



728 PRELIMINARY PROCEDURAL MATTERS

728.1 Attendance, Apologies & Welcome

Present: Kathryn Hardwidge (Chair)
Ahmed Mohammed
Deepa Rao
John Sills
Charlotte Simmonds

In Attendance: Andrew Clare (Deputy Principal Finance & Resources) (*Except Item 728.4a*)
Jayne Chaplin (Clerk to the Corporation)
Ryan Pearce (Scrutton Bland - IAS) (*Except Item 728.4b*)
Kerry Palmer (Head of IT) (*Item 728.3 only*)

Apologies: Shachi Blakemore (Buzzacott)
Leisyen Cox (Scrutton Bland – IAS)

All were welcomed to the meeting

It was **RESOLVED** for Item 728.3 to be taken and the first item and for 728.4b to be taken as the last item of business.

728.2 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

728.3 Committee Briefing: College IT

A briefing was received from the College Head of IT providing an overview of the IT infrastructure, previous and current challenges and priorities, then highlighting those areas upon which it was considered vigilance and focused attention was required.

Questioning and discussion included:

- Equipment disposals and the precautions undertaken
- Cyber Security, existing protections, maintenance and the weaker points with penetration testing, noting those around potential risks external to the College and internally, highlighting the focus on the strengthening of internal policies
- Artificial Intelligence, the resourcing and cost and the risks around and development and controls for its use in College
- The IT staffing structure and any concerns about loss of staff noting confidence in the team in place

The Head of IT was thanked for an interesting and informative presentation.

The Head of IT left the meeting

728.4 Private Meetings

Recorded separately

728.5 Minutes & Matters Arising

728.5a Minutes of the Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the 18 June 2025 were approved as a correct record and the application of the Chair's signature was authorised.

728.5b Matters Arising

Of the items outstanding members were advised of those:

- Appearing on the agenda or now contained in the Audit Recommendations Tracker (Minutes 725.1c (v)-(vi) and 725.1d)
- Scheduled for conclusion at the spring term meeting (Minute 725.1c (v))

It was then agreed that there were no further matters arising on which to report.

729 ACADEMIC YEAR 2024/25: YEAR-END & ACTIVITY

729.1 Developments, Audit Activity & Year-end Planning

Reports were reviewed comprising:

a. Financial Statements Audit Year-ended 31/07/25: Regularity Audit Questionnaire

The main changes were highlighted in the College responses in the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire, now being audited as part of the financial year end and informing the opinion on regularity, propriety and compliance.

The update was noted.

b. Internal Audit: 2024/25 Risk & Review Reports and Annual Report

Concluding the Audit Plan for the year, Risk and Review Reports were presented comprising:

(i) Management Information (MI)

A review to ensure that key management information produced was accurate, comprehensive and sufficient to monitor performance against targets and strategic KPIs and the methods used to produce the information were fit for purpose, a Strong Assurance was confirmed advising members that no recommendations had been made but four value added points had been raised.

The report and its conclusions were reviewed questioning the observations in the report regarding the current arrangements that members considered did not appear to support the overall Assurance Rating. Members were advised that:

- Whilst a centralised system was considered best practice, in arriving at its conclusions, the IAS recognised the ease of staff access to required information in all the areas tested, the quality of the information the current arrangements provided and that a such a system was already being actively explored by Management with a College a role in this regard being pursued
- The Assurance rating reflected the overall conclusion and the absence of any formal recommendations. Then considering the Value Added Points raised, it was suggested for these to be recorded on the Audit Tracker alongside report recommendations to be able to monitor any future consideration of the points raised

Whilst acknowledging the report conclusions and the rationale for a Strong Assurance rating, it was requested for the IAS to provide the criteria / methodology used when reaching this recommendation.

(ii) Funding Assurance

A review to confirm the College's level of compliance with the DfE's respective Funding Guidance for Young People, Adult Skills Fund (ASF) and Apprenticeships provision, a Significant Assurance was confirmed with four Low rated recommendations made.

Considering the report to not wholly identify or articulate the root cause of matters highlighted and observations not appearing to support the overall conclusion, the rationale for and consistency between the Assurance Rating and recommendations was queried.

In the context of the complexities of the funding guidance:

- The IAS confirmed its approach had been informed by the DfE full funding assurance review, which was focused on compliance and the identification of individual errors to highlight any areas where attention should be focused. The need then was observed for the appropriate context to be provided in the report to better explain and facilitate understanding of the rationale for the conclusions
- Discussion included some of the specific findings noting Management responses, suggesting it would be helpful for commentary to also explain how recommendations were to be implemented, which then would be recorded in the Audit Tracker

Whilst acknowledging the rationale for the report conclusions and the Significant Assurance rating provided, it was requested for the IAS to reconsider its report.

(iii) Audit Follow-up

A review to confirm progress made in implementing the recommendations raised within previous Internal Audit reports, members were advised of the IAS conclusion of good progress.

Reflecting on the original twenty-one recommendations and the five Low risk recommendations made in respect of those not fully implemented, particularly those longer standing in nature, in the context of members' experience and expectations, there was questioning of:

- The extent to which it was considered such progress was acceptable in a College setting, querying with the IAS its conclusion of good progress and its experience with other sector clients. Members were advised how based on its sector experience, it considered the College's implementation of recommendations to be very positive with nothing to suggest the presence of any factors to inhibit the conclusion of those remaining ongoing and that overall, it considered good progress to have been made

- The recommendation regarding Business Continuity, observing that whilst outstanding, progress had been significant, noting from Management how in addressing the action in the original recommendation, the need for further work had arisen as a consequence of which the recommendation remained ongoing at the time of the review.
- Discussing with Management the recommendations regarding GDPR and Human Resources and Business Efficiency. Acknowledging some of the recommendations had remained ongoing for some time, members were advised of the work to bring to a conclusion those for GDPR and HR, then explaining where challenges experienced that had delayed progress, notably in implementing the Business Efficiency recommendation and plans to move to Power BI dashboards.

Responding to questioning, Management confidence was confirmed in the actions and timescales for the recommendations advising members that an update on progress would be provided in the usual termly Audit Recommendations Tracker Update to be presented at the Committee's next meeting.

After discussion, the report was noted.

(iv) Internal Audit Risk & Assurance Annual Report

Presented to facilitate the Corporation in its preparation of an informed Statement of Corporate Governance and Internal Control within the College Financial Statements, the IAS Annual Report was considered.

After providing an overview of the work undertaken during the year and the adequacy and effectiveness of the College control frameworks reviewed in the period, members were advised that the IAS had expressed satisfaction in the adequacy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the College frameworks for risk management, governance, internal controls and processes and confirmation was provided of its reasonable Assurance on that basis.

The report was noted.

730 ACADEMIC YEAR 2025/26

730.1 Internal Audit Service (IAS)

730.1a IAS Charter

Following discussion at the June meeting and responding to the Committee's feedback, the updated IAS Charter was presented.

Intended to outline the service standards underpinning service delivery in line with the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors, it was observed and disappointment was expressed in the absence of the summary of changes from the IAS in line with the Committee's earlier request. After asking for this to be circulated after the meeting to ensure all members were aware of the changes and the standards to be adhered to, the Charter was considered to be in line with expectations subject to providing further explanatory text regarding administrative reporting and confirmation of when quality assurance reviews were last undertaken, then proposing for approval via email once updated.

730.1b IAS – Audit Plan

The updated Annual Audit Plan was reviewed, acknowledging the scheduling of the reviews and the one change made since originally presented with the review of Examinations replacing the Funding Assurance review, scheduled for November 2025.

The updated Plan was noted.

730.2 Compliance & Good Practice

730.2a Risk Register (Autumn Term)

After confirming the 2024/25 Risk Register remained unchanged at year-end, the Risk Register for 2025/26 was considered.

After observing how the format was easier to read and the overview of the principal risks and uncertainties of the operating environment had been helpful in providing the context for informing the College risk profile, the Register was considered.

Those ratings that remained largely unchanged were noted then focusing on the newly identified risks around examinations and awarding body sanctions and the loss of key staff, observing the need for further detail to be provided regarding the latter to more fully articulate the nature of the risk and any mitigating action.

After concluding that the Register reflected the most pertinent risks and requesting for the spell checking of the Register prior to circulation, the update was noted.

731 OTHER BUSINESS & NEXT MEETING

731.1 Any Other Business: Member Departures

As the final meeting for the former Committee Chair, John Sills and Committee member, Charlotte Simmonds, the Committee's thanks was extended for all their support and extensive and always invaluable contribution and insights. Members then were advised of activity underway to identify and recruit new members.

731.2 Dates of the Next Meetings

All commencing at 5pm and on-line via teams, the dates were confirmed as follows:

Tuesday 9 December 2025

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Wednesday 17 June 2026

Signed:

Dated: 9 December 2025

Kathryn Hardwidge, Chair, Audit Committee