signed:

Chair, Audit Committee

Date: