

**College of West Anglia**  
**Minutes of Audit & Risk Committee**  
**Wednesday, 26 February 2025**  
**9:30am – 12.00 noon**  
**Meeting Room – Principal's Suite, King's Lynn Campus**

<b>Present</b>	Ray Harding	Governor (Chair)
	Dave Clark	Governor (Vice Chair)
	Seb Ivanov	Governor
	Russel Liddington	Governor
<b>Attending</b>	Keri Williamson	Scrutton Bland
	Paul Harrison	Vice Principal Corporate Services
	Rob Petto	Assistant Principal Funding and Performance
	Jenny Quaif	Head of Finance
	Mandy Lakey	Employer Engagement Systems Implementation Manager
	Jules Bridges	Head of Governance

No.		Action
1	<b>Committee Members' briefing with Auditors (Governors and Auditors Only)</b> A confidential discussion was held prior to management attendance.	
2	<b>Apologies</b> Apologies for absence were received from Sharon Edwards. Apologies were also received from Claire Sutherland and Suzy Harper of RSM UK Audit LLP, and Paul Goddard and Leisyen Cox of Scrutton Bland. Keri Williamson was in attendance from Scrutton Bland to deal with their agenda items.	
3	<b>Declaration of Interests</b> There were no items of interest declared.	
4	<b>Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 4 December 2024</b> The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024 were reviewed and <b>agreed</b> as being an accurate record.	
5	<b>Matters Arising</b> The progress arising from the previous meeting were summarised in the progress report and all actions reported had either been resolved or, where appropriate, an update had been provided on progress elsewhere on the agenda.  The tender for a VAT specialist advisor has closed and an appointment is anticipated to be made thereafter. Governors were informed of the specialist firms who had tendered for the contract. Final meetings with bidders are to take place at the end of this week.	
J Quaif joined the meeting at 9.35am		
	The Head of Finance confirmed that if assets exist, they will always show in the Fixed Asset Register even if the net book value (nbv) is nil. A review of all 'old' assets for write-off will be completed and this will be conducted at the year-end as part of the close down process. The target date will be changed to September 2025 to reflect this.	HoF
	Internal Auditors have proposed for the Green Skills/Capital Projects internal audit work to be carried over 7-8 July 2025 and the New Finance System audit could be carried out 21-22 July 2025 or moved into the 2025/26 academic year. It is unlikely that the new system will go live before July 2025 so a discussion will be held with internal auditors to assess the entire process and perhaps conduct the audit on a phased basis, both pre and post implementation.	VPCS / SB

As requested, governors were provided with the sickness absence levels pre-COVID which showed a downward trend of average days lost per member of staff with a spike during lockdown. The data for the first quarter of 2024/25 suggests that this trend is continuing however the rate has increased in this term as reported under agenda item 11 below. Governors questioned if other benchmark data could be useful comparators such as NHS national data as flu and respiratory conditions were reported in high levels in the winter this year. It was agreed that relative comparators would be provided where possible in future reports.

All other completed items are to be removed from the report.

HoG

## 6 Risk and Assurance Progress Report

The progress report was shared with the committee. Audit work is on target in terms of the audits completed and those still to come. There were no issues to report.

## 7 Internal Audit Reports

### 1 Additional Learner Support/HNL

The objective of the audit was to provide assurance that the college is optimising funding based on the support provided, maintaining robust records that evidences the support provided to High Needs Learners and to ensure that the relationship between the college and the Local Authorities is appropriate and working well in practice.

The assurance opinion was significant (green status) with one low risk recommendation and one best practice point made regarding the college's development of its student portal platform.

Governors asked if it was a risk to the college that it was found that detailed procedures relating to the ALS function are not in place due to the complexity of high needs funding. Auditors acknowledged the challenges in developing documented procedures and this was in line with findings at other colleges in their field work. The VPCS agreed to establish if there were generic procedures that could be documented with the team and would report back to the committee.

VPCS

### 2 Learner Recruitment – Classroom Based

The objective of the audit was to review the processes followed for recruiting learners, including the effectiveness of the admissions processes. This included a mystery shopping exercise.

The assurance opinion was significant (green status) with four low risk recommendations made and 1 added value point. The four recommendations made were to 1) incorporate the learner recruitment strategy/approach into the marketing plan, 2) enhance the self-service portal to facilitate comprehensive monitoring of applicants requiring support plans, 3) determine KPIs to monitor the efficiency of the application process, and 4) reintroduce focus groups at the start of each academic year.

Governors raised concern that auditors found through testing that the average time between receiving an acknowledgement email and being sent an information session invite was 37.6 days. Auditors agreed to revisit the audit file to ascertain how many of the sample took this time, although it was acknowledged that if applicants requiring support plans were excluded from the test, the average days it took to respond reduced to an average of 4.3 days.

SB

The mystery shopping exercise tested the application experience and looked at the functionality of the process, using the website, the responses received, and how quickly these were actioned. Governors asked if CWA could carry out mystery shopping tests internally and it was agreed that this would be considered.

In addition, governors were interested to see that from the list of social media platforms that the college uses, Facebook had the highest number of followers yet other more modern platforms had lower numbers of posts and followers. The VPCS commented that

the marketing team are particularly sensitive and responsive to the channels that young people use and are always quizzing prospective and current students to find out which platforms they tend to, or like to utilise.

## **8 Progress on Implementing Agreed Audit Actions**

The Head of Finance reported that the audit recommendations are progressing well, and the tracker is up to date. Good progress has been made regarding the health and safety actions from the audit undertaken at the end of 2024. It was noted that recommendation 29 is red as the January 2025 deadline has been missed however the plan is to convert the manual paper process for expenses to online perhaps utilising iTrent or another platform (to be identified by MIS).

It was noted that no updates on recommendations 43 and 44 were available but the Head of Finance would chase these for the next meeting of the committee. Recommendation 41 has progressed although dependent on price the college will seek to proceed with an online web-based application and if too costly will resolve by developing a 'log-a-job' approach through the internal Hornbill system. The recommendations arising from the Health and Safety audit (points 50-56) have made good progress. The college has risk assessed the position concerning installation of a fire detection system for the equine arena and it is feasible to install detectors in this space including the viewing gallery and discrete portal alarms. We are now waiting to receive the cost of installation.

Governors queried why recommendation 46 was overdue if monthly progress meetings are held. The VPCS agreed to find out and discuss with the Head of HR. It was further queried by governors why recommendations 43 and 44 had been pushed back to a later deadline of March 2025 given that these related to apprenticeship provision. It was suggested that governors challenged this with the Assistant Principal Finance and Performance who would be joining the meeting for the next agenda item.

VPCS

R Petto and M Lakey joined the meeting at 10.10am

The Assistant Principal Funding and Performance explained that these actions had been pushed to a later deadline as the planned structural changes were yet to complete. The recommendations made from the internal audit work are achievable and governors were reassured that the intention is to address these through the structural changes that are planned to be in place for the end of March 2025.

## **9 Funding Assurance Report**

A review of the different systems associated with apprenticeships has been completed and this now enables the redevelopment of current systems that will give CWA better control of systems and processes. This is a four/five design piece with the hope that some implementation can be met for the intake of new students in September 2025.

Governors asked if the government changes proposed around end point assessments would be a help to CWA or a hindrance. The move to on-programme assessments may replace or certainly would ease the pressure of end point assessments but the likelihood of this is unknown. Furthermore, governors wondered if functional skills were to be quashed, would lower-level learners choose an apprenticeship route who would potentially need more support to achieve their qualification and how would the college be able to respond/accommodate this. The Assistant Principal Funding and Performance suggested that robust advice and guidance would be key to ensure that the right learner was on the right programme/course and this change would essentially impact 19+ as opposed to 16-18s.

Solutions for Polymers Ltd have been successful in their application to join the APAR (Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register) and current apprentices are planned to transition from CWA to S4PL by 31 March 2025. Those learners who are close to the end of their programme are expected to continue and complete with CWA under the current S4PL subcontracting model. A special dispensation code (for the ILR return) for those that

will transfer to S4PL has been granted by the ESFA to ensure that their transfer will not impact retention, achievement and funding for CWA.

R Petto and M Lakey left the meeting at 10.25am

#### **10 Risk & Internal Controls Update**

The ESFA funding announcement expected this month has been delayed to March 2025. There is the expectation that government will cover the NI employer increase although the public sector experience is that only half the amount has been covered. For CWA, NI employer contributions is c.£200k so if only half is received this is c.£100k.

The team has been focussing on improving college health and safety arrangements and regarding the Safesmart compliance target of 75% that governors asked if appropriate the proposal is to change the aggregate scoring mechanism to separate the individual elements to measure 95% target for risk assessment completion, 90% target health and safety training compliance, and 90% target achievement on tests and checks. The Health and Safety committee will then track, monitor and challenge the progress made against these KPIs.

The committee was informed that the ICT element of the colleges disaster recovery arrangements requires urgent update. Due to the absence of the Head of IT however this will be moved into March 2025 for completion and governors were given assurance that this remains a key focus.

Governors commented that it was disappointing that the relationship with the OU has ceased, and this raised concern generally for the colleges ability to fulfil its 2024-2035 HE strategy. The board will need to consider the future strategic direction of this provision and the risk score on the corporate risk register has been increased in recognition of the future uncertainty for HE at UcWA.

Finally, it was noted that the LEV report for the King's Lynn campus has been received, and the remedial works are in progress. External specialists have also undertaken a review of the LEV installation at Wisbech campus. The detailed report is expected soon.

#### **11 Risk Register Review**

The report details the risk movement since December 2024 with three risks that have moved up, and two that have moved down.

A governor commented that risk R005, has increased in score due to higher absence rates yet the risk is about staff recruitment and retention. Absence does impact retention as where there are high levels of sickness absence this puts pressure on those picking up additional workload and this has been caused an associated issue with retention particularly in English and Maths.

The Chair questioned why risk R003 (lack of funding/poor financial management leads to insufficient liquidity, ability to invest and/or regulatory intervention) had a residual score of 16 (red) as CWA liquidity is good. The high score had been determined to reflect the uncertainty of in-year funding and risk of potentially making a pay award without having certainty/secured funding. It was agreed that this risk will be rephrased to better articulate the risk.

VPCS

#### **12 GDPR/DPO Report (inc. FOI/SAR & Whistleblowing cases)**

The report confirms that the college has made good progress against the 156 recommendations arising from the compliance audit where the compliance level was found to be 'requires improvement' at 51%. At the last meeting held in December 2024 compliance was at 62% and is now at 70%. There is confidence that a 'good' level (80%+) of compliance will be achieved by the end of the academic year.

Since the last report to the committee, it was confirmed that 11 data breaches had been logged. Four of these were categorised as unauthorised access and a governor asked if

these were serious issues. The Head of Governance confirmed that these incidents were user error and all low level where data had perhaps been shared with others or access had been given to others that didn't need to see that information. None of these incidents were reportable to the ICO.

It was reported that the Head of Governance had handled three FOI requests and two DSARs since the last meeting of the committee. Governors queried why one of the DSARs had been handled as such as it was a request from a former student for their OneDrive files from their qualification. As the data had contained PII (Personally Identifiable Information) it therefore had to be treated as a DSAR. This had been satisfied relatively swiftly and uploaded to a secure portal where it could be accessed and downloaded to the data subject.

### **13 Review of Contracts Register, Waivers and Debt Write-Offs**

The report detailed six waived contracts with reasons for the waiver provided. CWA was only able to obtain two quotes for the contract of the servicing of the Fire Alarm system at King's Lynn, so this was awarded and waived as the equipment (for health and safety reasons) needed to be in service. The Property Services Team will be asked to go to market sooner in the process and the new procurement rules will help with this.

It was noted that the lease of the Downham Market premises ends in March 2025 and CWA is in negotiation with Norfolk County Council who are looking to conduct a commercial review and increase the rent. These premises are shared with Downham Library and the increase is considered reasonable so there is every confidence that services there will continue.

It was noted that the Mobilityways contract value in the table of the report was a three-year value, not per year and will be partly funded by Norfolk County Council and Lindum. Mobilityways work with employers to provide the tools and knowledge to achieve zero carbon commuting so it is hoped that this contract will help to take some pressure off car parking arrangements at the King's Lynn campus for example.

R Liddington left the meeting at 11.00am

### **14 CWA Publication Scheme (FOI) & Guidelines**

The committee was content with the changes made to the document and **approved** the scheme and guidelines for publication.

HoG

### **15 Schedule of Matters Reserved and Scheme of Delegation Review**

The Schedule of Matters Reserved has been updated to reflect and align key documentation and references. The committee agreed the changes made subject to resolving the query around point 6 of the scheme of delegation to correct the level of delegation at either Corporation, or the Finance and General Purposes committee. The adjusted copy will be presented to the Corporation, recommended for approval, at the meeting to be held on 26 March 2025.

HoG  
VPCS

### **16 Governors/SMT Expenses – Annual Review**

The annual review of governor and SMT expenses was received with no material transactions to report.

### **17 Gifts and Hospitality Register - Review**

The two entries of the gifts and hospitality register since the last report received in March 2024, were received and accepted by the committee with no issues arising.

### **18 Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

### **19 Chair's Items for Briefing to Corporation**

- An internal audit of the Green Skills/Capital Projects will take place at the beginning of July 2025. The internal audit of the New Finance System will be conducted on a phased basis, both pre and post implementation.

Chair

- The internal audits of Additional Learner Support/HNL, and Learner Recruitment – Classroom based both received significant assurance (green status).
- Solutions for Polymers Ltd have been successful in their application to join the APAR (Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register) and current apprentices are planned to transition from CWA to S4PL by 31 March 2025. Some will continue their learning with CWA.
- The college has made good progress against the 156 recommendations arising from the GDPR compliance audit. Progress is currently at 70% and there is confidence that a 'good' level (80%+) of compliance will be achieved by the end of the academic year.
- The committee has reviewed and **approved** the CWA Publication Scheme (FOI) & Guidelines
- The committee recommends that the corporation approves the reviewed Schedule of Matters Reserves and Scheme of Delegation.
- The annual review of governor and SMT expenses was received with no material transactions to report.

## **20 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 25 June 2025 at 9:30am (Meeting Room, Principal's Suite, KL)

Meeting ended at 11.10am