

Tuesday 12th November 2024 at 5.30pm
Held on Zoom

Present:

Gabrielle Williams Hamer – Chair of the Committee/Foundation Governor
Dave Navarro – Foundation Governor

Apologies:

Chukwuweta Uraih - Foundation Governor

In attendance:

Clare Baskott – Clerk to Governors
Graham Thompson - Principal
Margaret Searle - Director of Finance and Resources

Minutes

The meeting was quorate throughout.

All reports had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Item 1 - Committee time with the Auditors (if required)

A robust discussion took place about the Committee's time with the Auditors. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that this was a historic item on the agenda from when the internal auditors attended all of the Audit Committee meetings. The Director explained that the scope of the auditor's work had changed since the college had engaged Scrutton Bland for the internal audit work. The internal and external auditors consult with each other to provide assurance to the Committee. The Director explained that in order for the auditors to attend the remit would need to be updated and additional costs would be incurred. The Chair of the Committee said that she would revisit the issue in the future.

Item 2 Welcome and Opening Prayer – Chair of the Committee

The Principal opened the meeting in prayer at 5:41pm.

Item 3 Apologies for absence - Chair of the Committee

Apologies were received from Chukwuweta Uraih.

Item 4 Notification of any updated pecuniary and business interests or items relating to the agenda - Chair of the Committee

None.

Item 5 Minutes of the meeting held on 7th May 2024 for review and approval - Chair of the Committee

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the Committee and will be electronically signed by the Chair of the Committee in due course.

Item 6 Matters Arising - Chair of the Committee

None.

Item 7 Regularity Audit Self-Assessment 2023-24 - Chair of the Committee

The Committee formally received and approved the final version of the completed questionnaire as submitted to the auditor.

Item 8 Internal Audit: College Action Report: Director of Finance and Resources

The Director of Finance and Resources gave an overview of the report and explained that Action 3 was on-going and in progress.

Actions 1 and 2 had been both been implemented and were now closed.

Governor question: Are the new IT service providers now in place?

Response: Yes, they are, and they have uncovered a lot of issues with the network which need rectifying in order to secure our IT systems and prevent a cyber-attack.

Governor question: Do the current IT arrangements impact on the college's financial reporting system?

Response: The financial reporting systems software is secure; it is the IT infrastructure which needs to be upgraded. The new contractors are streamlining the system in order to make the workflow more efficient. We are confident in the new service providers.

A discussion took place about the challenges facing the new IT providers in order to bring the college's IT systems up to the required standard. The Principal explained that there was a Service Level Agreement in place with the new providers and that he was confident that the required infrastructure will be in put in place.

**Item 9 Risk Management – Principal
a to receive the updated Risk Register and policy**

The Principal gave an overview of the key active and emerging risks as outlined in the report.

Student Recruitment

The Principal reported that the student recruitment target was 1,285 and there were currently 1,303 students on roll, which was an increase of 30 students in comparison with autumn 2023. The Principal explained that a small number of students needed to achieve the 42 days on roll in order to be fully funded, as they had enrolled onto courses late.

Governor question: What was the fall out rate?

Response: At one point we had 1,400 on roll, but students often enrol and then move to other providers.

The Principal reported that the college was now offering the A Level Law course to attract students to the college.

The Principal reported that an emerging risk was the on-going uncertainty with the BTECs, which were currently being reviewed by the DfE. A decision around the future of BTECs was not expected until December 2024. The college had published a prospectus of courses for September 2025, but some courses may need to change, depending on what is decided about BTECs.

Governor question: Are staff in the college going to take strike action?

Response: Staff have voted for industrial action. The strike is against the Secretary of State for Education and is in response to Sixth Form Colleges not being given the same 5.5% pay award as schools.

Governor question: What have you awarded staff as a pay increase?

Response: We have not made a pay award yet. The budget was set with a 4% pay increase in the summer term.

A discussion took place about the disparities in the pay awards given to schools compared to Sixth Form Colleges. It was noted that the new national insurance employer contributions could also impact on the college budget, as they will not be fully funded.

Quality

The Principal reported that exams results were stronger, year on year.

The Principal explained that if the college did not award the 5.5% pay award, it would make the college less attractive to potential new staff and this could impact on the quality of education.

MIS/IT Infrastructure

The Principal reported that the college's Cyber Essentials certificate had expired in July 2024 and its renewal was a condition of funding. The new IT contractors were supporting the college through the new certifications.

A discussion took place about the importance of the Cyber Essentials certificate. It was noted that several colleges had been targeted in cyber security attacks.

Governor question: Does the college have insurance in place for cyber security?

Response: Yes, we have cyber security insurance in place.

Reputation

The Principal reported that the college received very few complaints.

Catholic Ethos

The Principal reported that the Catholic Ethos was strong.
The college was awaiting the Catholic School Inspection.

A discussion took place about the future Catholic School inspections.

Estates

The Principal reported that the Estates teams were strong.

HR

The Principal reported that there were no major issues with staff recruitment and retention. However, it was noted that it was often younger members of staff who chose to leave.

A key challenge was the recruitment of practising Catholics, as seen nationally.

Governance

A discussion took place about the importance of succession planning.

A discussion took place about the Risk Register and emphasizing the critical need to scrutinise potential unrecognised vulnerabilities in risk assessment, as had been evidenced with the college's IT infrastructure.

Item 10 Specification for Internal Audit 2024/25, reports to include:

10.1 Learner Recruitment

10.2 Funding Assurance

It was noted that the Committee had commissioned the above internal audits following the previous meeting.

Item 11 Board Assurance Framework

The Committee confirmed that the framework reviewed in Summer 2024, approved by the Governing Board, provided assurance in conjunction with the IAS assignments for end of year financial statements 2023-24.

Item 12 Audit Committee Annual Report to Governors for 2023-24

The Committee agreed that the report reflected all the activities that the committee had or should be carrying out; including the audit plans and levels of assurance in place.

It was noted that the signed report will be filed with the ESFA. There was no annual opinion from IAS.

Item 13 To receive an update on any enrolment issues and any actions taken to mitigate the issues will be included

The Principal gave an overview of the new T Level courses on offer and future recruitment to these courses.

It was agreed that student enrolment for 2024 had already been covered.

Item 14 Any Other Business

None.

Item 15 Date of Next meeting

Tuesday 4th February 2025 at 5:30pm

The meeting closed in prayer at 6:36pm.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Chair of the Committee

The minutes will be electronically signed, following approval by the Committee.