HERTFORD REGIONAL COLLEGE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH 2026
BY VIDEO-CONFERENCE

736 PRELIMINARY PROCEDURAL MATTERS

736.1 Attendance, Apologies & Welcome

Present: Kathryn Hardwidge (Chair)
Ahmed Mohammed
Chiz Onuora
Deepa Rao
Charlotte Simmonds
Joshua Temile

In Attendance:	Andrew Clare	(Deputy Principal Finance & Resources) (*Except Item 738a)*
	Jayne Chaplin	(Clerk to the Corporation)
	Leisyen Cox	(Scrutton Bland – IAS) *(Except Item 738b)*
	Ryan Pearce	(Scrutton Bland - IAS) *Except Item 738b)*
Apologies:	Shachi Blakemore	(Buzzacott)

Chiz Onuora was welcomed to his first meeting

736.2 Declaration of Interests
No interests were declared.

736.3 Committee Briefing
Responding to the Committee's previous request and focused on the roles, responsibilities and requirements around Internal Audit within the FE sector the Internal Auditors provided a briefing highlighting

736.4 Minutes & Matters Arising

736.4a Minutes of the Meeting
The Minutes of the meeting of the 9 December 2025 were approved as a correct record and the application of the Chair's signature was authorised.

736.4b Matters Arising
Summarising progress, the update was noted and it was then agreed that there were no further matters which to report.

737 ACADEMIC YEAR 25/26

737.1 Internal Audit Service (IAS)

a. IAS - Audit Plan Progress Report
Confirming activity date, no proposed changes to the Audit Plan and the dates planned for the reviews and presentation of reports, the Audit Plan Progress Report was noted.

b. IAS – Risk & Review Reports
In line with the Internal Audit Plan for the year, reports were presented comprising:

i Examinations

A review to ensure systems and processes in place enabled the prompt an accurate entry of learners, the successful conduct of examinations and the accurate and prompt capturing of results, a Strong Assurance was confirmed.

After explaining the review had been in response to and considered a prudent measure following a recent JCQ inspection, it was noted that particular concerns raised at that time had been identified as isolated and not systematic incidents. Confirming that the approach and action taken was found to have been proactive supported by comprehensive evidence, the IAS conclusions were noted that newly introduced clear and robust processes had been fully embedded at the time of the review.

Then highlighting the three Low risks recommendations made and two value added points shared for Management consideration, the report and its conclusions were reviewed:

- Discussing the recommendations, noting IAS confirmation that the points now raised were separate, additional control measures intended to further strengthen procedures, and the confidence expressed that processes would withstand any further external scrutiny
- Questioning timescales to review opportunities for further efficiencies the once examinations process had been streamlined into a single system, noting this was planned for the summer to ensure arrangements were in place for the start of the new academic year, to then allow testing and conclusion of the Action in November 26

Following review, the report was noted.

ii Human Resources – Recruitment and Retention

A review ensure that College recruitment and appointment processes optimised the likelihood of staff recruitment and strategies were optimised to increase the likelihood of retention, a Strong Assurance was confirmed.

After noting the review followed up on that undertaken in the previous year, reporting that five of the six recommendations from that time had been implemented, members were advised that overall the College had in place and effective overall framework, sharing strengths observed during the latest review. Highlighting the three Low risks recommendations made and the two value added points shared for Management consideration, the report and its conclusions were considered, including:

- Reflecting on the staff retention strategies in place, acknowledging vacancy levels to be lower than in previous years, reflecting the impact of measures introduced, but then exploring any potential further action and experience of practices elsewhere for the College to distinguish itself from and remain more attractive than its competitors
- Noting the observations regarding and querying the May 26 timescale for addressing inconsistencies identified between the Resourcing Procedure and the Talent Acquisition documents, noting this to be the focus of attention to ensure swift alignment with current practice

- Discussing the accuracy issues identified in interview scoring in the sample reviewed. Advising members that this had been reviewed by Management, it was confirmed that there had been no impact on recruitment decisions and that additional measures had been introduced to monitor and check scoring records

After commending the inclusion of the Significance section in the report, considering to be helpful, the report was noted.

iii Marketing and Reputation
A review to ensure that an effective marketing strategy was in place underpinned by operational plans that contribute towards meeting College recruitment targets and commercial objectives, and to review the effectiveness of marketing activities, a Strong Assurance was confirmed.

After noting that it was considered that the College had established an effective framework, the IAS highlighted the two Low risks recommendations made and the two value added points shared for Management consideration. The report and its conclusions were reviewed, discussing:

- The decline in total enrolment figures for the last three academic years, acknowledging where numbers had decreased but highlighting an overall trend of growth. Then in the context of value for money, members reflected on the level of investment in and return from marketing activity noting confirmation that value for money would form part of performance KPIs
- Implementation dates, observing the proximity of those to the presentation of the report, noting confirmation that these had been reviewed and considered realistic and reasonable

Following review, the report was noted.

iv Cyber Security
A review to consider the controls in place to protect the College's data and to prevent and detect cyber-attacks, including the effective use of software, monitoring and staff awareness a Strong Assurance was confirmed.

After confirming satisfaction in the action taken in response to previous recommendations regarding staff training completed, the IAS shared the two recommendations made, one Medium risk and one Low risk and the one value added point shared for Management consideration.

The report and its conclusions were reviewed. Observing and emphasising the heightened sensitivities of the current operating environment with increasing instances of cyber threats and attacks:

- The rationale was questioned for the ratings assigned to the recommendations, noting the IAS to have been reassured by the findings in the areas assessed and its acknowledgment that external penetration testing remained ongoing at the time of the review

- It was requested for action and the implementation of recommendations to be expedited, proposing that once the testing was complete for the report findings to be shared with the IAS and for its report to be updated to reflect subsequent action taken and represented at the next meeting

Then highlighting the frequency of phishing and scam emails, there was discussion of College arrangements in this regard noting how routine checks and action included further staff training. Last tested before the Christmas break, it was confirmed that the next test was planned imminently and that arrangements would be reviewed once penetration testing was completed

Following review, the report was noted.

v Student Satisfaction, Progression and Outcomes
A review to confirm the effective capture and response to the learner voice, appropriate steps were taken to achieve internal progression targets, and to ensure the College procedure for dealing with complaints was appropriate and consistently and successfully applied in practice, members were advised of a Strong Assurance.

Highlighting the one Low risk recommendations made, the report and its conclusions were reviewed and the report was noted.

737.2 Other Activity: Monitoring - Recommendations Tracker (Spring Term Update)
The Spring Term update was considered. Progress was reviewed, and:

a. After particular questioning of why the longer standing recommendation regarding HR Performance Management action remained ongoing, it was confirmed that further information would be obtained and an update provided
b. The feasibility of further summarising the report was requested

Following review, the update was noted

737.3 Compliance & Good Practice
a. Risk Management
The second update of the term, the Risks Register was considered. After observing discussions elsewhere on the Agenda, those ratings that remained largely unchanged were noted, then focusing on:

i. The risks in the Register reported to:

   - Have increased, particularly the risk around long-term property strategy, noting the potential failure of aging plant highlighted by problems recently encountered explaining the need to expedite action through an independent condition report to be commissioned and an increased commitment in the financial plan
   - Have decreased, questioning the assessment around inflation, noting whilst accurate at time of the last review, the operating environment remained dynamic, confirming that this would be revised accordingly. After then observing the speed with which events changed, members reflected on the potential for these to captured before developing as risks

ii. Sector risks in the context of those highlighted in the Internal Audit Progress Report, noting where identified in the College Register, albeit articulated differently, and reassured by confirmation of those reported on and discussed at the respective committees and Board meetings

After review and concluding that the Register continued to reflect the most pertinent risks, the update was noted.

b. Updated Policy - Whistleblowing
In the context of the responsibilities of the Board's and the Committee for ensuring arrangements for the protection for individuals making qualifying disclosures in the public interest remained in line with legislation, the updated College Whistleblowing Policy was presented.

The amendments were summarised particularly reflecting on and discussing both the broader definitions and further detail or clarifications, and the stronger protections or strengthening of processes outlined. After responding to further queries, it was agreed clarification would be provided regarding the reporting of concerns to the Clerk to the Corporation.

After observing amendments outlined were modest in nature rather than substantive or new changes requiring Board approval, it was **RESOLVED** to:

i **APPROVE** the updated College Whistleblowing Policy

738 Private Meetings
Recorded separately.

739 OTHER BUSINESS & NEXT MEETING
739.1 Any Other Business
None advised.

739.2 Dates of the Next Meetings
Wednesday 17 June 2026, 5.00pm