

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee
held remotely on Monday 29 March 2021**

Present: - Mike Rookes (Chair)
Graham Briscoe (Co-opted Member)
Kay Sandford-Beal
Emma Lewis (Co-opted Member)

In attendance: - Tim Williams (Finance Director)
Jane Simons (College Accountant)
Linda Watkins (Clerk to the Governors)
Abigail Appleton (Principal)
Louise Tweedie (RSM)

The meeting was quorate as four members of the Audit Committee were present.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Joe Hedges.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Committee agreed that the Chair should sign the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2020 as a true record.

There was a matter arising relating to ensuring the College is compliant with the GDPR. The Finance Director updated the Committee that details of consultants have been collated which will be progressed to appoint a consultant.

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the minutes

4. RSM Internal Auditor's Reports

Louise Tweedie informed everyone that Laura Goodwin was on maternity leave. During this period Karen Gentles would work with the College. The Committee recorded their congratulations to Laura Goodwin.

Louise Tweedie presented the following reports.

- I. The progress report outlined progress against the audit plan including client briefings which were presented for information. Reference was made to the briefing about 'Determining Your College Risk Appetite'. The new Audit Code of Practice could make this assessment of risk appetite compulsory as a response to Dame Mary Ney's review of finance and governance. This would strengthen the role of the Audit Committee and provide additional assurance to the Board that there is effective risk management. The revised Audit Code of Practice was due to be published which will be taken into account at a future meeting.
- II. Learner Number Systems was an advisory audit with one medium recommendation. Though there was no overall opinion this was a

- good audit. There was a question about hours timetabled and delivered compared to the funding record asking if this should be of concern for the student experience as there were 65 hours difference between the planned and actual hours delivered. Details would be investigated which could relate to GCSE provision. **ACTION: RSM**
- III. Key Financial Controls accounts receivable (income and debtors) was given reasonable assurance with two low level recommendations. The follow up audit identified 2 medium and 10 low level recommendations outstanding recommendations from the previous year. There was discussion about fraud noting that requests to amend supplier's bank details could be fraudulent. The finance team are vigilant and the College Accountant had already actioned a number of recommendations.
- IV. Capital and Estates Management arrangements were audited at Folly Lane and College Road Campus as part of an advisory audit. This identified one high priority action to establish an estates strategy, four medium and three low level recommendations. It was agreed that the College is small which needed to be taken into account regarding some of the recommendations, such as taking minutes of the estates team's weekly meetings. There was a question about the level of priority and timescale relating to a recommendation to take minutes of meetings with contractors. The implementation date was next year with agreement that progress of projects could potentially go adrift. It was agreed that this date should be changed to immediately. In discussion, it was agreed that records could include an email and not necessarily minutes as the College has a small estates team. **ACTION: RSM.** The Principal commented that the audit was extremely useful to support the Estates and H&S Manager had taken on several additional duties.

A Governor raised the structure of internal audit reports which no longer included management comments against recommendations. RSM explained that management actions are recommended which give detail of actions incorporating input following discussion with management.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the Internal Auditor's reports and useful sector updates

5. Risk Management Register and Report

High-scoring risks were noted which included the impact of COVID-19. A new risk had been added relating to where COVID-19 results in some Universities refunding a proportion of annual HE Tuition fees. The Finance Director explained that this is a sector-wide risk that may not happen. If it did happen the size and magnitude of impact is unknown. . To mitigate this, extended term dates and access to workshops during Easter are being explored. The College is liaising with UWTSD regarding completion dates for some courses which require extended time to access workshops. A summer show is being planned which was unable to take place last year. Governors were encouraged by actions being taken.

FE applications are buoyant and higher than last year. HE applications have decreased; the F&GP Committee discussed HE applications last week.

SLT will remove the risk regarding the College's relationship with RNC which was no longer a strategic risk as RNC are not the College's landlord.

A Governor raised Student Union liaison and the student experience which were risks that had increased in some institutions. The Principal responded that the

SU is not separately constituted and that two Student Governors have roles in the SU. The College works closely with the Student Council who meet fortnightly, its membership includes some SU officers and Student Governors. By way of example, a recent issue discussed had been the student hardship fund during COVID-19.

SLT have discussed staff morale during the pandemic as some staff had been affected by lockdown. SLT have planned to conduct a staff survey. A Governor asked if any staff were anxious about returning to working on site. There had been resistance by a few staff following the second lockdown; however, SLT are working with staff and following Government guidelines. There was a question about student wellbeing. Support will continue to be provided for students, particularly those who could have been affected from missing study skills and social interaction.

There was a suggestion to add some additional high-level risks, such as a governance failure or health and safety failure to the register. An example of principal risks for risk registers would be shared with the Finance Director.

ACTION: G BRISCOE

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the risk register

6. Recommendation Tracking

The Finance Director explained that GDPR consultants will be appointed to support the College to ensure that appropriate measures are embedded so that the College complies with GDPR.

A Governor asked about succession planning following the ILT Manager's retirement. The Finance Director had discussed the ILT Manager's duties with the Network Manager to identify any revisions to the job description. The Network Manager is ensuring effective management of IT including robust cyber security.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the tracker and progress

7. Anti-Bribery Policy

The Clerk had drafted the policy.

The Committee agreed: -

- To recommend the Board approve the Anti-Bribery Policy

8. Any Other Business

The Clerk informed everyone that Emma Lewis would step down from the Committee following her appointment as Quality Manager at NMITE. The Committee recorded appreciation to Emma Lewis for her contribution to the Audit Committee and wished her every success in her new role. Emma Lewis responded that she had enjoyed serving on the Audit Committee and was sorry to be leaving but hoped that the link forged would continue.

9. Date and Time of the Next Meeting

The next meeting was arranged for Monday 14 June 2021 commencing at 2.00pm.

Signed as a true record of proceedings:

Chair: **Date:**