

# EXETER COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

## AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

### Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 26 February 2024 via Zoom

<b>Present</b>	Neil Hitchings Rob Hutchins Adele Westcott	Chair Vice Chair Co-opted
<b>Observers</b>	None	
<b>In Attendance</b>		
<i>For item 2 only</i>	John Laramy John Dowell Jade Otty	Principal/CEO Executive Director of Finance Vice Principal
<i>For item 2.1 only</i>	Lisa Smith	Assistant Principal
<i>For item 8.1 only</i>	Gemma Noble	Executive Director of People and Organisational Development
<i>To item 9 only</i>	Roy Plowman	Tiaa, Internal Auditor
<i>For item 2 only</i>	Graham Atkins	Governor
<i>For item 2 only</i>	Sue Clarke	Governor
<i>For item 2 only</i>	Ashish Ghadiali	Governor
<i>For item 2 only</i>	Victoria Roberts	Governor
	Alison Layton-Hill	Head of Governance
<b>Apologies</b>	None	

1. **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest** **Action**  
 The Chair welcomed colleagues to the meeting and extended a particular welcome to Roy Plowman from Tiaa. The Chair also welcomed Sue Clarke, Graham Atkins, Ashish Ghadiali and Vicki Roberts who were attending for item 2 only.  
  
 The Principal/CEO who attends the meeting in an advisory capacity left after item 2 and the Chair thanked Jade Otty for deputising.  
  
 There were no other apologies or declarations of interest received.
2. **Deep Dive**
- 2.1 R1.25 – Failure to meet EDI, British values, commitment, access, legislation and expectations  
 The Committee received the presentation and noted challenges facing the College due to increasing numbers of students with an EHCP and increasing numbers of care experienced learners, including unaccompanied asylum

seekers. It was noted that the review of the EDI policy is awaiting the final DfE guidance related to gender questioning children.

In response to challenge, it was confirmed that learners provide helpful input into the EDI strategy, particularly through the Learner Leadership Team.

The Committee expressed interest in the data related to the increasing numbers of young people with high needs emerging over the next six years and noted the impact on the College. Governors acknowledged the efforts of the College but questioned whether Exeter College may not be the right environment to meet the needs of some young people. It was confirmed that although Exeter College is inclusive, however on some occasions young people are unable to be admitted following consultation and consideration of their EHCP.

Governors raised the priority of attendance and how the College supports those part-time learners who may not have built up the habit and resilience to fully attend. The College engages in transition work and Heads of Faculty ensure they understand every learner's circumstances when considering a full-time programme.

The Committee considered the risk score noting the EDI trends and increasing number of cases. It was suggested that the inherent risk score may need to be increased.

JD

**The Committee thanked the Assistant Principal for a helpful presentation**

- 2.2 R1.64 – Failure to accommodate and coordinate large exams sittings  
The Committee received the report and noted that the College, as a tertiary college with a broad curriculum, is experienced in managing extremely large exam sessions. The impending construction work and much increased GCSE resits will add a new dynamic this year which has been planned for.

The Committee questioned whether managing behaviour during exams was an issue. It was confirmed that disruptive behaviour is not a concern and small or individual rooms are provided for those learners who may find a larger exam sitting challenging. Learners experiencing anxiety on exam days is more common. These learners are monitored and dealt with supportively with input from the wellbeing teams, CLT and SLT.

Governors queried whether exam logistics are supported by an electronic system. The College Information System provides data on how many learners are expected, whether they have access requirements and when exams have been successfully started.

The Committee was reassured that there are effective procedures in place for extreme weather conditions to ensure the comfort of learners. Public transport issues are also well managed and learners are made aware at an

early stage about planned industrial action. Unplanned cancellations are more difficult, however, parents/carers support each other with transport and the College also arranges to collect learners if needed. Awarding bodies allow learners to enter the exam room up to 30 minutes after the designated exam start time.

The Committee agreed the risk scoring for R1.64.

**The Committee thanked the Vice Principal and acknowledged the expertise and commitment of the exams team**

**3. Minutes**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023, as circulated, were agreed by the Committee.

3.2 The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023, as circulated, were agreed by the Committee.

**4. Matters Arising**

4.1 Payroll and Anti-fraud Controls Audit

The Committee was reminded of the payroll and anti-fraud controls audit undertaken in the previous academic year and that governors had sought clarification of the actions required to achieve substantial assurance. The Executive Director of Finance explained that a reasonable level of assurance is the most that can be achieved where there are priority 2 recommendations. It was confirmed that these actions had been completed.

**The Committee noted the report**

**5. Risk Management Update**

5.1 Risk Register

The Committee received the risk register and the Executive Director of Finance highlighted the changes since the previous Committee.

The Committee questioned the impact that recruiting host families would have on R1.44, student residential capacity and safeguarding. It was explained that the Clocktower accommodation is provided from Monday to Friday and has a dedicated Accommodation Manager. Host families would also provide Monday to Friday accommodation, however the process is slightly more complex as there are audits and risk assessments required to be carried out on homes as well as DBS checks for every member of the household.

In response to challenge related to R1.26 failure to meet safeguarding and prevent strategy requirements, the purpose of the web filtering and monitoring software (a requirement of Keeping Children Safe in Education) was explained. The College has also developed a system to go beyond compliance where it can monitor learner access to lower level online sites.

The Committee noted that an additional Deputy Safeguarding Lead was being recruited and it was hoped this would enable the risk level to reduce.

*This item was further discussed as a confidential item and recorded in the confidential minutes.*

**The Committee voted to recommend the risk register to the Board on 19 April 2024 subject to amending the inherent risk rating of R1.25** **HofG**

**6. Assurance Framework Discussion**

**6.1 Assurance Map progress update**

Following an initial discussion at the previous meeting, the Chair led a further discussion exploring the emerging assurance map for Exeter College. It was agreed that a draft assurance map would be circulated in April/May.

**The Committee agreed to receive the assurance map at its meeting on 10 June 2024** **JD**

**6.2 Risk Appetite**

The Committee considered how the College's risk appetite might be discussed and established. This may include how long-term risks or constant 'high' risks are monitored and managed. It was agreed that the landscape and threat vectors for some risks are always changing and that there is a need to ensure proper investment to mitigate high risks.

**The Committee agreed that a discussion related to risk appetite at the Board Residential would be useful** **HofG**

**6.3 Future Deep Dive Programme**

The Committee had requested and received a schedule of deep dives that had been undertaken in the previous five years to support discussion for future items. The time allocation for deep dives was considered appropriate to allow for assurance without scrutiny of the detail.

A further deep dive related to cyber security was suggested and the Committee was pleased to note that a potential new committee member is an IT/Strategy expert. It was suggested that some risks could be amalgamated for deep dive eg. cyber security and business continuity.

**The Committee agreed to receive a deep dive covering cyber security and business continuity to its meeting on 10 June 2024** **HofG**

**7. Internal Audit Service**

**7.1 Internal Audit Programme progress**

*This item was taken after item 7.4*

The Committee was reminded of the internal audit programme for 2023/2024 and noted that Tiaa had completed two audits this financial year, one of which had been carried over from the previous year's programme. The Committee sought and gained assurance from Tiaa that the remainder of the programme was achievable before the Committee's June 2024 meeting.

## **The Committee agreed to receive all outstanding internal audit reports at its meeting on 10 June 2024**

**JD**

### **7.2 GDPR Audit Report**

The Committee received the audit report and noted the grading of reasonable assurance due to six priority 3 recommendations. Although slightly disappointed, the College had accepted the recommendations and will use them to enhance processes. The Committee reflected that the recommendations were indeed low level and thought they might be at 'comment' level as opposed to actual priority 3 recommendations.

Governors challenged the recommendation related to not retaining emails in excess of twelve months. There was a concern that essential information may be lost which would impact on the smooth running of the business. It was agreed that the policy may need amending as opposed to changing practice.

The Data Protection Officer was confirmed as Martina Esser and the Senior Information Risk Officer is John Dowell.

### **The Committee noted the report**

### **7.3 Apprenticeship Audit Report update**

The Committee received an oral update and noted that the audit is in progress with no adverse comments emerging at the date of the meeting.

### **The Committee noted the report**

### **7.4 Internal Audit recommendations progress update**

The Committee noted that the only recommendations outstanding were from the most recent audit and were well within timescale.

### **The Committee noted the report**

*Gemma Noble joined the meeting*

## **8. Policies**

### **8.1 Whistleblowing policy**

The Committee received the updated whistleblowing policy and noted the amendments. Most of the changes were minor, however a new section had been added about independent advice and support.

In response to question, it was confirmed that the Head of Governance operates the disclosure email and contact with governors would be co-ordinated through her office. In the case of a fraud, the Committee was assured that the evaluation and investigation process is robust.

The Committee questioned whether learners are able to report potential risks and fraud. It was advised that the whistleblowing policy does not offer that as a route, however contact from learners is usually through the

feedback policy. There is also a confidential channel for learners to raise bullying or harassment issues.

**The Committee approved the whistleblowing policy**

*Roy Plowman left the meeting*

9. **Review of Performance of External Auditor**

- 9.1 The Committee noted that Bishop Fleming were appointed in March 2022 for an initial period of three years, followed by a further two years subject to satisfactory performance. The Executive Director of Finance gave a positive overview of the performance of the external auditor.

The Committee Chair acknowledged the good working relationship the College enjoys with Bishop Fleming and that, as chair, he is well briefed.

*This item was further discussed as a confidential item and recorded in the confidential minutes.*

**The Committee agreed to recommend the reappointment of Bishop Fleming as the external auditor for the year 2023/2024 to the Board for approval** HofG

10. **Emerging Risks**

The Committee considered that there were no additional risks to add to the risk register that had emerged during the meeting.

11. **Future Meetings**

- 11.1 The Committee agreed to take the following items to the Board:

- Deep Dives
- Risk Register
- Whistleblowing policy
- Appointment of external auditor
- Internal audit outcomes

11.2 Items for next meeting

The Committee reviewed the cycle of business for the following meeting and agreed to add the Assurance Map as an item for discussion.

11.3 Date of meetings

- Monday 10 June 2024

13. **Items for Information**

- 13.1 Anti-Fraud register

- 13.2 Register of Interests

Signed by the Chair 

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024