

CCEA

ARAC COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes of the sixty third Audit & Risk Assurance Committee meeting held on Thursday 14 March 2024

10am – 12pm

Hybrid attendance via MS TEAMS and Room 115, CCEA HQ

Present :

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Members

Mrs D O'Connor (Chair)	Prof S Morison
Dr M Johnston	Mrs A Kinglsey
Mr H McCarthy	

CCEA Executive

Mr G Campbell (Chief Executive Officer)
Mr M Crossan (Interim Director of Qualifications)
Mr M McAuley (Temporary Business Manager Qualifications)
Mr J Daly (Business Manager, Financial Services)

Ms J Burns (Temporary Manager, Council Secretariat)

In Attendance

Mr R Falls (Cavanagh Kelly)
Mr P O'Sullivan (Nother Ireland Audit Office)
Mr D Anderson (Education Authority)
Mr R Caldwell (Department of Education)

MINUTES

1. Apologies:

Apologies were received from: Mrs J Bartley

2. Conflict of Interests

There were no conflicts of interest declared at this meeting.

3. Chairs Business

The Committee Chair welcomed committee members, CCEA staff as well as external representatives to the meeting. She introduced new members to the committee and all attendees spoke of their role within the organisation.

Training for Audit Committee

VERBAL

The Chair informed members that specific training was to be organised for ARAC members and information regarding this would follow in due course.

Terms of Reference (ToR)

The Chair referred to the CCEA ToR for the committee and spoke of the importance of consistent attendance. The CEO emphasised the importance of the ToR and the committee as a whole as its purpose was to provide himself and Council with the assurance that the organisation had the correct systems in place to comply with policies and procedures.

The CEO asked that the ToR were approved by members. They were proposed by Mr H McCarthy and seconded by Mrs A Kingsley.

Correspondence

2023/2024 Accounts Direction and Year End Timetable:

Requirement for original draft Annual Report and Accounts had originally been one week earlier and this extra time will have an impact on the timetable for the production of the Annual Report and Accounts.

4. Ratification of Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 19 January 2024

It was agreed that the minutes provided were an accurate reflection of the previous meeting. The minute were proposed by Mrs A Kingsley and seconded by Mrs D O'Connor

The Chair also referred to the actions log and confirmed that all actions had been completed.

5. Financial Risk Control and Assurance

Risk and Assurance in Awards and Purchases (Jan 24 – Feb 24)

AUD/63/1

The Chair invited the Business Manager of Financial Services (BMFS) to present an update to the committee on 'Risk and Assurance in Awards and Purchases'. He informed the committee that this was a standard report that provided an overview of unauthorised purchases greater than £1,500 as well as 'Direct Award Contracts' from January to February 2024.

The BMFS reported no unauthorised purchases during the 2023-2024 period.

He reported three Direct Award Contracts during the reporting period (Jan 24 – Feb 24) totalling to £4,494.70 (excluding VAT).

Committee members received clarification on the detail of the information provided and were satisfied with the content of the report.

Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 Progress Report

AUD/63/2

The BMFS provided detail of the progress to date on the Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24. He informed members that upon completion of the audit, it is expected that the Annual Report and Accounts will be reviewed and approved by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on the 18 June 2024.

The Chairperson and Chief Executive will then approve and sign the Annual Report and Accounts following Council approval on the 20 June 2024.

Members were satisfied with the detail provided and thanked the BMFS for the update.

6. Corporate Risk Management and Audit

Draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

AUD/63/3

The CEO advised members that the current version was very much an early draft that had been issued to DE for feedback on 08 March 2024. He informed that it followed a standard template and welcomed feedback from committee members.

The committee discussed in detail some areas of concern regarding the length of the document as well as some issues around content and duplication. A committee member felt that the content was passive rather than directive in relation to the importance of Council. She also emphasised the importance to align the Annual Governance Statement with the Terms of Reference.

The CEO asked for opinion from Mr D Anderson and Mr R Caldwell. Mr Anderson said that it was a DE template and Mr Caldwell said that it was the quality of content rather than quantity that mattered the most from the statement.

The CEO asked Dr M Johnston if he would be willing to provide assistance with the document. Dr M Johnston agreed to this.

Corporate Risk Register (CRR)

AUD/63/4

The Chair invited the BMFS to provide detail of the paper to committee members.

The BMFS informed members that the Business Assurance Team have agreed to increase the frequency of reviewing the CRR and aim for monthly reviews rather than quarterly.

He then provided detailed information regarding the status of CCEA's eight risks. He confirmed that after careful review by the risk owners, the residual scores of three risks had increased while the remaining five had not changed.

The residual score of corporate risk one increased from ten to fifteen primarily due to on-going industrial action and proximity of the summer series. The BMFS detailed mitigations that had been put in place.

The residual score of corporate risk four increased from twelve to sixteen primarily due to challenges with resourcing in the Irish Medium department and recent legislation relating to RSE. The BMFS detailed mitigation that had been put in place.

The residual score of corporate risk six increased from sixteen to twenty due to the financial impact of additional statutory pressures in 2024/2025. The BMFS detailed mitigations that had been put in place.

The committee discussed in detail the substantial risk regarding the recent departures of key senior staff members.

Mr R Caldwell asked if potential failures or single points of failure had been identified within the CRR and asked if the high-level risk of failing to deliver on statutory duties pertaining to Curriculum, Assessment, Examinations and Regulation be captured explicitly linked to resources. The Chair said that she hoped to establish a working group that would identify these as well as assess what CCEA do to achieve the level of assurance that is required.

A committee member suggested that AI is also a risk and should be included in CR4. The CEO agreed and that it should be added to the CRR.

External Audit Strategy 2023/24

AUD/63/5

The Chair invited Mr R Falls to provide an update on the External Audit Strategy. He informed members that the NIAO Audit Strategy had been shared with the committee in order to outline both the purpose of the exercise as well as outline key dates and deadlines.

Members were asked to note the information and seek clarification where required.

Internal Audit Schedule & Reviews

AUD/63/6 & AUD/63/7

The Chair invited Mr D Anderson to provide an update on the Internal Audit Schedule. He provided a summary of the agreed annual plan for 2023/2024 including the current status, timescales and reporting to the Committee.

He advised that two recent internal audits on absence and disciplinary as well as cyber security both had positive outcomes. He informed members there were a small number of recommendations but had concerns that previously made recommendations had not been taken onboard. He agreed to provide a paper with more detail on the subject for the next meeting.

Members were asked to note the information and seek clarification where required.

6. Examinations

Risk Management Report

AUD/63/8

The Chair invited the Interim Director of Qualifications (IDoQ) and the Temporary Business Manager of Qualifications (TBMoQ) to present this paper and provide detail to committee members. The paper outlined the operational readiness of the summer 2024 series and the journey back to pre-pandemic standards as per Ministerial direction.

The IDoQ informed the committee that the examinations directorate manage a comprehensive operational readiness risk log which identifies specific risks that require attention.

The committee considered each risk and asked questions in relation to issues with the printers, industrial action, resourcing and increase in examiner fees. The TDoE provided detail on these queries and the committee were satisfied with the information provided.

8. Any other Business

There was no other business identified.

9. Date of Next Meeting

Committee Chair thanked members for their attendance and confirmed that the date of the next meeting was 24 April 2024 at 10am.