MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE

AUDIT COMMITTEE
held on Monday 7th December 2020 at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Mr Geoffrey Bowley, Mrs Susan Martineau, Mr Hugh Stafford-Smith, Mrs Sarah Ediss

Apologies: Mr Karl Banister

In attendance: Mr Dan Lodge (Principal), Ms Nicola Whitehead (Clerk) Mrs Rachel Gander (Scribe)

In the Chair: Mr Hugh Stafford-Smith

1.   Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of interests.

2.   Minutes of the meeting held on 17th November 2020 were approved.

3.   Matters arising

Item 5ix: The Principal reported on the risk of software contracts highlighted from the college-wide risk register.

Whilst an escrow contract had been considered the outcome was deemed to be too costly and overly complicated. The two main suppliers are Civica (used for accounts system/MIS database/Corero) and CINTRA (for payroll and HR). Should the need to use source codes ever arise the college would need to buy in a particular skill set/area of expertise. The considered view therefore was that in the event of a supplier difficulty, there would always be a reasonable amount of time to continue using the software. In the meantime, most data is held in a usable SQL format so the College would either be able to build a way to access the data or import it to a new supplier. Additionally, the college uses large suppliers (such as Microsoft) which doesn't eliminate risk entirely, but does significantly reduce it.

A member asked whether the workaround solution had been documented and the Chair informed him that the answer lies in a software mapping exercise and confirmed that the college is aware of the steps it would need to take in such a scenario.

4.   Regularity Self-assessment Questionnaire
Paper: Regularity Audit update;

The Clerk had amended the document in line with comments from members. It was noted that usually this report would have been submitted to the auditors prior to their Audit Findings Report, however, for completeness and transparency, the AFR points had been set out in italics to differentiate them as a post-audit event.

5.   Audit Committee Annual Report to the Governing Body
Paper: Audit Committee Annual Report to the Governing Body 2019-2020 update

The Clerk noted that the amendments to reflect the discussion in November, most notably in relation to the Audit Findings Report (AFR), had been made. She had also included the

internal audit opinion and a consistent reference to the performance management report. It was agreed to replace 6.7 with the form of words used by the Head of Audit, which was felt to be a stronger piece of text. The reasons for removal of 'succession planning' (included within the original scope and title of the performance management internal audit report) was explained and understood.

Recommendation: That the Governing Body approve at its next meeting the Audit Committee Annual Report as amended.

6.   **Internal Audit Action Plan**
        Paper: Explanatory top sheet

The Chair outlined the reasons behind the suggested change to the current audit plan. This was summarised as a huge amount of workload arising from managing grade expectations, new marketing efforts, securing income and strategic planning, all of which had become a significant mountain of work for SMT. The question of whether there was a more efficient way to reach the summit should therefore be considered. A discussion took place regarding ways in which workloads could be lightened, not, it was stressed, the avoidance of doing the work but to consider alternative ways to get to the same point.

The Principal thanked the Chair for his summary and added that all schools, colleges and universities were expressing very similar challenges with workloads; a situation understood by MP Jeremy Quinn who had recently visited the College. He highlighted the significant impact on workloads of the COVID situation and the significant work to be undertaken in response to the successful bid for T Level funding.

The two internal audits in question were Progression and Destinations, and Quality Assurance Processes and Self-assessment. The VP (Pastoral) had very recently taken over responsibility for the former area and was working up a strategy (to include the appointment of a new Employability Co-ordinator and Careers Adviser). The VP(Curriculum) was new in post and had a busy term with the core quality assurance and self-assessment processes.

The Chair invited comments and suggestions from members to see whether a streamlined audit process could be supported. Members were largely in agreement, particularly in light of the staffing changes and the ongoing COVID situation but raised concern that a precedent should not be set. The Chair asked the committee to look at ways in which flexibility could be given without setting precedents and confirmed that any decisions reached should be viewed as a one-off.

It was suggested that internal assurance on each area not being covered could be provided. This could be in the form of a report from relevant Heads and should not take too much time, but should give assurance that the College was still heading in the expected direction. The Chair and Principal felt this was a strong suggestion and the Principal would be happy for both Vice Principals to join the next meeting and provide updates. *(Action: Clerk)*

The Clerk highlighted that the SAR & QIP was a robust procedure and additionally governors had been involved in faculty and subject meetings so the process here had been as diligent as ever.

A member asked whether changes to implement blended learning could be retrospectively reviewed. The Principal commented that this would be best served in the form of student

and staff surveys. It was noted that these would need careful consideration in light of the anticipated shift to 100% learning as of February. The Principal was happy to bring survey results to the summer audit meeting. *(Action: DPL/NCW)* The KPIs were also considered to be a good method of assurance.

Governors were happy to endorse the proposed changes.

Recommendation: That the Governing Body approve the revised Internal Audit Plan at their next meeting.

7.   **Any other business** None

8.   **Meeting assessment**

The Committee were grateful for the opportunity to discuss the updates and internal audit proposal in person through a practical and brief Zoom meeting.

9.   **Date of the next meeting: Tuesday 2nd March 2020 at 08.00.**

The meeting ended at 11:05

Chair…………………………………

Date………………………………………

RLG 9/12/20