

Audit Committee

Meeting of 6 June 2024

Present:

Richard Lockhart (Chair, Non-executive member)
Seonaid Crosby (Vice Chair and Non-executive member)
Rehela Hussain (Non-executive member)
Shelagh Fraser (Support Staff member)
Chris Wood (EIS Trade Union Member)

In attendance:

Jackie Galbraith (Principal)
Alex Linkston (Chair of the Board of Governors and Non-executive member)
Gillian Callaghan (Azets Internal Auditors)
Lesley McGiffen (Non-executive Board Member in attendance only)
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)

1 Committee Administration

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were noted from Sue Stahly (Senior Independent Member), Tony Sharkey (Vice Chair of the Board and Non-executive Member), David Eardley (Azets Internal Auditors) and Hazel Brady (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 14 March 2024

The minutes of the meeting of 14 March 2024 were accepted as a correct record.

1.4 Matters Arising

Action 1: In progress

The Vice Principal (People, Performance and Improvement) to give a verbal update on the Scottish Funding Council visit in May 2024 as part of the Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure Report.

Action 2: In progress

Action 3: Completed

The Board Secretary and Governance Advisor confirmed that trend data had been requested for the Health and Safety Report and from Internal and External Auditors. Updates on relevant sector comparisons will be given by Azets and Audit Scotland as part of the agenda for committee meetings.

2 Matters for Committee Approval

2.1 Approval of Committee Remit

The committee agreed to amend points 2.2 and 7.3 and to specifically state complaints, freedom of information and GDPR as part of the review of college performance indicators,

The committee agreed to point 4.1.2 and to further discuss risk management during the self-assessment exercise.

The committee approved the revised remit with the aforementioned amendments.

3 Matters for Committee Attention

3.1 Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure Report

The committee heard an update from the Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure.

Digital Infrastructure:

The committee's attention was drawn to two points of update from the report taken to the March committee meeting:

- It was confirmed the college is still in discussion with JISC and other suppliers to procure and implement Managed SIEM (Security Information and Event Management) technology. The committee was assured there is no negative impact on management of risk while this is in progress.
- The committee noted cyber essentials certification will be concluded by the end of this week.

The committee noted that £100k of investment has been made to prepare students and staff returning in 2024-25.

The committee noted the MFD (multi-function device) Project will reduce the college fleet of photocopiers from 26 to 11 devices, further supporting net zero target achievements.

Information Systems:

The data dashboard project continues to expand with a new Withdrawals Tracker report being made available to enable follow up on all students who leave the college and to track reasons for this.

The committee's attention was drawn to a meeting with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) which highlighted the college as one of the leading colleges in the sector on prescriptive analytics. The committee noted the SFC wants to work with the college to support their own developments.

The committee discussed progress on the centralised timetabling system and whether this allows the use of college space to be analysed. The Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure reported we are already capturing information on space utilisation and the system will provide an interface to support this.

The committee discussed actions the college takes to ensure staff and students have the right level of digital literacy to use college systems and engage effectively in learning and work.

The committee noted that multi factor authentication can be a barrier to a small number of students. It was agreed to consider what other support can be provided to support these students informed by the experiences of students in the first months of the new academic year, identified through the induction survey and other feedback mechanisms.

Action 1: Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement

To explore other options to support students in light of feedback from the first few months of the new academic year.

The committee noted that training on developments such as Artificial Intelligence and Boxphish would be useful for the board.

The committee discussed how the college is learning from recent cyber attack in Dumfries and Galloway and from the experiences of other organisations. The Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure reported on multi-agency response and our participation in external sector networks such as JISC and CISO which share threat intelligence with the college community. This intelligence is integrated into our own systems development and business continuity planning. The committee also noted that the Managed SIEM and JANET network developments will give further assurance.

3.2 Health and Safety Quarterly Report

The Health and Safety Officer introduced the paper. The committee noted a comparison table has been included as requested.

The committee heard that student incidents have tailed off as the end of the academic year approaches but that we are not complacent about the level of demand that will come at the start of the new session. The committee noted that students presenting with pre-existing conditions is a common factor across the sector.

The number of First Aiders has been reviewed and found to be sufficient to provide evening support as well as day time support.

The Health and Safety Officer confirmed that auditing had focused on motor vehicle and electrical workshops.

The committee noted the Health and Safety Officer chaired the College Development Network meeting which provides an update on learning across the sector and is a good support network.

The Health and Safety Officer has been working with the Active Campus Co-ordinator to support staff and student health. This has included the introduction of walking challenges and inputs to Wellbeing Wednesday.

Toolbox talks on lone working have been carried out for staff such as work based assessors who work off campus and where staff are working from home alone.

The committee noted the college is being recognised by other external organisations for our work on cyber-terrorism and other organisations are looking to work with us and learn from our work here.

The committee noted the implementation of Martin's Law has been delayed due to the forthcoming election, and that an updated Smoking and Vaping Policy is to be approved.

The committee noted the report and agreed the report provides reassurance that health and safety is well managed.

4 Internal Audit

4.1 Progress against plan 2023-24

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates reported that we have one outstanding audit to take place in August which will complete the programme for 2023-24. The plan for 2024-25 will be brought to the next committee meeting.

The committee noted the paper.

4.2 College Rolling Audit Action Plan

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates reported the one outstanding recommendation is on target to meet the agreed deadline.

The committee noted the paper.

5 External Audit Update

5.1 Audit Plan 2023-24

Audit Scotland reported to the committee on the annual plan, noting there are no points of significant risk. It was confirmed that financial sustainability and governance will be focus for 2024-25. The committee noted a full re-evaluation of land and buildings will be carried out in July 2024.

Audit Scotland confirmed the audit programme will commence 14 October 2024.

The committee noted that audit fees will increase by 6% across the sector. The Principal noted that an increase in fees is a challenge for the college in light of a flat cash funding settlement.

The committee asked if there are any changes to accounting standards. Audit Scotland confirmed there will be minimal changes this year.

The committee noted the update from Audit Scotland.

Benchmarking Update:

Audit Scotland gave a brief resume of themes that have been identified from the 2022-23 external audit reports. These include:

- a high percentage of colleges have not signed off on accounts
- staffing cuts and the implementation of voluntary severance schemes
- financial deficits being forecast.

Feedback from the Auditors Sector Meeting in March 2024 noted sector themes of:

- clear financial hardship due to flat cash situation, pay awards and voluntary severance schemes
- potential compulsory redundancies in some colleges
- removal and/or reduction of courses due to lack of funding
- lack of capacity at senior leadership level
- the unresolved situation with job evaluation
- the sale or lease of properties.

The Principal noted that not all of these themes were relevant to the college's situation. The committee noted the support staff pay award has now been agreed which includes a clause regarding no compulsory redundancies. West Lothian College has committed to no compulsory redundancies.

The committee discussed the overview report on the college sector which the Auditor General traditionally produced. It was felt a report from the Auditor General would hold more weight with Scottish Government and would be an effective communication tool. The committee asked if this could be reinstated.

Action 2: Brian Battison, Audit Scotland

To request the re-instatement of the college sector overview report.

6 Key Performance Indicators

6.1 Complaints Report

The committee noted the college has recovered over 95% of costs from the 5-year legal case.

The committee noted the report.

6.2 Business Continuity Planning Report

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates introduced the report and confirmed that a further business continuity planning event had been held with our insurers.

Part 1 of the exercise was a desktop scenario. Feedback from the insurers was that there was confidence management could deal confidently with a major incident. The team was well prepared and confident and had sound knowledge of the plan.

The second part was a presentation from colleagues from West Lothian Council on handling a major incident which occurred at a local school and learning from the impact of social media.

The committee asked how the college trains new staff who may not have participated in the scheduled event. The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement confirmed the college is moving to a training plan that will be implemented across the year.

The committee noted the report.

7 Matters for Committee Information

7.1 Industrial Action

The Principal updated the committee on the current situation. UNISON members accepted the 3-year pay deal. EIS members have introduced a 4-year pay deal claim for 2025-26 and negotiations are continuing. It was noted the Scottish Government has issued guidance on pay offers for 2025-26.

The committee heard the EIS has increased strike action over the next few weeks.

The committee noted the update and expressed the wish that industrial action is resolved soon.

8 Any Other Business

The Chair of the Board thanked Richard Lockhart for his contribution to board governance over the last eight years.

8.1 Review of Committee and Supporting Papers

The committee agreed that benchmarking information from Audit Scotland was helpful.

The committee discussed whether it would be more effective to review the papers at the start of the meeting rather than the end. The committee agreed to retain at the end of the agenda on the basis that further information on papers may be provided during the meeting but to keep this in mind for future consideration.

9 Date of Next Meeting

The next Audit Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 3 September 2024.

10 Committee Self-Assessment

10.1 Audit Committee Self-Assessment Review 2023-24

The committee participated in a review of committee performance over the last year. Areas of strength and development points were discussed and recorded. Development points will be taken forward through the Board Development Plan 2023-2025.

Action: To Approve

Agenda Item: 1.3

West Lothian College

Paper 1

3 September 2024

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: