

Board of Management Audit & Assurance Committee

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 23 November 2021
Paper No.	AAC2-G
Agenda Item	5.5.2
Subject of Paper	Internal Audit Report – Curriculum Planning
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Henderson Loggie
Date of production	17 November 2021
Action	For Discussion and Decision

1. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to consider and discuss the report and the management responses to the internal audit recommendations.

2. Purpose of report

The purpose of this review is to provide management and the Audit and Assurance Committee with assurance on key controls relating to the curriculum and financial plans in place for City of Glasgow College and their alignment with the regional plan for Glasgow and the college student number targets.

3. Key Insights

This internal audit of Curriculum Planning provides an outline of the objectives, scope, findings and graded recommendations as appropriate, together with management responses. This constitutes an action plan for improvement.

The Report includes a number of audit findings which are assessed and graded to denote the overall level of assurance that can be taken from the Report. The gradings are defined as follows:

Good	System meets control objectives.
Satisfactory	System meets control objectives with some weaknesses present.
Requires improvement	System has weaknesses that could prevent it achieving control objectives.
Unacceptable	System cannot meet control objectives.

4. Impact and implications

Refer to internal audit report.

City of Glasgow College

Curriculum Planning

Internal Audit report No: 2021/09

Draft issued: 11 November 2021

Final issued: 17 November 2021



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Level of Assurance

In addition to the grading of individual recommendations in the action plan, audit findings are assessed and graded on an overall basis to denote the level of assurance that can be taken from the report. Risk and materiality levels are considered in the assessment and grading process as well as the general quality of the procedures in place.

Gradings are defined as follows:

Good	System meets control objectives.
Satisfactory	System meets control objectives with some weaknesses present.
Requires improvement	System has weaknesses that could prevent it achieving control objectives.
Unacceptable	System cannot meet control objectives.

Action Grades

Priority 1	Issue subjecting the organisation to material risk and which requires to be brought to the attention of management and the Audit and Assurance Committee.
Priority 2	Issue subjecting the organisation to significant risk and which should be addressed by management.
Priority 3	Matters subjecting the organisation to minor risk or which, if addressed, will enhance efficiency and effectiveness.



Management Summary

Overall Level of Assurance

Good	System meets control objectives.
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Risk Assessment

This review focused on the controls in place to mitigate the following risks on the City of Glasgow College Strategic Risk Register as of 20 May 2021 noted no specific risks around capital projects. However, we did not one risk relating to the future investment of the capital maintenance grant as following:

Risk Number 1 – Failure to support successful student outcomes (Red rated, Risk score 20)

Background

As part of the Internal Audit programme at City of Glasgow College (the College) for 2020/21 we carried out a review of Curriculum Planning. The Audit Needs Assessment, completed in March 2017, identified this as an area where risk can arise and where Internal Audit can assist in providing assurances to the Board of Management and the Principal that the related control environment is operating effectively, ensuring risk is maintained at an acceptable level.

As part of the Glasgow Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) 2020-2021, the region has agreed aims around curriculum requirements that achieve the following:

- Widens access, draws in people from under-represented groups and reaches those who can benefit most from the college learning.
- Meets current and future skills needs and is effectively supporting inclusive economic growth, and
- The combined regional curriculum is effectively coordinated without unnecessary gaps or overlaps in its provision.

Collaboration within the Glasgow Region allows the college to develop curriculum that provides pipelines for employers and higher education locally and nationally. It is important for the College to review its curriculum and course provision on a regular basis to ensure that it remains aligned with the needs of national requirements, employers, and individual learners and to ensure that programmes that are cost effective.

Every year the College forecasts the credits it will earn from each course and ensures that it has planned to deliver sufficient credits to meet its ROA credits target. This is then monitored throughout the year as a guideline to whether the credits target will be met. If credits are forecasted to be lower than the target, then decisions can be made to run additional courses or course cohorts in year. Over the last few years, despite the impact of the global pandemic, the College curriculum has remained stable – with provision of further education and higher education. The College also provides flexibility to employers within the region through the Flexible Working Delivery Fund and upskilling/ reskilling programmes.



Scope, Objectives and Overall Findings

The scope of the audit was to consider the key risks in relation to the College's curriculum.

The table below notes each separate objective for this review and records the results:

Objective	Findings		
	1	2	3
The objective of our audit was to obtain reasonable assurance that	No. of Agreed Actions		
1. The core College curriculum is aligned with national priorities and the needs of regional industry, employers and individual learners	Good	-	-
2. There is a process in place to review and refresh existing programmes on a regular basis	Good	-	-
3. Adequate controls are in place over the development of new programmes including the preparation of a business case, costing and pricing	Good	-	1
4. The College has exploited the potential of new technology in order to widen access to the curriculum and enhance the learner experience	Good	-	1
5. The curriculum planning process takes sufficient cognisance of the College's share of the Region's Credits target	Good		
6. There are strong links between the curriculum planning process and workforce planning and budgeting	Good		
Overall Level of Assurance	Good	-	2
		System meets control objectives.	

Audit Approach

Interviews were held with the Deputy Principal, Vice Principal Student Experience, Faculty Deans, Director of Excellence to assist in documenting the systems and processes in place. A detailed assessment of the key internal controls was performed.



Summary of Main Findings

Strengths

- The College has set its ambitions to meet local and national needs in its Strategic Plan 2021-2030 that was approved by the Board of Management in June 2021.
- Curriculum planning within the four Faculties noted focus on learning pathways, articulation, and employability within the region. Faculty collaboration with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and industry partners are utilised effectively to develop courses that support career pathways directly into industry.
- There is diversification of the curriculum with a balance between further education, high education, and flexible short courses to support upskilling and reskilling agenda for industry. This is supported by a dedicated Business Engagement Team who support employer's utilisation of funding available from the SFC.
- There is an annual portfolio review process that is well established and involved faculty review of the curriculum offering – what is working and what is not working just as well. In 2021/22, a new performance and quality cycle is being introduced that will support his assessment and help the transparency around curriculum choices.
- There is a process for proposing new course via Early Notification Forms that are provided to the Faculty Board, Academic Board, and the Learning & Teaching (L&T) Committee.
- Despite the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, faculties and management worked at pace to identify solutions or alternative ways of working and progressing courses digitally where possible. Lessons learned over the first year of the pandemic were brought into 2021/22 curriculum planning with blended working models developed to support decision making for academic staff when designing the delivery of course material. The College has access to a Blended Learning Fund to support the development of online content. They also have implemented a new Virtual Learning Environment in August 2021 that will improve the delivery of material to students.
- The digital offerings and future needs of the College are being assessed as part of the Digital Strategy 2020-2030 that will see the College develop a “Digital campus” reflective of its physical campus. The Digital Transformation Group will support strategic decision making around curriculum needs and the wider implementation of the Digital Strategy.
- Curriculum planning is tracked by the Student Records Team on the Master Student Recruitment Model. Review of the Student Recruitment Model for 2021/22 noted it listed all courses, enrolment target, credit target, credit projections their status, tuition fees, waiver grants projected, notional fee income targets and projections resource. This model in turn feeds into workforce planning and the annual budget planning process.

Enhancements

While the audit did not identify any significant control weaknesses, arrangements would be further enhanced if the following areas could be addressed:

- The one new course proposal completed during 2020/21 took several months (almost one year) to be formally approved by the L&T Committee. This was mainly due to resource information not being complete on the original proposal. The Faculty Board should ensure that all resource costings have been completed prior to submission to the Academic Board and support provided to Faculty leads when developing proposal to ensure that the final proposals to Committee are complete.
- There is absence of a management group that will assesses the physical estate and interdependencies from curriculum planning in the same way that the Digital Transformation Group reviews the digital requirements around the curriculum. Consideration should be made to expand the remit of the Digital Transformation Group to include the strategic utilisation of the physical estate.



Acknowledgment

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the College who helped us during our audit.



Main Findings and Action Plan

Objective 1 - The core College curriculum is aligned with national priorities and the needs of regional industry, employers and individual learners

As noted earlier the ROA 2020-21 sets ambitions around the curriculum provision for the Glasgow Region. In turn the College has set its ambitions to meet local and national needs in its Strategic Plan 2021-2030 that was approved by the Board of Management in June 2021. Within this plan, it aims to:

- Consistent, high quality student experience
- Developing students' confidence, well-being, and skills for work and life
- Flexible, linked pathways, widening access and challenging deprivation
- Adding value through regional collaboration
- Industry partnerships providing real work experience opportunities
- Curriculum aligned to skills needs and developing the young workforce
- Fair Work values and behaviours

The strategy identifies how these aims link to the National Performance Framework, National Outcomes, how they delivery the ROA for the Glasgow Region and Tertiary Sector. Management have taken requirements further by developing a Student Academic Experience Strategy that considers three elements: City student, City Learning and Teaching, and City Student Journey.

In practice, curriculum and programme provision has been stable for several years and, as a result to disruptions to learning over the COVID-19 pandemic, the curriculum programme for 2020-21 was rolled forward for 2021-2022.

While a stable programme, the College has been able to explore other curriculum provision – such as increasing the short course provision for upskilling and reskilling, international, and there is currently discussion around introducing micro-credential courses. A further consideration is around the College developing its Taught Degree Awarding Powers and education validation process. This has implications for the configuration and operation of the college academic quality arrangements and this work will be progressed in earnest over the next three years.

Our walkthrough of curriculum planning within the four Faculties noted focus on learning pathways, articulation, and employability within the region. This was supported by work we completed on Business Engagement (Internal Audit Report No: 2021/10) and Partnership Working (Internal Audit Report No: 2021/11) relating to curriculum planning around utilising the Flexible Working Development Fund. Discussions also noted faculty collaboration with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and industry partners to develop courses that support career pathways directly into industry, such as noted with Barclays Fast Track Model.



Curriculum Planning

Objective 2 - There is a process in place to review and refresh existing programmes on a regular basis

Our discussions with Faculty Deans noted that despite the core curriculum being rolled forward, the process for setting credit targets and tracking student recruitment remained in place. The process for review the curriculum needs also remained in place and is part of everyday activity within the faculty.

In practice, Faculty Deans discuss and review the curriculum provision on an ongoing basis with their Associate Deans and Curriculum Heads. Reviews include progress on recruitment, delivery needs of the offering and programme, student feedback on experiences, withdrawal rates, and blended learning requirements.

2020/21 Curriculum Planning

As a result of disruption to learning, however, the College developed options to provide support for current students who had deferred from 2019/20 and 2020/21, new entrants for 2021/22, and increasing the number of short courses to meet upskilling and reskilling demand. Planning was led by the Vice Principal for Student Experience who worked with Faculty Deans and senior management to review current learning pathways and develop a blended learning model for 2021/22.

Parameters for planning by curriculum leads was presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee in May 2021. This planning reviewed curriculum needs around physical distancing, student engagement, learnings of best practice over the pandemic period, use of digital resources (Zoom and MS Teams), development of learning spaces and general teaching rooms, use of the new Virtual Learning Environment, MYconnect, digital access and connectivity, staff support for digital learning.

Courses are generally fixed; however, curriculum changes can be made to the content of courses so long as it remains in line with the credit “budget” of the faculty. Changes are reported by Faculty Deans to the Principal through one to ones, or where there is fundamental changes, to the Faculty Board. These changes are not formally tracked. Any changes such as a refreshed title or new programme or course are assessed by the Academic Board. During 2020/21, there was one new course developed (HNC Fashion Business with e-Commerce) on the back of identifying a gap in the market.



Objective 2 - There is a process in place to review and refresh existing programmes on a regular basis. (Continued)

2021/22 Curriculum Planning

Curriculum planning for 2022/23 will reintroduce the formal process of evaluating the curriculum performance to outcomes. The new annual Quality Cycle, developed by the new Director of Excellence, will support the implementation of the Student Academic Experience Strategy. This will involve:

- A new approach to Faculty annual reviews.
- New Annual quality reports have been established and are to be introduced this year later in 2021.
- Further actions are proposed, including establishing an annual enhancement theme and enhancement projects.

We reviewed arrangements established for the new strategic planning cycle, quality cycle, and performance and compliance arrangements for next session, in year, and end of session. This will involve setting operation plans and prioritises, review of timetabling, resourcing, and facility planning, that will be reviewed formally at six months after approval, and progress made by Faculties fed into the review of progress against the College's strategic plan.

This plan is broken down further into monthly tasks by action owner with deadline dates. This detailed plan remained in working progress at the time of audit and items were still to be discussed and agreed. However, the new performance review and portfolio planning meeting in progress at the time of our audit. While we note that planning is still in progress, management and faculty deans were committed to arrangements and arrangements reviewed were reasonable and will better support operational planning and inform wider digital and faculty planning.



Curriculum Planning

Objective 3 - Adequate controls are in place over the development of new programmes including the preparation of a business case, costing and pricing

Only one new course was identified to have been developed for the 2021/22 academic year – HND Fashion Business and eCommerce. For any new course or programme, an Early Notification Form is completed by Faculty Deans and faculty management. This form acts as a business case that is reviewed by Faculty Board and then by the Academic Board.

In the example reviewed, the Academic Board reviewed the Early Notification Form for the HND Fashion Business and eCommerce in October 2020. The proposal detailed the subject area, course leadership, the proposed start date, academic rationale. Anticipated market profile, anticipated student intake, indicative content, evidence of demand, resources, digital requirements, course fee, and financial projections (fees, SFC grant projected, staffing costs, other costs).

The minutes of the Academic Board in November 2020 also indicated approval of the course on provision that further details on staff resource costing be provided. However, information was not available by the February 2021 Academic Board resulting in the proposal not formally approved by the Learning and Teaching (L&T) Committee until September 2021.



Curriculum Planning

Objective 3 - Adequate controls are in place over the development of new programmes including the preparation of a business case, costing and pricing. (Continued)

Observation	Risk	Recommendation	Management Response	
<p>The one new course proposal made during 2020/21 took several months (almost one year) to be formally approved by the L&T Committee. This was mainly due to resource information not being complete on the original proposal.</p> <p>As this was only one example, the timeline for approval may not be reflective of the effectiveness of the proposal review and approval process.</p>	<p>Full costing are not transparent to allow for effective decision-making impacting on the efficiency of reviewing and approving new courses or programmes in time for the next academic year.</p>	<p>R1 - The Faculty Board should ensure that all resource costings have been completed prior to submission to the Academic Board and support provided to Faculty leads when developing proposal to ensure that the final proposals to Committee are complete.</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>To be actioned by:</p> <p>Vice Principal Student Experience</p> <p>The costing template will be updated to include initial finance review to ensure robust costing is completed.</p> <p>No later than:</p> <p>31 January 2022</p>	
			<p>Grade</p>	<p>3</p>



Curriculum Planning

Objective 4 - The College has exploited the potential of new technology in order to widen access to the curriculum and enhance the learner experience

Due to COVID-19, there was a shift to digital learning and requirement for some course to review the delivery of programmes. This also impacted courses where specific software was required, however, licenses were limited and could only be accessed on campus i.e., Adobe Creative Cloud by Creative Industries. Despite the challenges, faculties and management worked at pace to identify solutions or alternative ways of working and progressing the courses.

The College has access to a Blended Learning Fund to support the development of online content. There is a bidding process that faculties should follow that is reviewed by the Academic Board and L&T Committee.

As noted in Objective 3, any new course proposal will identify any digital need and any potential upfront costs.

A Digital Strategy 2020-2030 for the College was also in the process of being approved by the Finance and Physical Resources Committee (FPRC) at the time of our audit. As part of the vision to develop a “Digital Campus”, the College also implemented a new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in August 2021 that faculties have been encouraged to use. It is planned to replace Moodle and identified components of MyCity.

The Digital Transformation Group was also created by management to act as a strategic group that brings together stakeholders from across the academic and professional services to ensure there is review of the digital needs of the curriculum programme and roll out of the digital strategy. It is chaired by the VP of Corporate Services and VP of Student Experience. Each initiative will require a business case for agreement and funding approval by ELT/SMT. The new Project Management Office will also provide support for large scale project works with reporting provided to the FPRC.

Discussions with management also noted that while strategic planning has been good in faculties, operational planning arrangements have not been as robust and were inconsistently completed across the organisation for 2021/22 planning. The Senior Management Team have since attended an Operational planning workshop that will support Deans to complete operational plans for 2022/23 financial year. Operational plans should include a review of the digital and estate requirements from areas.



Curriculum Planning

Objective 4 - The College has exploited the potential of new technology in order to widen access to the curriculum and enhance the learner experience. (Continued)

Observation	Risk	Recommendation	Management Response	
<p>The College's Estates Strategy was under review at the time of our audit. However, we were unable to identify a management group that assesses the estate needs in the same way that the Digital Transformation Group reviews the digital requirements around the curriculum.</p>	<p>Interdependencies relating to facility needs from across the curriculum are not fully assessed.</p>	<p>R2 - Management should consider expanding the roles and responsibilities of the Digital Transformation Group to include the review of the physical infrastructure of the estate in line with curriculum needs. This work would allow a platform then to assess the strategic requirements, and feed into any capital investment requirements for both the digital and physical estate infrastructure.</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>In the short-term curriculum related estates change requests will be presented to the Digital Transformation Group.</p> <p>SMT will also review the potential requirement for a specific estates group.</p> <p>To be actioned by:</p> <p>Vice Principal Corporate Services</p> <p>No later than:</p> <p>31 January 2022</p>	
			<p>Grade</p>	<p>3</p>



Curriculum Planning

Objective 5 - The curriculum planning process takes sufficient cognisance of the College's share of the Region's Credits target

As part of the annual portfolio review process, management review the performance of courses and industry needs. Information on the curriculum plan is tracked by the Student Records Team on the Master Student Recruitment Model. Review of the Student Recruitment Model for 2021/22 noted it listed all courses, enrolment target, credit target, credit projections their status, tuition fees, waiver grants projected, notional fee income targets and projections resource. This model in turn feeds into the operational budget planning process. Data is tracked during the student recruitment and enrolment process which was not reviewed as part of this audit.

Progress of recruitment and implications on budget planning is reported to the SLT, Academic Board, L&T Committee, and financial planning to the FPRC as part of the annual reporting cycle.

The data is fed into Faculty Utilisation Tools that allow Faculty Deans and senior management to track arrangements.

Our review of arrangements with the VP of Corporate Services noted the Student Recruitment Model is used consistently throughout the process and controls are reasonable.

Objective 6 - There are strong links between the curriculum planning process and workforce planning and budgeting

As noted in our review of the Student Recruitment Model, we noted that the lecturer hours target, number of weeks of teaching, and total lecturer hours are tracked per course. Total lecturer hours from the previous year are also used for trend analysis. This supports the resource and budget planning arrangements as noted in Objective 5.

However, workforce planning at the College is a complex process. There are many factors when considering the resource needs to staff the curriculum, including balancing the permanent staffing portfolio with permenisation of temporary staff, ensuring that right staff have the right skills to deliver the curriculum and are upskilled where required. To support planning a new Learning and Teaching Academy for academic staff has been developed and a new Assistant Director post has been approved to support lecturer development.

There is also a new People Strategy that is to be reviewed by the Board of Management in November 2021. This will support the medium to longer term vision and planning around the College's workforce and consider the demographics of the workforce.



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