MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date	**Wednesday 3 December 2025**
Time	17:00 to 17:45
Location	Via MS Teams
Present (Governors):	Chair: Dr Andrew Gilchrist James Measures Rick Parish – co-opted member
In attendance (officers)	Christine Ricketts (Principal and CEO) Allan Tyrer (Chief Operating Officer) Melissa Drayson (Director of Governance)
In attendance (auditors)	Paul Goddard (Scrutton Bland) Katharine Patel (Buzzacott)
Apologies for absence	Adam Herriott
Quorum (3)	The meeting was quorate throughout

Item | **Action lead**

0. Private session without management present

The Chair offered the opportunity for a private discussion between the Committee and the Auditors without management present. It was agreed that there was no requirement for this item at this meeting.

1. Preliminary items

1.1 Apologies for Absence and welcomes
Apologies were received from Adam Herriott

1.2 Declarations of interest
There were no new declarations of interest relating to matters on the agenda. Previously declared interests were carried forward.

1.3 Urgent other business notified in advance.
No urgent matters of other business had been notified in advance. The Chair asked for an update on the estates redevelopment if time permitted.

2. Minutes

2.1 Minutes of the meetings on 1 October 2025

The Committee asked for a misspelling of “Vickers” and paragraph numbering to be corrected. Subject to this, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee on 1 October 2025 be APPROVED as an accurate record of the meeting. Confidential sections would be redacted from the public version on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

2.2 Matters Arising

The Committee noted the completion of actions and those covered by other agenda items. Three items would be scheduled on the next meeting agenda: a deep dive on Health and Safety risk, and a briefing on the Economic Crime and Transparency Act and an update to the college’s Counter Fraud strategy.

4. Internal Audit 2025-26

4.1 Progress Report

Supporting paper by Scrutton Bland, presented by Paul Goddard.

The audit program was up and running.

The Capital Development audit had been completed and would be reported to the February meeting. In response to a question about the scope of the audit, it was confirmed that this covered capital project management and design rather than procurement, which would be part of a separate audit.

Two audits were scheduled for presentation in February, three for June, including follow-up on recommendations, and the remaining two for October next year. A checkpoint would take place to ensure later audits remain relevant.

Within the Sector Update section of the report, attention was drawn to the guidance on ‘Failure to Prevent Fraud’. Governors raised the question of what FE Corporations might do to gain assurance that achievement rates were not being misrepresented. The internal auditors advised on several ‘red flags’ that might raise concerns:

- A significant, unexplained uptick in performance from previous reports.
- The lack of a culture of openness that allows staff to raise questions and concerns.

It was suggested that data accuracy/manipulation might be added to the risk register.

The Principal and CEO advised that inflating rates without fraudulent activity on the ILR return would be difficult. However, it would be possible in theory to enhance qualification statistics by adding short qualifications to a study programme.

AGREED: That governors be brought a breakdown of Qualification Achievement Rate data showing the balance of long qualifications versus short qualifications and soft skills.

3.2 Audit Recommendations Tracker

A new version of the tracker was presented by the COO. This would be maintained internally since the change in internal auditors. The Tracker used RAG rating (Green = complete, Red = past date, Orange = not yet due). Completed recommendations would be removed once confirmed by the Committee. As an additional assurance, the internal auditor's follow up review would validate the record.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the tracker would also include external audit and funding audit recommendations.

The Chair queried how confidential actions (e.g., Cyber Security) would be prevented from entering the public domain. It was confirmed that the College could refuse or redact these from any information requests on the grounds of commercial confidentiality.

AGREED: That the audit recommendations tracker be adopted.

4. Audit Committee Annual Report (Draft) 2024-25

Supporting paper by the Director of Governance

The draft report was reviewed. Based on the advice of the auditors, It was agreed that the wording of the assurance statement in the final paragraph be amended to ensure alignment with the College Financial Handbook.

RESOLVED: That, subject to completion of the final paragraphs and amendment of the assurance statement, the Audit Committee Annual Report be recommended to the Corporation for approval and signing by the Committee Chair, to be submitted to the Department for Education with the Financial Statements.

5. Value for Money Report 2024-25

Supporting paper by the Chief Operating Officer

The Committee was asked to confirm that the report contained sufficient information. Governors were happy to accept the report but made suggestions for future enhancements:

- Adding IT usage and room utilisation rates to future reports to track efficiency
- Linking the report with whole-college KPIs, including HR and health and safety metrics.

PG noted that other colleges link other KPIs, such as Health & Safety and HR metrics, into their Value for Money reporting.

AGREED: that the Value for Money report be received.

6 **Termly report on any whistleblowing, fraud, FOIA data-breach or cyber security events.**
Supporting papers presented by the COO

The Committee noted that there had been no significant events. The College continued to receive a high volume of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests but these were all of a commercial nature.

7. **Other Business**

The Committee noted that this was officially Rick Parish's last meeting as a co-opted Committee member but that Rick had kindly agreed to stay on until a replacement could be recruited. Members were asked to share the opportunity with anybody in their networks with a finance/audit background.

A brief update was requested on the estate strategy

- The first three projects were to be signed off within budget and had now been reoccupied.
- A contingency would be carried forward to the new Vickers project, which was at the Tender stage. The project managers, Fusion, had recosted the Vickers project and this remained within budget.
- Completion of the new Vickers, car parking, and landscaping was estimated for Spring 2027
- The Sports Hall was being developed by Cala. The project was slightly behind schedule with an estimated completion of October 2026
- Demolition of the Link was complete. Unfortunately, the demolition had affected the heating system for Locke-King. Cala would be responsible for the additional heating and repair costs.

An update was also requested on the smoking and vaping ban. Student compliance continued to be monitored but was generally good. Outside areas were being managed to improve access. The main area for vigilance was a number of students smoking just outside the gate, but this was currently manageable and has not led to poor behaviour.

8. **Date of Future Meetings**
25 February 2026
10 June 2026

Approved as an accurate record on 25 February 2026