

Board of Management Audit & Assurance Committee

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 29 November 2022
Paper No.	AAC2-G
Agenda Item	5.6.2
Subject of Paper	Internal Audit Report – Internal Communications
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Henderson Loggie
Date of production	21 November 2022
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 Internal Communications 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.

LEVEL OF ASSURANCE

Satisfactory

City of Glasgow College

Internal Communications

Internal Audit report No: 2022/09

Draft issued: 17 November 2022

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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	Fundamental issue subjecting the organisations to material risk which requires to be addressed by management and the Audit and Assurance Committee as a matter of urgency.
Priority 2	Issue subjecting the organisations to significant risk, and which should be addressed by management as a priority.
Priority 3	Matters subjecting the organisations to minor risk or which, if addressed, will enhance efficiency and effectiveness.



Management Summary

Overall Level of Assurance

Satisfactory	System meets control objectives with some weaknesses present
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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 ('the College') Risk Register as at September 2022:

- Failure to support successful student outcomes
- Negative impact upon College reputation

Background

As part of the Internal Audit programme at the College for 2021/22 we carried out a review of the College's internal communications arrangements and processes. The Audit Needs Assessment, agreed with management and the Audit and Assurance Committee in March 2022, 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.

Strengthening internal communications is a priority for the College. Having the right communication structure in place enables staff, students, the Student Association, Trade Unions, and the Board of Management to be appropriately informed about what is going on within the College; participate in key decisions; encourages engagement; and increases a shared understanding of the College's strategic objectives.

The College provides strategic brand and communications guidance and support to all members of the College community using a range of channels including MyConnect (staff intranet platform), Canvas (Student learning environment), City Together digital staff magazine, the Principal's Briefing, social media, and a number of digital screens located across the College's estate.

Our audit identified controls in place over the internal communication processes and obtained views and perception of internal communication effectiveness from interviewed members of management and staff.



Internal Communications

Scope, Objectives and Overall Findings

The scope of this audit was to evaluate the effectiveness of the College’s internal communication arrangements.

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

Objective	Findings				
The objective of our audit was to ensure that:		1	2	3	Actions already in progress
		No. of Agreed Actions			
1. The College has an internal communication strategy and plans in place	Satisfactory	0	0	1	✓
2. The College has established employees preferred method of receiving communication about a range of topics	Good	0	0	0	
3. Employees are getting all of the information they need, on the College and for their specific role	Good	0	0	0	
4. Existing internal communication channels are effective in providing information that is clear, consistent, relevant and timely	Good	0	0	1	
Overall Level of Assurance	Satisfactory	0	0	2	
		System meets control objectives with some weaknesses present			

Audit Approach

Through discussion with the Vice Principal Corporate Services, and other responsible managers and staff, we established the existing internal communication practices and processes in place within the College and considered whether there were any gaps.

Through review of existing employee surveys or collection of further data using a questionnaire as required, we established the level of employee satisfaction and perceptions around the effectiveness of internal communication. This was followed-up through a series of one-on-one interviews / focus groups to capture additional detail regarding the needs, expectations and perceptions of stakeholders on the effectiveness of internal communication across different employee groups in Faculties and Support Services and campus locations.



Summary of Main Findings

Strengths

- Several documented internal communication policies, procedures and guidance documents are in place, including email best practice guide, all-staff and all-student email protocols, Internet content and MyConnect (intranet) best practice guides, Social media policy and other procedural documentation;
- The College deploys a wide range of communication methods to its internal stakeholders (staff and students). The College's intranet platform MyConnect is identified as the main central internal communication tool, effectively supplemented by other resources, with separate protocols existing for proactive and reactive communication;
- The College provides guidance on selecting the optimal method(s) of internal communication depending on the target audience, the purpose and objectives of communication;
- We confirmed that the College's employees were satisfied with the volume of information they receive on the College and information disseminated which was pertinent to their specific roles;
- Regular updates are provided to the College community by the Principal;
- Management and staff confirmed their awareness of the College's strategy, policies, procedures and events, readily available via relevant communication resources; and
- The College's employees consider existing internal communication channels effective in providing high quality information (i.e. clear, concise, relevant, consistent and timeous) to end users.

Weaknesses

- We were advised that there is currently no formally approved Internal Communication strategy in place. However, a set of communication strategy, plans, protocols, guidance and advice is being developed, with a view to obtaining approval by the Strategic Management Team (SMT) and the Board of Management by April 2023. We have not raised a separate recommendation in relation to this finding as we have recognised that management are aware of the position and that work is already underway to address this issue;
- Our review of the Communication operational planning process highlighted that the 2022/23 operational plan was in draft at the time of our fieldwork and was expected to be submitted for approval in November 2022. Additionally, the 2021/22 operational plan contained gaps in alignment of the planned activities with the College's corporate strategic objectives and indicated an incorrect deadline. The template was not formally signed off / dated by the Director of Communications and Vice Principal Corporate Services; and
- We observed that staff surveys were not fully utilised as an opportunity to obtain valuable employee feedback and to provide staff input in identifying areas for further improvement of internal communication processes and practices.

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 College has an internal communication strategy and plans in place

Strategic approach

Through discussion with management, and review of documented procedures and guidance, it was identified that a review of the internal communication process within the College is ongoing. The development of the College's set of relevant strategy, plans, protocols, guidance and advice for all members of the College community, is in progress, with the intention to obtain approval by the Strategic Management Team and the Board of Management by April 2023.

We have acknowledged that there are a number of documented communication resources, policies and guidance already in place, and these are available to relevant users, including, inter alia:

- Email best practice guide;
- All-staff email protocols;
- All-student email protocols;
- Web content best practice guide;
- MyConnect content best practice guide
- Social Media policy (June 2021);
- Writing Content for MyConnect Style Guide;
- Big Screen Guidelines (February 2022).

We confirmed that the College recognises the importance of strengthening internal communications as a priority for the organisation, in helping to achieve the objectives set out in the College's Strategic Plan 2021-30.



Objective 1: The College has an internal communication strategy and plans in place (Continued)

Strategic approach (Continued)

Internal Communications and Staff / Student Engagement approach incorporates the following principles:

- Identifying key stakeholders and Champions (involving staff and students as the major stakeholders but also considering impact on external element, such as media, local politicians, Student Association, Trade Unions);
- Developing clear plan and objectives meeting SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely);
- Engaging people by improving access to information;
- Using appropriate tools (a variety of group platforms and a range of channels, including face-to-face communication, group discussions, surveys, messenger communication etc.);
- Consistent message across all channels with simultaneous updates to avoid misinforming;
- Two-way dialogue (ensuring free, uncensored feedback from stakeholders);
- Inclusive internal communications;
- Concise messaging;
- Internal / External dimension (consistency between internal and external communication);
- Internal Communications included in Crisis Management Plans;
- Structuring existing Internal Communications; and
- Measurement, review and analysis.

Our fieldwork confirmed that, although the College did not have a formally approved internal communication strategy in place at the time of our audit, management are aware of the position, and it is being addressed. We were advised that, once all the Faculties / Directorates provide their feedback and input, then the internal communication strategy and plans will be completed, and a final version will be issued for approval by the SMT and then subsequently the Board. Given that this issue is already being activity addressed we have not included a separate recommendation on this point.



Internal Communications

Objective 1: The College has an internal communication strategy and plans in place (Continued)

Observation	Risk	Recommendation	Management Response	
<p>Operational planning We requested a copy of the current Communications Operational plan. We obtained a copy of the operational plan for Academic Year 2021/22 and were advised that the 2022/23 Operational plan was currently in draft and was expected to be submitted later in November 2022. It was observed that there was no evidence of formal sign-off of the 2021/22 plan (i.e. the completed template was not signed by the Director of Communications and Vice Principal Corporate Services).</p> <p>Additionally, from our Corporate Planning audit assignment (final report issued 18 May 2022) we were aware that draft operational plans across the College were expected to be returned by June 2022 to be approved in advance of the start of the new academic year in August 2022. However, the 2022/23 operational plan for Communication had not yet been finalised at the time of our audit fieldwork.</p> <p>From review of the 2021/22 Operational plan we found that there were no lead managers aligned with actions and the 'Strategic Alignment' column was not completed to demonstrate how the Communications operational objectives, and related planned actions, were supporting achievement of the College's strategic priorities.</p>	<p>In the absence of timeously finalised and formally approved comprehensive operational plan, aligned with key corporate strategic priorities, there is a risk that the Internal Communication activities would not support the long-term corporate strategy, potentially leading to non-achievement of the College's strategic objectives</p>	<p>R1 We recommend that operational planning templates for the internal communications activities should be formally signed off in compliance with the corporate timetable and guidelines, to demonstrate full alignment with the College's corporate strategic objectives and setting out clear deadlines and responsibility for implementation in respect of each key operational objective.</p>	<p>We will update the operational plan in tandem with the completion of the Comms Team's internal Comms "mini roadshows", and subsequent update of our internal Comms strategy. The updated Operational Plan will include clearer alignment to the College's Strategic Plan version objectives, ownership and timeframes.</p> <p>To be actioned by: Head of Communications</p> <p>No later than: 30 April 2023</p>	
			<p>Grade</p>	<p>3</p>



Objective 2: The College has established employees preferred method of receiving communication about a range of topics

From discussions with management and staff we confirmed that the College offers a range of communication methods to its internal stakeholders. These include:

- All-staff email, all-student emails;
- MyConnect – the College’s intranet platform, the key central tool for employee communication;
- Canvas – students’ targeted learning platform (since 2022/23 Academic year. Previously Moodle / MyCity Virtual Learning Environment was used);
- MyDevelopment – staff learning platform;
- Social media: FaceBook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Spotify, SnapChat (also involving aspects of internal communications via personal messaging etc);
- Website, Onelans (digital signage media players across the College’s premises);
- ‘City Together’ (digital staff magazine) and digital Alumni Newsletters;
- Principal’s Briefings (communicated fortnightly), single issue Principal’s Updates (on Covid-19 or financial challenges etc);
- All-manager’s meetings via MS Teams from the Principal (or Depute and other relevant Vice Principals, Directors, Deans) which have both verbal and digital questions being answered;
- One-to-one meetings of staff and management;
- Individual team meetings, both online via MS Teams and face-to-face, where appropriate;
- Key Facts and other internal one-pagers, key documents, e.g. the College’s Prospectus;
- Strategic meetings – Executive Leadership Team (ELT), Strategic Management Team (SMT), Brand and Communications team;
- Academic and Student Experience Group (ASEG) meetings (minuted);
- Staff and student surveys;
- Mini-road shows – initiated with Student Associations and Student Experience team to develop clearer guidance and protocols on College communications to students.

The management and staff interviewed confirmed that, although there is no single ‘one size fits all’ method of communication, MyConnect is used as a primary central internal communication tool, supplemented by other resources, as appropriate. Communications are consistent among various resources, according to our discussions’ findings. There are documented processes in place for issuing all-staff and all-student information, with separate protocols existing for reactive (e.g. following the Government guidance) and proactive messages.

MyConnect Internal Communications guidance states: *“Choosing the correct channel includes thinking about who your audience or audiences are. You need to reach different audiences in different ways. For example, while an email may be enough for one group of colleagues, you will need to think about colleagues who do not have regular access to a computer. Students may prefer to be contacted via a different agreed channel within agreed times of day. If you communicate the right message, to the right person, at the right time, using language they relate to, it’s more likely to be heard, understood and acted on.”*



Objective 2: The College has established employees preferred method of receiving communication about a range of topics (continued)

In general, the process of creation of communication involves the following steps:

- The purpose of communication is identified;
- The objectives of messaging are agreed;
- Agreement on the action expected from the reader / viewer of the message;
- Agreement on priority of the message among other corporate communications;
- Determination of the target audience
- Choosing method of communication, based on the purpose and objectives of communication;
- Tailoring the message for optimal understanding by the target audience.

All-staff communication

Where any team or individual intend to send an all-staff communication, its contents and timetable are agreed and approved by the relevant member of SMT. Once agreed, it is sent to the College's Executive Officer team, and approvals are requested from Director of HR and Director of Communications, and, where necessary, from relevant Director or Faculty Dean, where appropriate. Branded communication is issued within an all-staff email by the Executive Leadership Team, and this is aligned with relevant supporting information on MyConnect and other resources where relevant.

All-student communication

Similarly, where all-student information is intended to be circulated, it is agreed and signed off by ELT and notified to SMT, verified by an agreed representative in Student Experience Directorate and notified to the Student Association President or other relevant team member. The communication is then signed off by the Vice Principal Student Experience and Director Student Experience. The Communication team issues the message to students via email / Canvas / website and / or social media, where appropriate.

We, therefore, concluded that the College offers a range of communication methods and provides guidance on selecting the optimal method(s), depending on the target audience, the purpose and the objectives of the specific communication.



Internal Communications

Objective 3: Employees are getting all the information they need on the College and for their specific role

Through our discussions with management and staff, all interviewees confirmed that they felt that they were receiving a sufficient amount of information in respect of the College and specific to their individual roles and responsibilities.

The main sources of such information were, inter alia:

- Individual job descriptions;
- Strategic and operational plans;
- Relevant policies and procedures published on the intranet and internet;
- Fortnightly Principal's Briefings;
- Management and team meetings;
- One-to-one meetings with line management;
- Various management, staff and working group meetings (e.g. ASEG).

We obtained evidence of the Principal's briefings and meeting records and confirmed that regular communication processes are embedded, with information appropriately disseminated, received and understood. Management and staff confirmed their awareness of their roles, relevant policies and procedures, news and the updates communicated to them.



Internal Communications

Objective 4: Existing internal communication channels are effective in providing information that is clear, consistent, relevant and timely

Through discussion with management and staff we confirmed that all interviewed individuals were satisfied that the information they received via the existing information channels was clear, consistent, relevant and timely.

There is a clear distinction between communications addressing different audiences in contents, style, user-friendliness, accessibility, with consideration of individual cognitive needs and language skills. Messages were prioritised and not excessively voluminous, and contained an appropriate level of infographics (depending on the purpose and target audience). Where communication was directed towards faculties or directorates, it was accompanied by corporate-wide narrative as appropriate. There was consistency in the way that communication was placed on various information resources (e.g. MyConnect and all-staff emails).



Internal Communications

Objective 4 – Existing internal communication channels are effective in providing information that is clear, consistent, relevant and timely (continued)

Observation	Risk	Recommendation	Management Response	
<p>We requested and reviewed the results of the most recent Staff Wellbeing survey (July 2021), and Student Experience survey for Academic Year 2021/22. We confirmed that there was detailed feedback from the Student Experience survey in relation to learners' communication with lecturers and staff via a variety of channels (e.g. for off-campus learning, accessibility of learning resources etc.).</p> <p>However, the Staff Wellbeing survey outcome contained generic feedback on communication. Additionally, no recent surveys dedicated to communication processes were offered to staff. We consider this as an area for potential improvement, as staff opinions on the effectiveness of internal communications can inform the decision-making and management actions across the College in respect of communication resources, policies, and practices.</p>	<p>In the absence of comprehensive staff feedback on internal communication and input in development of communication practices, opportunities for improvement could not be identified and exploited, potentially affecting the College's operations</p>	<p>R2 We suggest that specific surveys focused on internal communication processes within the College should be designed and offered to relevant stakeholders. Consideration should also be given to the inclusion of detailed internal communication question(s) in future all staff surveys undertaken at the College.</p>	<p>We will work with the College Performance team and Students' Association to determine the best way to implement this recommendation. We will consider whether to establish a new survey focussing exclusively on student Comms or add a significant element in an established student survey.</p> <p>To be actioned by: Head of Communications</p> <p>No later than: 30 June 2023</p>	
			<p>Grade</p>	<p>3</p>



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