

BOSTON COLLEGE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 MARCH 2024

1. PRESENT

Sandra Williamson (Chair), Andy Atkins, Daran Bland, Daniel Elkington and Katy Priestley.

Also in attendance: Janet Hemmant (Clerk to the Corporation), Claire Foster (Principal and CEO), Debbie Holland (Chief Operating Officer), Jonathan Creed (ICCA), Gareth Jones (RSM) and Harvey Mudd (RSM).

Apologies for absence were received from James Brindle.

Attendance: 83%

2. ACTION LOG AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKING

Members reviewed the committee's action log and noted progress made.

It was noted that the financial handbook had just been issued. It was reported that the Finance and Resources committee would look at staff recruitment and retention plan at its next meeting. It was agreed that Tom Hughes should either speak to the committee himself about the effect of AI on efficiency or nominate staff to do so. ●

The recommendations tracking log was reviewed and progress against items with amber ratings noted. Debbie Holland advised that issues with apprenticeship progress reviews had been addressed and Jonathan Creed confirmed that the 2024 funding audit will check this. It was noted that this item would remain open pending the audit.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November were reviewed and approved.

It was noted that the suggestion at this meeting for deep dives on risks had been initiated by ICCA.

4. INTERNAL AUDIT

Jonathan Creed presented a number of reports:

a) Office for Students Registration

This report carried a Substantial assurance opinion. Jonathan explained that the single recommendation related to annual completion of the OFS self evaluation.

b) Curriculum efficiency

This report carried a Reasonable assurance opinion. Jonathan explained that the audit had not looked at areas already covered in work with the FE Commissioner. The established planning process covers adult provision so the audit focused on ad hoc activity. He recommended that proper assessments of this work should include examining the justification for provision with lower contribution levels. This is a relatively small amount of activity.

The report included two recommendations on apprenticeships and distance learning. Jonathan identified the need to ensure that correct costs are used to

calculate case loading for this work. Sandra Williamson asked which committee would look at this and it was noted that the Finance and Resources committee would review this as part of its budget setting overview. The balance of provision is important and cross subsidy needs to be identified.

c) Risk Management

This report carried a Substantial assurance opinion. The committee noted that a recommendation that the corporation should consider its risk appetite had already been actioned. This and a recommendation relating to the description of the role of the audit committee will be covered when the Risk Management policy is reviewed in September 2024. In response to a query from Sandra Williamson, Debbie Holland confirmed that the policy will be brought to the committee for review before endorsement by the corporation. Jonathan advised that most colleges bring the policy for review on an annual basis

Daran Bland commended the alignment of risk categories with committees and suggested that committees review these risks at least once a year. Sandra suggested that this would strengthen the review process with committees looking at strategic rather than operational risks. Daran commented that this scrutiny would help committees to see how risks are being mitigated.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

Members received a report from the Chief Operating Officer on Risk Management.

Members reviewed the contents of the Risk Register and detailed information on the most significant risks. Debbie Holland advised that some changes had been made to the presentation of information. It was noted that the Financial Handbook requires more information on risk being provided to corporations. Jonathan commented that the handbook sought to increase the corporation's ownership of risk across all of its committees rather than just Audit.

A discussion took place about cyber security and staffing with Sandra Williamson enquiring whether enough resource was provided for this. Debbie Holland advised that the college was doing what it could but there was always some risk. Sandra asked how strong contingency plans were and Debbie told members that there were tabletop exercises on risks. Further examination of what a cyber attack could mean for Boston College was suggested. Jonathan Creed advised that the greatest impact of cyber attacks did not always come from the most obvious systems. Staff training gives an opportunity for this to be reviewed. Katie Priestley asked what the college's target was relating to the rate of clicks on unverified links and Debbie offered to check this..

6. FRAUD AND CORRUPTION REPORTING

Debbie Holland confirmed that there was nothing to report.

7. FINANCIAL HANDBOOK

Gareth Jones advised that analysis of the implications of the Financial Handbook would be in the emerging issues information for the next meeting. He noted that some recommendations were relevant now even if the handbook is effective from the new year.

8. NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the committee would take place on Teams on 13 June 2024.