

NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

Minutes of Audit Committee meeting held by Microsoft Teams on Friday 5 June 2020, commencing at 14.00.

Present

Mr A Grimby (Chair)
Ms A Ferguson
Mr C Owen
Mr T Wood

In attendance

Mr N Ackroyd, KPMG, External Auditor (to Item 11)
Ms S Beavis, KPMG, External Auditor (to Item 11)
Mr S Belderbos, Director of Finance, NUA
Mrs A Robson, Acting Vice Chancellor, NUA
Ms L Tweedie, RSM UK, Internal Auditor (to Item 11)
Ms A Tubb, Registrar, NUA
Mr D Williams, Clerk

Apologies

None

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 21 February 2020 were agreed.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Item 3.3 Key Financial Controls. In consultation with the Internal Auditor, the Director of Finance had reviewed the reasons for the delayed payments to a couple of smaller suppliers. Following investigation by the Director of Finance, the Internal Auditor agreed that in each case there was a good reason for payment being delayed.

Item 5.0 GDPR. The Registrar had reviewed the scope and applicability of the California Consumer Protection Act (CCPA). The scope of the CCPA was highly specific to certain businesses, and its provisions were not applicable to the University.

3. QUALITY MATTERS

3.1. Annual Course Approval and Periodic Review 2019-2020

The Committee received the annual report on course approval and periodic review. The report offered assurance that the University continued to follow the appropriate processes for course approval and review, and that during the current cycle no significant issues with regard to quality had arisen. The Committee noted the report.

3.2. Update on External Accreditation

Since the report to the Committee had been written, the BA (Hons) degree in Games Art and Design had been accredited by Screen Skills. This completed the accreditation of all University courses eligible for accreditation by Screen Skills.

Despite submitting the required documentation ahead of the submission date, renewal of the accreditation of BA (Hons) degree in Architecture had been delayed by Architects Registration Board (ARB). As a consequence, it was anticipated that pending completion of the review by the ARB, the current accreditation of the course would be extended for a period of probably 3 months.

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3.3. GDPR & Cyber Security Covid-19 update

The report provided an update to the Committee on the actions taken by the University following the outbreak of Covid-19, and the movement to remote working. The resulting changes had been significant. In making the changes the University had been mindful of the need to manage the increased likelihood of cyber-attacks. A key action had been to provide guidance and support to staff, raising their awareness of cyber risks and continuing to emphasise the importance of training. To assist in capturing 'lessons learned' following the changes, the Compliance Manager was keeping a detailed log of matters that had emerged.

Remote desk top working was employed by staff working from home. This meant their personal computer operate as a monitor, and data and files remained behind the University's firewalls. The Committee noted that there was a risk that some staff, if they experienced difficulties with their broadband connectivity, might be tempted to download files to the personal computer. It was agreed that it would be appropriate for the University to remind staff of the risks should they be tempted to download material to their 'home' computer.

Acting Vice Chancellor

3.4. Covid-19 Pandemic – Adjustments to Learning, Teaching and Assessment arrangements

The report documented the decisions arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic, and communications with students and staff following the movement to on-line working from 23 March 2020. The report covered all groups of students: undergraduate, postgraduate and research.

Appendix 1 of the report detailed the University's responses to the guidance issued by the Office for Students (OfS) and by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Appendix 2 of the report included the adjustments made by the University to student assessment.

While a number of students had been anxious about the changes early on, the subsequent feedback by students had been positive. Course teams had also responded strongly. In the case of undergraduate students, it had helped that the majority of teaching had been completed before the University was forced to physically close.

The Committee discussed the assessment procedures, and were satisfied that appropriate adjustments had been introduced by the University. The Committee also discussed the plan for the FY21 teaching year recognising there were many variables at play.

Only 3 complaints about the changes made by the University had been received, two of which had been written by the student's parents. All complaints had been dealt with in line with NUA procedures.

The Committee noted the report.

4. EXTERNAL AUDIT

4.1. KPMG External Audit Plan and Strategy 2019/20

The external auditor introduced the external audit plan and strategy 2019/20. The Committee's attention was drawn to the risks identified in plan, and to the materiality

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and the reporting thresholds. All of the work of the external auditor would be undertaken remotely. The auditor confirmed their independence.

The scope of work required to audit the implementation of the University's access and widening participation plan was currently unclear. Until the requirements had become clear, it was difficult to finalise the external audit fee.

The external auditor undertook a significant number of higher education audits. Information obtained from the different audits informed the thresholds it used for sector and institutional comparisons.

The Committee noted the External Audit Plan and Strategy 2019/20.

5. INTERNAL AUDIT

5.1. Internal Audit Progress Report

The Committee received the Internal Auditor's progress report. Despite Covid-19 good progress had been made in completing the 2019/20 plan.

The Internal Auditor also provided the Committee with their March 2020 Higher Education Briefing and a Covid-19 Fraud Briefing, which was not specific to higher education. The Internal Auditor had published a more recent edition of the Higher Education Briefing and this would be shortly circulated to members of the Committee.

Internal Auditor

5.2 Final Report – Competition and Markets Compliance Arrangements

The Committee received the internal auditor's report. The University was fully compliant with the Competition and Market Authority's (CMA) requirements, and no additional management actions were required.

5.3 Interim Audit Strategy 2019-2022, including Internal Audit Plan 2020/21

The Committee received the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21. Rather than separately considering Covid-19, and assessment of its impact would be incorporated into each of the individual audit reviews. The Committee noted that a number of areas reviewed included in the plan, were necessary to meet external requirements placed on the University.

The Committee examined the Plan, and discussed possible additional areas for current or future inclusion in the Internal Auditor's programme of work. Possible areas included student and staff mental health and support, equality, diversity and inclusion and sustainability. It was agreed these topics would be kept under review, and might in future be appropriate subjects for examination by internal audit.

The Committee agreed the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21.

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6. RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1. Significant Risks List

The Committee noted the Significant Risks List. The list had been updated to reflect the actions and impacts associated with Covid-19, which were highlighted throughout the report using a 'red' typeface.

Further information on the student number controls for 2020/21 had been issued. The Department for Education (DfE) had informed the University that it had a student number control (SNC) total of 880. However, the University believed its student number for 2020/21 entry could be 901 Home & EU students which was the total number of firm acceptances received before the 1st June deadline. Institutions recruiting above their designated student number control would be subject to a severe financial penalty.

6.2. SMG Annual Risk Management Report

The Committee received the annual review of the University's policy and processes for identifying and managing risk. The report confirmed that the full risk management review and recording process had been undertaken for the year.

7. INTERNAL CONTROLS

7.1. Report on Fraud and Review of Fraud Response Plan

The Committee noted the report on fraud, which showed that most attempts to defraud the University involved information technology. No known attempts at fraud had been successful, and the University had suffered no financial or other adverse impacts. There were no changes to the University's Fraud Response Plan.

7.2. List of Donations Received May 2019 – April 2020

The Committee noted the list of donations.

8. HEALTH AND SAFETY

8.1. Health and Safety Annual Report

The Committee received the Health and Safety Annual Report. The Report also contained a summary of the Health & Safety/Estates responses to Covid-19. There had been no major injuries or incidents during the reporting period.

9. GOVERNOR MATTERS

9.1. Governors' expenses

The expenses claimed by governors for the period May 2019 – April 2020 were noted.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other matters of business.

11. AUDIT MATTERS

BUFDG Audit Fee Sector Benchmarking

The Committee considered the report. The report confirmed that the internal auditors offered value-for-money.

In line with the principles of good governance, re-tendering for the contracts for the University's internal and external auditors would be required in the next two years. To encourage applicants, both contracts should be re-tendered at the same time.

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Following discussion it was agreed that the retendering for both audit services should take place in spring/early summer 2021.

Director of Finance

12. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place during 26 October 2020.