

CCEA

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee

Minutes of the sixty-second meeting of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee held on Friday 19 January 2024 via MS Teams.

Present : Mrs D O'Connor (Chair) Mr H McCarthy
Mrs P Leitch
Mrs A Kingsley

Executive

Mr G Campbell (Chief Executive)
Mrs L Scott (Director of Finance & Corporate Services)
Mr M Crossan (Temporary Director of Examinations)
Mrs S King (Head of Regulation)
Mr J Daly (Financial Services Manager)
Mr D Wilson (Business Assurance Manager)

Mrs P Bowden (PA to CEO)

In Attendance

Mrs A Kane (DE)
Mr R Falls, Cavanagh Kelly
Mr D Anderson, Education Authority
Mr P O'Sullivan, NIAO

Introduction

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Professor P Hanna and Mr R Caldwell (DE) with Mrs A Kane representing DE.

Conflict of Interests

Members confirmed there were no conflict of interest in relation to any of the agenda items.

Chair's Business

The Chair informed members of the current arrangement in relation to the departure of the previous Chair of this committee.

External Attendees

The Chair welcomed Mr Derek Anderson (EA - Internal Auditors), Mr Peter O' Sullivan (NIAO), Mr Ryan Falls (Cavanagh Kelly – External Auditors), and Ms Angela Kane (DE Sponsor Team) who was representing Ray Caldwell (DE) at the meeting.

Officer & Representative Attendance

Mr John Daly (Financial Services Manager) and Mr David Wilson (Business Assurance Manager) were in attendance to provide details on various agenda items as required.

Ratification of the previous meeting held on 20 September 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 September 2023 were proposed by Mrs P Leitch and seconded by Mr H McCarthy as a true and accurate record. A copy would be available for the Acting Chair to sign.

Action Points

The Chair drew members' attention to the action points and invited the relevant officers to provide updates on the following action points.

AUD 61/1 Consider format and content of the assurance report.

The Financial Services Manager (FSM) reported that the status of this action was in progress. He committed to providing an update at the next committee meeting.

AUD 61/4 The issue of AI in education and associated risks to be referred to the Education Committee to widen the discussion and review potential risks.

The Chief Executive (CEO) reported this action was being considered and addressed. It was discussed at the Education Committee on 11 January 2024 and that it was also referenced in CCEA's new draft corporate plan.

Members noted the progress and information provided related to the action points.

Financial Risk Control and Assurance

Risk and Assurance in Awards and Purchases

AUD/62/1

The Chair invited the Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DoFCS) to introduce the paper which provided the details of awards and purchases.

The DoFCS reported that during April 2023 to December 2023 there were no purchases greater than £1,500 processed as unauthorised. She further reported during the September 2023 to December 2023 reporting period, a total of £2,460,942 was paid to suppliers.

The DoFCS referred to one direct award contract *POSERV15392* and provided the members with the background to this. She referred the members to the details which were provided in the overall summary in Appendix 1 of the paper.

A committee members sought clarity in relation to the terminology of professional associates related to education work. The FSM responded this was classified this way for internal purposes only. The CEO noted similar terminology was used in various educational bodies.

The Chair noted CCEA's £5k threshold in relation to direct award contracts. The FSM assured the members there were internal processes and procedures in place to mitigate this.

The Chair commended the team on the position in relation to the trend of non-authorised awards and purchases and also the direct award contracts.

Members noted the information/position provided.

Annual Report and Accounts

AUD/62/2

The Chair informed members the purpose of this paper was to make the committee aware of the process and anticipated timelines to produce the Annual Report & Accounts. She invited the DoFCS to introduce the paper and the FSM would provide any clarification which members may have.

The DoFCS informed the members a planning meeting with Cavanagh Kelly had been undertaken. She articulated the process and timelines for the members.

A Council Member expressed concern in relation to the schedule of committee meetings in order to meet the timelines associated with the approval for the Governance Statement. It was agreed the schedule of committee meetings would be reviewed to ensure the dates were timely.

Mr Peter O'Sullivan (NIAO) suggested, if required, a virtual committee could be convened towards the end of May for this single agenda item.

Members noted the process and timelines associated with the production of the Annual Report & Accounts.

Corporate Risk Management and Audit

2023-24 Corporate Risk Register (CRR)

AUD/62/3

The Chair reminded the members the CRR was formally reviewed on a quarterly basis within CCEA and invited the DoFCS to introduce this item.

The DoFCS drew attention to the detailed information at paper *AUD/62/3* and provided an update on the corporate risks and associated risk environment. She reminded members that the format of the CRR had been revised in line with the DE Risk register and best practice. She referred to the dashboard and heatmap which identified the level of risks at this time including the changes to residual risk ratings since the last review as provided in the paper.

Members sought and received clarification on a wide range of risk issues, including these significant risks - Summer examination series, impact of industrial strikes, development of RSE guidance in light of the public consultation, Artificial Intelligence and the risks associated with the turnover of senior positions.

The CEO and Temporary Director of Examinations (TDoE) separately reassured the committee the risks highlighted by members were being addressed. The TDoE informed members there was also an operational risk log embedded within the examinations directorate. A Council Member stated this was reassuring.

A Council Member thanked all the staff who contributed to the processes and procedures to deliver the examinations series throughout the pandemic period. She expressed her support for additional staffing resources to support the delivery of the next Summer examination series.

The CEO thanked members for their observations and comments in relation to the CRR. He provided the committee with assurance that the issues were covered in the key corporate risks and operational risks captured at operational level.

The Chair informed members that Irish Medium (IM) and Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE) has been discussed at length at the previous Council meeting. IM and RSE are included within the

corporate risk register ensuring the effective identification, assessment, and resolution of risks and issues related to these areas.

Mrs P Leitch left the meeting at this point.

Members noted the status of the corporate risks.

General Conditions of Recognition (GCoR) – Statement of Compliance **AUD/62/4**

The Chair informed the committee CCEA was required to submit an annual statement of compliance and that this paper provided an update on the annual return of the GCoR. The paper included a copy of the submission. She invited the Business Assurance Manager (BAM) to provide a high-level outline of the submission.

The Head of Regulation notified a conflict of interest and left the meeting for the discussions on this agenda item.

Members approved the submission.

Internal Audit Reports – Internal Audit Examinations Entries **AUD/62/5**

The Chair reported the Internal Audit Report for Exam Entries was completed as part of CCEA's Internal Audit Plan for 2023-24. She welcomed Mr Derek Anderson to provide the committee with a summary of the report.

Mr Anderson reported the audit opinion as a *Satisfactory* assurance level rating with 14 Internal Audit recommendations, 11 of which were assessed as low priority.

The CEO thanked Mr Anderson for the thorough audits which had been undertaken.

The Chair commended the examinations team for their hard work and contributions in assisting with the internal audit on examination entries.

Members noted the report.

CCEA Internal Audit Schedule 2023-24 **AUD/62/6**

The Chair reminded members that the 2023/24 to 2025/26 Internal Audit Strategy was approved at this committee's last meeting. She invited Derek Anderson to provide the committee with the details of the audit schedule.

Mr Anderson provided a summary of the agreed Annual Plan for 2023/24 including the current status, timescales for fieldwork and reporting to ARAC. The plan and the associated timescales have been discussed and agreed with the Managers responsible for the first assignment and will be discussed and agreed prior to fieldwork for the remaining assignments. He confirmed the following audits have been identified for completion by end of March 2024:

- Exam paper production and security
- Administrative support

Members noted the information provided.

Revised CCEA Whistleblowing Policy **AUD/62/7**

The Chair reminded members that the CCEA Whistleblowing Policy was last approved by this committee in April 2022. The version provided in the papers reflected some further updates which

were necessary to ensure that the policy remained fit-for-purpose. She invited the BAM to provide the committee with the details of the updates/amendments made to the policy.

The BAM provided a broad overview of these changes made to the policy:

- The policy has been updated to reflect the current Council member Whistleblowing contact;
- The external disclosures section has been updated to remove reference to the NI Civil Service Commissioners following confirmation that this is not a reporting pathway available to CCEA staff; and
- Explicit reference has been made that the policy has been reviewed in light of the NI Civil Service Action Plan in Response to an External Independent Review and being consistent with Department of Finance Raising a Concern Policy Framework published in January 2023.

The Chair observed some public sector organisations had retitled this policy to '*Raising Concerns Policy*'. It was agreed consideration would be given to amending the title in line with good practice with the NIAO's guidance to '*Raising Concerns Policy*'.

Mrs A Kingsley proposed and Mr H McCarthy seconded the approval of the revised policy.

Updates

Any Other Business

NIAO Update

Mr Peter O'Sullivan reported being on target for the audit review in March 2024.

Cavanagh Kelly Update

Mr Ryan Falls gave an update on the progress made to date in planning for the 2023/4 audit. He reported being on target for delivery of the strategy for March 2024.

DE Update

Ms A Kane introduced herself to the Committee noting that she was looking forward to working with CCEA in her role at the Department. She acknowledged the risks which have been identified and discussed.

The Chair commended the DoFCS and TDoE for their respective contributions to CCEA over the years and she wished them well and every future success in their new jobs.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chair confirmed the next meeting was scheduled for 13 March 2024 at 2 pm.