

NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

Minutes of Audit Committee

Held on 29 October 2019 in the Conference Room, FH201, Francis House, Norwich

Present

Mr A Grimby (Chair)
Mrs A Ferguson
Mr P Norton
Mr C Owen
Mr T Wood

In attendance

Ms S Beavis, KPMG, External Auditor
Mr S Belderbos, Director of Finance, NUA
Prof J Last, Vice Chancellor
Mr M Jones, RSM, Internal Auditor
Mrs A Robson, Deputy Vice Chancellor, NUA
Ms A Tubb, Registrar, NUA
Mr D Williams, Clerk

Apologies

None

APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

Mrs A Ferguson was appointed to the position of Vice Chair.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference had been updated to reflect the establishment of the Office for Students (OfS). The Committee agreed the revised terms of reference.

Chair

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 7 June 2019 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

1. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 5.1 GDPR: an update had been included in the papers for the current meeting

2. OfS MATTERS

2.1. Material Adverse Events Reporting

The Committee noted the report and that no reportable material adverse events had occurred during the last year.

3. QAA MATTERS

3.1. Recent OfS/QAA publications

The list of publications was noted. Since the list of publications had been compiled the OfS had issued further publications, and two such publications would be discussed at the next meeting of the Council.

Two of the University's staff were QAA auditors, who normally undertook two institutional visits on behalf of QAA each year.

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3.2. Annual Summary of Complaints

The Committee received information, including the University's Annual Statement for 2018 issued by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, which provided an annual summary of complaints made against the University.

The University had historically only received a small number of complaints and this had been the case in 2018 with 2 complaints being referred to the OIA for that year.

For the year 2018/19, NUA had received 6 complaints, none of which were upheld. Academic complaints made by students were normally teaching related, which non-academic complaints often involved accommodation and issues about other students.

Student appeals were a separate category to complaints.

Despite a tendency for the number of complaints against universities to increase, the University had not experienced any material change in the volume of complaints received

The Committee noted the report.

3.3. Tier 4 sponsorship – baseline compliance assessment confirmation

The University was still waiting for response from UK Visa and Immigration on the continuation of its Tier 4 sponsorship status, having submitted its documentation by the required deadline.

3.4. GDPR update

The Committee received an update on GDPR. All, bar one, of previously outstanding actions with regard to the University's GDPR Action Plan had been completed. The only outstanding action relating to privacy notices, could not be completed until the government had passed the delayed E-Privacy legislation which is expected to become the law in 2019.

The Committee noted and welcomed the summary of the Information Security Incident reporting. Subsequent reports to the Committee would focus on new incidents. Members suggested that the incidents experienced by the University might be used as case examples in the training/updating of staff to maintain awareness.

3.5. Personal data sharing – Brexit implications

The Committee noted the potential implications for personal data sharing of BREXIT.

4. INTERNAL AUDIT

4.1. Internal Audit Annual Report – year ended 31 July 2019

The Committee received the internal audit annual report. The Head of internal audit's opinion for 2018/19 was positive, but reflecting the findings in relation to cyber security and GDPR, had been placed at one level below the highest level of opinion. The Head of internal audit had reached the overall opinion that "the organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance, internal control and economy, efficiency and effectiveness. However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework for risk management, governance, internal control and economy, efficient and effectiveness to ensure that it remains adequate and effective."

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4.2. Internal Audit Progress Report

The Committee received a progress report from the Internal Auditors. The start dates for all of the internal audit assignments had been agreed, and the first on Data Quantity Process would commence in the current month.

The Chair thanked the Head of Internal Audit for his reports.

5. DATA QUALITY

5.1. Student data quality,

The Committee received a report on the creation and reconciliation of student data submitted for the Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) survey and the year-end Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) student return. There were only small differences between the two returns.

An update to the OfS Good Practice Guidelines had also been included in the papers for the Committee.

The student return was virtually complete and would shortly be presented to the Vice-Chancellor (the University's Accountable Officer) for signature, ahead of submission to HESA.

6. BANK COVENANTS

The University's strong financial position in being able to meet its bank covenants was noted.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT – SIGNIFICANT RISKS LIST

The Committee received the significant risks list (SRL). The list detailed the highest risks facing the University. The SRL was reviewed twice a year by the Committee and then by Council.

The format of the SRL was fairly simple and reflected the nature of University's business model.

Earlier in the current calendar year, the employability risk had been added to the SRL. The accurate measurement of employability remain difficult. Past manipulation of data by institutions, collected through a process of self-reporting, had resulting in data collection on employability being transferred to an external third body. Despite this change, it remained unlikely that the details of self-employed graduates would be fully captured. This would disadvantage the University.

Turning to student recruitment, the Committee explored the work the University was undertaking in relation to working with school children. The University was part of the Network for East Anglia Collaborative Outreach (NEACO) project, which involved the five higher education institutions in the region working closely together. Collaboration on the project had helped to create a regional network of professional staff who were able to exchange ideas and work closely together.

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8. FINANCIAL PROBITY

8.1. Anti-Money Laundering Policy Annual Review

The Committee noted that the anti-money laundering policy had been reviewed and that no changes were required.

9. AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT (DRAFT)

The Committee reviewed and considered a draft of its Annual Report. The report provided information on the Committee's work during the year, and provided assurance to Council that the Committee had successfully discharged its responsibilities.

The Committee suggested that it would be helpful to include under the report's conclusion that other sources of assurance to the auditors had also been positive in reaching its overall judgement about the adequacy and effectiveness of the University's policies, controls and management systems. Subject to amending the report's conclusions the committee approved the report for presentation to the Council.

Chair

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair drew the main part of the meeting to a close.

The Chair thanked both the external and internal auditors and the University's finance and registry teams for the work they had done.

11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Friday 21 February 2020 at 14.00.

12. MEETING WITH EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL AUDITORS

Members of the University's executive left the meeting and the Committee met privately with the external and internal auditors.

13. ANNUAL APPOINTMENT OF THE EXTERNAL AUDITORS

The external and internal auditors left the meeting.

The Committee agreed to recommend to Council that KPMG be re-appointed as the University's external auditors for 2019/20

Chair

14. COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS

The Committee discussed the results of the survey of effectiveness, noting a number of helpful points and suggestions had been made to improve further the Committee effectiveness.