

Audit Committee

Meeting of 3 September 2024

Present:

Seonaid Crosby (Chair and Non-executive member)
Sue Stahly (Non-executive Member)
Rehela Hussain (Non-executive member)
Shelagh Fraser (Support Staff member)
Chris Wood (EIS Trade Union Member)
Lesley McGiffen (Non-executive Board Member)

In attendance:

Jackie Galbraith (Principal)
Kevin Hentges (Co-opted Non-executive Member)
Charly Lowell (Azets Internal Auditors)
Brian Battison (Audit Scotland)
Simon Earp, (Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement)
Jennifer McLaren (Vice Principal, Finance and Estates)
Hazel Brady (Vice Principal, Learning and Attainment)
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)

College Development Network: Board Member Training

The committee benefited from a development session from Gordon Hunt, College Development Network to bring members up to date with the requirements of being a board member and charitable trust status. Relevant guidance and codes of good governance were discussed and made available to members.

1 Committee Administration

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Kevin Hentges was welcomed to his first meeting.

Apologies were noted from David Eardley (Azets Internal Auditors).

1.2 Declarations of Conflicts of Interest

There were no declarations of conflicts of interest noted.

1.3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting of 6 June 2024

The minutes of the meeting of 6 June 2024 were accepted as a correct record.

1.4 Matters Arising

Action 1: The committee noted that alternative means to support students accessing the college's digital resources continue to be explored.

Action 2: Brian Battison, Audit Scotland gave a verbal update on the feasibility of re-introducing the college sector overview report. The committee noted this is still under review.

2 Matters for Committee Attention

2.1 Internal Audit

(i) Assessment Report

Charly Lowell, Azets Internal Auditor attended the meeting in place of David Eardley and presented the report. The committee noted there was only one minor recommendation which was to provide a faculty handbook for students. The committee noted this recommendation is being progressed.

The committee noted the positive report.

(ii) Annual Report 2023-24

The Annual report was discussed and noted by the committee.

Internal Audit Contract

The committee was reminded that the Board of Governors approved the appointment of Azets to provide the internal audit service and informed that, as the 35-month period has elapsed, the college is taking up the option of a 12-month extension to the internal audit contract.

2.2 Infrastructure and Cyber Security Update

Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure Report:

The Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure introduced the report, highlighting the works and projects completed in the final quarter of 2023-24.

The committee noted the delay in completion of the managed SIEM project and asked if there is a slightly heightened risk due to the delay. The Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure confirmed there was no increased risk since the work is focused on enhancements and not addressing existing gaps in security. The committee will be kept up to date with progress.

The committee heard the centralised timetabling programme is under consideration, pending a further options appraisal. An update will be brought back to the committee at a future meeting. It was noted that the 5-year contract for the student record system is coming to an end and the college will require to go out to tender in October.

The committee queried the use of AI in predictive modelling to identify students at risk of withdrawal and asked for reassurance there was no human bias in the system. The Head of Information Systems and Digital Infrastructure confirmed that the AI model uses data for predictive analysis and is free from bias.

The committee agreed that it would be useful for a presentation to be given to the Board of Governors on the use of AI in college business to facilitate understanding.

Action 1: Vice Principal, Learning and Attainment

Arrange for a presentation on the use of AI at a future meeting of the Board of Governors

The committee noted the paper as very comprehensive but asked if the report could be enhanced by:

- Inclusion of additional PowerBi data
- More detail on planned dates to clarify whether works are in advance or behind schedule.

Action 2: Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement

To circulate the 3-year plan to the Board of Governors.

The committee noted the report.

2.3 Health and Safety Update (Quarterly Report)

The Health and Safety Officer introduced the quarterly report.

The committee noted the Health and Safety Officer continues to engage with sector networks and is on a short life working group to introduce Martin's law.

It was noted that students are being encouraged through student induction and the Freshers Fayre to engage in vaccination programmes.

The committee noted the training that has taken place to enable staff to effectively respond to drug related issues on campus. The Health and Safety Officer detailed the new system implemented to record accidents and incidents which will give improved reporting.

The committee was interested to know what action is taken to address staff who do not complete mandatory training and who have a mark on their HR file. It was noted that compliance is currently 92% and action is taken on an individual basis.

The committee noted the quarterly report.

2.4 Health and Safety Annual Report

The Health and Safety Officer introduced the report, highlighting new initiatives that have been implemented covering staff and student wellbeing and mental health support.

The Health and Safety Officer also noted the work of other teams that enables positive reporting on health and safety.

The committee noted the uptick in incidents and asked if there is any correlation with student numbers. The Health and Safety Officer said that the increase in slips, trips and falls has been noted and is being addressed and agreed that student numbers can be produced so that correlations can be made.

The committee noted the volume of work that has been completed with a very small team and thanked staff for their significant contributions.

2.5 College Rolling Audit Action Plan

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates introduced the paper and asked for comment from the committee.

The committee noted the impact on the action plan as a result of financial constraints.

The committee approved the extension to the one outstanding recommendation.

3 General Compliance

3.1 FOI and GDPR Update 2023-24

The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement introduced the paper and noted the increase in third party data requests. The committee was informed this has been due to one organisation collecting data to monitor their own performance.

The committee also noted that FOI requests have increased. The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement confirmed there have been more requests from parliamentary committees and trade union requests associated with the pay dispute, as well as other sector wide issues.

The committee asked if there were any exemptions to the FOI requests and whether there are proactive actions that can be taken to mitigate the numbers of FOI requests coming in.

The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement confirmed he will examine requests and report back to the committee.

Action 3: Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement
To report back on FOI exemptions and possible proactive actions to a future meeting.

3.2 Complaints Report

The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement introduced the report to the committee and asked for comment. The committee heard that one complaint had gone to the Ombudsman who had not upheld the complaint.

The committee asked if complaint outcomes are fed back to staff involved as well as to the complainant. The committee heard that outcomes are fed back as legally required and that the college is in discussion about the complaints handling process to ensure complaints are handled sensitively and appropriately.

The committee noted that an updated Complaints Policy will come back to the committee at a future date.

The committee noted the report.

4 Matters for Information

4.1 Industrial Action

The Principal confirmed the EIS has accepted the 4-year pay offer and that the dispute will be lifted. It was noted that support staff are not included in this.

The committee was pleased to note that student success rates have held up well despite the disruption and have improved in some areas.

The committee noted the update.

4.2 Sector Update

Audit Scotland reported that a meeting of college finance directors had been held but there was no update to be given on sector issues. Azets Internal Auditors also had nothing to report on sector wide developments.

4.3 Staff Mandatory Training

The committee noted the 92% completion rate as being positive. Staff mandatory training will also be discussed at the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting.

The committee noted the report.

5 Key Performance Indicators

5.1 Business Continuity Planning Report

The Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement reported that monitoring of business continuity will move to a quarterly meeting of the planning group.

The committee thanked staff for this positive work and noted the report.

6 Any Other Business

6.1 Audit Committee Remit/Terms of Reference

The committee was asked to approve the remit for 2024-25.

The committee approved with current remit with the caveat that 4.1.2 may require to be amended post the strategic risk management workshop.

6.2 Review of Risk Register Process

A discussion took place on the process of review and scrutiny of the risk register. The committee agreed there should be a quarterly review by Audit Committee but suggested that each committee should review relevant risks and give feedback to Audit.

The committee noted that a covering paper detailing escalations, changes and horizon scanning of potential future risks would be useful.

It was agreed that a strategic risk management workshop should be arranged to include members of Audit committee and Chairs of Learning and Teaching and Finance and General Purposes committees to work on a revised process. It was noted that advice could be sought from Azets Internal Auditors.

Action 4: Board Secretary and Governance Advisor

To set up a risk management workshop with representation from other two committees to review the strategic risk management process and governance compliance.

6.3 Review of Committee and Supporting Papers

The committee agreed to remove this item from future agenda and cover the review as part of committee self-assessment.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Tuesday 26 November 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: