THE COLLEGE OF RICHARD COLLYER

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
THE AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE
HELD ON Wednesday 6 March 2024 at 8.00 on Teams**

Present: Karl Banister, Sarah Ediss, Susan Martineau, Dom Valente

In attendance: Members of SMT - Ian Dumbleton (FD), Dan Lodge (Principal)
                              Rob Hussey (VP Curriculum) Items 5 & 6 only
                              Andrea John (VP Pastoral) Item 5 only

                              Russha Sellings (Director of Governance)

                              External attendees: Scott McCready (Wylie + Bisset) Item 5 only

In the Chair: Dom Valente

1. **Chair Introductions and Apologies for Absence**
   The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all members. Karl Banister joined the meeting during Item 4. The VPs were present to provide relevant updates.

2. **Declarations of Interest**
   None declared with respect of the agenda items.

3. **Minutes of the meeting 22 November 2023**
   The minutes of the previous meeting were approved without amendment.

4. **Matters Arising**
   (not already covered on the agenda)

   Item 6(ii) – Impact of academisation on international provision which was referred to the AWP. Further exploration would be undertaken on the possibility of obtaining a Tier 4 license required for the continuation of fee-paying international students. The matter would be revisited subject to the receipt of an academy order in the phase of due diligence and there was a brief update on progress of the applications.

   Item 6(vi) – Fraud risk questionnaire recommended for completion by the external auditors which the Director of Governance suggested could align with Fraud reporting to be presented at the summer term meeting. *(Action: FD)*

   Item 7(i) – Cyber Essentials/training which the Director of Governance advised was in part arising from members request for another internal review following the recommendation and emphasis on cyber controls highlighted by the external auditor. The Principal informed members that there was a new IT Manager in post replacing the former IT Network Manager who may have a fresh point of view. Early autumn term would be good from a timing's perspective. *(Action: FD)* There was also a training element which the Director of Governance would refer to the G&S Committee. *(Action: Director of Governance)*

   [8.11 – Scott McCready was welcomed to the meeting]

5. **Internal Audit / Board Assurance**
   Papers: Exams process and safeguarding internal audit reports

a) Internal audit reviews
Scott explained the reporting format and grading methodology. The reports contained a benchmark against other education providers, which as a guide, represented around 60-70 institutions, although they could not be specific on how colleges were included.

It was agreed the Safeguarding audit would be addressed first to allow the VP (Pastoral) to leave the meeting.

i) Safeguarding audit
The scope of the review was covered on page 2 of the report. For this area, sufficient controls to mitigate risks were expected and the audit work evidenced that systems and processes were in place to safeguard students. Scott spoke of the strong level of assurance reference the conclusion on page 8 of the report. There was one low grade recommendation identified for improvement. Questions were invited.

Members commented on the layout and format of the report which they found very helpful, especially the benchmarking information. However, they requested further clarification on the recommendation and whether under these circumstances, it was the view of the internal auditor, that new DBS checks should have been issued. Scott explained that the recommendation arose around staff who had left and returned in a short period of time and the need to record this gap. The VP (Pastoral) clarified that the instances were very low and related to casual members of staff (e.g. invigilators). The audit identified a need for an explanatory note on the checking of the DBS Update service to explain the short gap rather than a new DBS check needing to be undertaken. There was further discussion about how this should be expressed in the audit report and whether there should be confirmation of the sample checks included. Scott maintained that the finding was more related to the documenting of the gap and therefore the recommendation in the report was appropriately documented. Members wished to check that the action had been implemented given the implementation date for the action marked as "immediate" and the date of the report (14/02). The VP (Pastoral) made a note to follow this up. *(Action: VP (Pastoral))*

[8.25 – The VP (Pastoral) departed the meeting]

ii) Exams process audit
The report followed a similar format and there was an update on the internal audit process. There were no areas identified for improvement or anything to report that was material, however there were several good practice recommendations observed including one suggested action on inclusion of the investigation process in the Examinations Policy. The overall conclusion was strong and members could seek comfort from the favourable position in the benchmarking.

A member asked about exam access arrangements and how the College managed the logistics of this when there was an increasing number of requests. This was managed in part by the Access Co-ordinator, the main issue being that the guidelines issued by the exam boards were becoming more robustly applied. The VP (Curriculum) acknowledged there was a general rise in the number of exams and their management was a big undertaking with the pandemic still having an impact. This was being looked at in workforce planning as part of the People Strategy. Thanks were recorded to the Exams team for all their work and attention to detail in securing such a good audit outcome, in managing what was a mission critical service.

There was a further question about the level of appeals and whether this was an issue with the exam boards. The VP (Curriculum) said that there were around 150-200 per year consistently and this was proactively encouraged where possible for students close to grade boundaries. Roughly a third of grades increase following the process. The committee was satisfied that the targeting of student exams for appeals was appropriate and measured and not indicative of wider concerns.

b) Update on remaining reviews
There would be a mock funding review in early June and in addition a follow up process on the reviews that had taken place over the year to provide the Committee with assurance about any

recommendations and actions, which included those reviews undertaken at the end of MHA's tenure.

The Chair commented on the thorough and methodical audits which had worked well through virtual remote working and provided comfort and assurance on the audits undertaken to date.

[8.42 – Scott McCready was thanked for the updates and departed the meeting]

6. **Risk Management Update**
Papers: EQR, RMG minutes, College RR, external risks

a) EQR (e-science)
The VP (Curriculum) explained that the report followed an Ofsted format with corresponding headings. E-Science was an improving area and had met the internal target of ALPs grade 4 or above. The outcomes reflected observations of a well-structured department with good practice, a variety of resources and access to a range of links and external speakers. It was noted that the report presented contradictory views on skills/careers development which was confusing and the VP (Curriculum) said one of the strengths was the number of external opportunities provided to students.

Flipped learning methodology was explained following a question. Members noted that students with SEND achieved well in this subject area and the VP (Curriculum) said this was the case across the College. Retention was however observed as low, and members queried the success of the split teacher working arrangements which had changed this year. The VP (Curriculum) admitted a whole course approach was potentially more useful than split teacher working arrangements and added that the position would be monitored. The retention rate was attributed to a lower GCSE average across the cohort which was generally a contributory factor in students continuing with their courses.

Members asked the VP (Curriculum) to explain the selection criteria for the cycle of EQRs. Subjects were chosen for many reasons and not necessarily where there was an indication of improvements being identified. Sometimes the EQRs were used as a mechanism of feedback.

[8.58 – the VP (Curriculum) departed the meeting]

b) *RMG minutes of 5 Feb 2024
Minutes received as a consent item. It was noted that Governors were no longer required to attend the termly meetings.

i) College-wide Risks
The Committee heard updates on the College-wide risks, the scoring and mitigations. The Principal explained that whilst some scores had not changed, this was likely due to the mitigations producing marginal gains.

- B.5 – not much movement in this area. A non-inflationary linked 1.89% pay award was noted for the next academic year and the Principal was meeting with unions and the expected outcome of the pay award was likely to result in industrial activity. It was confirmed following a question about an increase in admissions that the financial forecast had stabilised overall.
- B.6 – any loss of international provision would be offset by the VAT rebate.
- C.1 – currently showing the highest residual risk. The Principal acknowledged this, however thought this was due to the level of uncertainty on the outcome and therefore the published course offer.
- C.2 – members were most concerned about the risk of certain subjects in readiness for inspection. The Principal explained that the monitoring was an area of responsibility of the Q&C Committee and members requested quality assurance be explained in the narrative of the Risk Register. *(Action: VP (Curriculum))* Members heard about the engagement of an Ofsted consultant to provide input across the College in the summer.

- H.1/G.1 – both were impacted by the timing of potential academy conversion. Receipt of TEG funding had allowed some project support which included exploring new systems following a question about the external auditor's view on the current accounting software. The Forest School Business Manager was included in the tender process and the FD confirmed there had already been one demo, however further options would be explored with support of an external expert.
- H.5 – Members asked for a status update on workload reduction. There had been significant work in this area through the Workload Action Plan following Planning Day. A workload impact statement was planned for each new initiative and staff were fully consulted at each stage. This was especially important as the College made preparations for growth. The Principal said there had been some added complications around the estate arising from the identification of RAAC. The consultation referred to under this risk had originally commenced in response to meeting the previous pay award but would now not be taken forward due to increased funding.
- P.2 – Members noted positively that attendance was improving.

Following the update, there was an observation on the consistency across the relative residual scores e.g. for subject and pastoral and the Principal responded that this was a complex picture in sector and also factored in reputational impacts. Overall there was less variability in the scoring and over time this was reducing as some the risks were consolidated by area.

ii) External Strategic Risks
This followed the agreed PESTLE analysis format. Information was emerging on the Labour Government's policies and the new Chief Inspector of Ofsted was beginning to embed some changes in practice.

The Chair made some general reflections on risks arising from College growth and funding. A Reserves Policy was being drafted in response to feedback from the external auditors.

iii) Disaster recovery and business continuity
There was a brief verbal update on the Disaster Recovery Plan following the annual review and the RAAC response plan that had been a good test of the procedures. There had been minimal external enquires since the announcement, none from parents/carers, and the interim classroom arrangements had been well managed.

7. AOB

8. Meeting Assessment
Thanks were recorded to everyone who helped to draw the meeting pack together and there had been a good focus on the key areas.

9. Date of Next Meeting
The Committee would next meet on: **Wednesday 12 June 2024, 16.00 at Collyer's.**

The meeting closed at 9.34

Chair…..…………………………………

Date……………………………………

RRS 13-03-24