

## AUDIT COMMITTEE

17 February 2025 via Microsoft Teams

### CONFIRMED SUMMARY MINUTES

**Contact Georgina Bailes [georgina.bailes@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:georgina.bailes@northumbria.ac.uk), Secretary to the Board of Governors, with any queries about these Summary Minutes.**

The meeting was preceded by a closed meeting with Committee members and the representatives of internal and external audit.

**Present:** H Thorne (Chair), A Fellows, S Haagensen, J Hudson, P Turnbull, I Wilkin  
**Observer:** P Judge  
**Secretary:** G Bailes, B Lenney (Assistant Secretary)  
**In attendance:** J Blewitt (KPMG) [absent minutes AC24/49], Prof L Bracken [Minute AC24/55], Dr S Corbett [Minute AC24/50-Oral Report], R Groves [Minute AC49/50], Prof T Lawson, Prof A Long, Prof G Marston [Minute AC24/53], L Mayfield, S McNair (PwC), A Poole [Minute AC24/50] G Tideswell [MinuteAC24/53], C Stogden, A Sahota (PWC), J Taylor, M Wilkie (KPMG), Prof G Wynn [Minute AC24/50]

## MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1. **Introduction**  
**Vice-Chancellor's Horizon Scanning** [Oral Report]  
The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive presented on sector wide matters and the implications of these for the University. The Government had announced that the statutory tort and the regulation of Students' Unions would be removed from the new Freedom of Speech Act however, the active promotion of Freedom of Speech and the complaints scheme was expected to be implemented with effect from September 2025. The University's response to the recent OfS Strategy consultation was being prepared and would recommend that the regulatory burden on Universities should not be increased, and that reconsideration should be given to the increases in the subscription rates paid to the OfS. John Blake, OfS Director for Fair Access and Participation, had recently visited the University and met with several representatives from partner schools, the Students' Union and graduates, during the visit he commended the University's comprehensive approach to widening participation. Lol Crawley, Film and TV Production alumnus, had won the Best Cinematography BAFTA award for his work on *The Brutalist* and had been nominated for an Oscar. The University had been nominated for three different categories in the National Apprenticeships Guide awards, Apprentice of the Year, Best Apprenticeships in Healthcare and Leadership in Apprenticeships, the winner would be announced in May. **The Committee noted the update.**
2. **External Audit 2023/24**  
**External Audit Report – Feedback on 2023/24 Audit** [Oral Report]  
**The Committee noted the feedback on the 2023/24 Audit from KPMG, the University's External Auditors, and that the Group accounts had been signed off by the December deadline.**
3. **Internal Audit Plan**  
**Internal Audit Progress Report** [AC24/48]  
**The Committee noted progress on the implementation of the Internal Audit plan. One final report had been issued and two terms of reference issued with a further two in progress**  
**Audit Report: ESFA** [AC24/49]

	<p>The Committee considered the ESFA Internal Audit report which was rated as medium risk overall with three medium risk recommendations, four low and one advisor. Management had requested the audit following the outcome of the ESFA Audit in 2023/24, all issues identified had been as expected and an action plan had been implemented, with work already underway to address the recommendations. The governance structure now in place had been highlighted as good practice. <b>The Committee noted the report, that the February actions were on track to be completed by the deadline and that the changes to leadership and investment in the new system had substantially improved the compliance culture of apprenticeship programmes.</b></p> <p><b><u>Outstanding Audit Actions</u></b> [AC24/50]  The Committee considered progress on the implementation of previously agreed audit actions. Of the 55 actions, 30 were not yet falling due for implementation, 18 were reported as fully implemented and 7 actions from the CMA audit were reported as overdue against their agreed implementation dates. This was due to a change of leadership to enable clear ownership in this area, and temporary de-prioritisation to ensure UKVI compliance, and no delays to September recruitment to the integrated international foundation year with Newcastle University. <b>The Committee approved the requested extensions to the Competitions Market Authority actions.</b></p> <p><b><u>Programme and Project Management Update</u></b> [AC24/51]  The Committee noted an update on the two Programme and Project Management audit actions which had been extended to December 2024 at its previous meeting. Both the benefits realisation and prioritisation aspect of the Project Management framework would now be considered at the strategic level via Planning Committee, rather than as part of the delivery aspect of projects, and confirmed that both actions were now closed.</p>
4.	<p><b><u>Policy, Risk and Assurance</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Strategic Risk Report</u></b> [AC24/52]  The Committee endorsed the Strategic Risk Report for consideration by Board of Governors on 3 March, subject to amendments.</p> <p><b><u>Regulatory Reportable Incidents Summary</u></b> [AC24/53]  The Committee noted an update on Regulatory Reportable incidents.</p> <p><b><u>Health and Safety Report Q2 2024/25</u></b> [AC24/54]  The Committee considered the Health and Safety Q2 (October-December) report, including a report into the increased level of sports related incidents. The Terms of Reference for the Health and Safety Management Group had been updated to reflect that Wellbeing was now managed separately and reported to People Committee, there had been one near-miss fire incident at Coach Lane Campus caused by the burning out of a power cable supply which was currently being investigated, and there had been three incidents involving contractors which had been investigated and actions were being addressed, and a further incident relating to an area already under investigation which now had an action plan in place. The investigation into the increased number of reported sports-related incidents had concluded that the previously reported increase in sports injuries was related to increased participation in competitive sports, an increase in events due to team successes, and improved reporting. <b>The Committee noted that this was Prof George Marston's last meeting of the Committee and thanked him for his contribution to the Committee during his time at the University, and endorsed the Health and Safety report for submissions to Board of Governors on 3 March.</b></p> <p><b><u>TRAC Return</u></b> [AC24/55]  The Committee considered the results of the tests for reasonableness for the TRAC return 2023/24. The report was intended to provide the Committee with assurance that the methodology used in the compilation and reporting of TRAC was in accordance with the TRAC requirements. The TRAC Steering Group had reviewed and confirmed the completion of the TRAC return which was submitted by the 31 January deadline. <b>The Committee noted report and confirmed that the methodology used in compiling the that the recommended changes to the methodology strengthened compliance and would improve cost recovery approved the TRAC approach for 2023/24.</b></p> <p><b><u>UKRI Funding Assurance Report Follow-up</u></b> [AC24/55]</p>

	<p>The Committee considered the UKRI Funding Assurance Follow-up report. UKRI had removed the special measures from the University and reinstated the Moderate Assurance classification following successful implementation of the actions outlined in the paper considered by the Committee at its September meeting. <b>The Committee noted the report, noting that processes had been improved to ensure that future changes in requirements were acted upon and encouraged further improvements to achieve substantial assurance.</b></p>

Georgina Bailes  
Secretary to Audit Committee  
February 2025