

AQUINAS COLLEGE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date: 12 February 2024

Time: 4.30pm

Venue: College

GOVERNORS PRESENT

Mr A Anwar, Mrs H Dove, Ms M Garratt and Mr A Martin.

Mr A Martin in the Chair

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr S McCready

Ms N Tucker

Mrs D Blackburn

Mr T Conlon

Wylie and Bissett LLP

Murray Smith LLP

Assistant Principal (Finance)

Clerk to the Governing Body

1. OPENING PRAYER

The meeting began with a prayer led by Mr Martin.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J Miller and Mr M Benson (Murray Smith LLP)

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members and Staff were asked to declare any interest, which they may have in any items on the Agenda for this meeting. No interests were declared.

4. COMMITTEE MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2023, copies of which had been circulated previously be approved and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE COMMITTEE MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

6. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

Wylie and Bissett reported that the two audits that had been carried out went smoothly and that everything was on target to complete their work in accordance with the Audit Plan for 2023/2024. Three more reports would be submitted to the June 2024 meeting of the committee a) Capital Funding b) Learner Numbers and c) Follow Up.

RESOLVED: That the Internal Audit Progress Report be received.

7. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

Wylie and Bissett outlined their approach to internal audit and the format of their reports. The grading would be based on recommendations contained in the report. In addition, they would highlight areas of good practice at the college along with benchmarking amongst their clients.

A discussion took place on the internal audit report that had been prepared by Wylie and Bissett on:

a) Freedom of Information

Strong Assurance
There was one Low recommendation

The object of the audit was to ensure i) that the college has adequate policies and procedures in place in relation to Freedom of Information and ii) to provide assurance to the Audit Committee that Freedom of Information processes are robust and in line with best practice.

There were one Low recommendations in the report and 5 areas of good practice were identified.

One Low recommendation – That a log is created containing, but not limited to, the following headings: Date request received, Requesters name and contact details, Details of the request and Date of response. The recommendation had been accepted by the college.

It was noted that the college provide reports on Freedom of Information to the Senior Leadership Team, but there is no set reporting period or frequency due to the low volume and infrequency of the requests received.

Taking account of the issues identified in the report the Governing Body can take strong assurance surrounding the policies and procedures in place at the college in relation to Freedom of Information.

b) Health and Safety

Strong Assurance
Two Low Recommendations

The object of the audit was to ensure i) that the risks surrounding the health and safety arrangements in place at the college are appropriately managed and ii) to provide assurance to the college that the health and safety arrangements are operating effectively.

There were two Low recommendations in the report and 10 areas of good practice were identified.

i) Contractors qualifications are retained following the completion of the tender process (Low recommendation).

ii) That the college ensure that all staff complete refresher training (Low recommendation).

The two recommendations had been accepted by the college and the refresher training had already taken place.

In addition an observation point was raised concerning the Action Plan for the Science Department where there were 99 outstanding actions. These actually relate to 1 action which is to review and update all risk assessments for science practical experiments. We have included them individually

within the action plan and they cover the full year. Risk assessments are only reviewed, and if necessary updated, close to the date of the practical so they are most relevant and up to date. Some of the 99 have already been completed as they fall due. In addition, Mrs Blackburn advised members that the Science Department, which has six subjects has been asked to include in each risk assessment items previously included within the generic risk assessment such as the use of the Bunsen burner /handling glasswear etc. The college has no issue with this approach.

Taking account of the issues identified in the report the Governing Body can take strong assurance surrounding the management of health and safety at the college. This is further highlighted as a number of good practice points were identified.

Mr Martin asked how many first aiders there were in the college. Mrs Blackburn that whilst she did not know the precise number, each medium and high risk department had first aiders within it who tend to deal with incidents within the department and there are around half a dozen general first aiders who are called to incidents around the college.

8. ACTION ON INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

Mrs Blackburn introduced a report that had been circulated to members prior to the meeting that showed which actions from previous internal audit reports had been implemented and those that were ongoing. All but 1 related to the audit points raised in the two audits conducted this year.

9. FEEDBACK ON RISK REGISTER AND MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

Mrs Blackburn introduced a report that had been circulated to all members prior to the meeting. It gave members a brief overview on risk areas which are a focus for the Spring Term. The full Risk Register and Policy are submitted to the Autumn Term Governing Body. The current key areas included the following:

- i) Reduction in funding from the ESFA
- ii) Drop in ESFA funding, devolution to GMCA and rise in fee charges for Adult Centre
- iii) High Level ALS
- iv) Level 3 Reforms
- v) The college overspends its revenue
- vi) Recruitment of students
- vii) Failure to maintain the reputation of the college
- viii) Student issues – Student attendance, progression and drop out is not acceptable and fails to achieve targets set.
- ix) The college fails to maintain a high standing in national performance tables
- x) Inspection announced at short notice
- xi) Use of building reaches capacity and college cannot afford replacement build

The report also gave a list of all the Key Risks included in the Risk Register.

Mr Anwar asked which committee had oversight of the capital build. Mrs Blackburn replied that the Resources Committee was overseeing the capital build. The capital build will have a fixed price contract which is close to being finalised with a capital grant of 80% at £3.93m to be claimed against the gross cost.

RESOLVED: That the report be received.

10. FRAUD LOG BOOK/WHISTLE BLOWING

Mrs Blackburn advised members that there were no incidents of fraud, corruption or whistle blowing to report.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Anwar asked how soon after the month end do the college prepare the monthly accounts. Mrs Blackburn replied that it is usually 3 or 4 days after the end of the month.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that Mr D Pearson (Principal) be invited to attend the next meeting that would be held on 3 June 2024 at 4.30pm.

Signed _____
Chairperson

Date _____