



Chartered
Institute of
Internal
Auditors

Parliamentary briefing:

An introduction to internal audit

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What is internal audit and why should it matter to parliamentarians?

As a parliamentarian, it is helpful for you to understand the role and value of internal audit in promoting greater accountability, transparency, effective risk management, and good corporate governance, all of which support sustained economic growth and wealth creation across all sectors of the economy.

Everyone will have heard of auditors, and for many this will mean what is technically known as external audit. External auditors analyse and test financial accounts to ensure the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial situation of an organisation. As the name suggests, these auditors must be external to the organisation whose accounts are being audited.

Internal audit is there to provide independent assurance to an organisation's board that its risk management, governance and internal control processes are operating effectively. Internal auditors are most often employed directly by the organisation. When they are not, they are usually referred to as outsourced or co-sourced internal audit.

The risks that an internal auditor looks at are not just financial risks, but also non-financial risks like cybersecurity, supply chains and environmental, social and governance-related risks including climate change and even assessing the corporate culture or diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Internal audit operates independently from the operations it evaluates, reporting directly to both the board (typically via the Audit Committee) and to senior management, so as to provide effective oversight and governance. This is why typically, internal audit reports to the audit committee.

As parliamentarians, supporting legislative or regulatory initiatives that strengthen internal audit functions can drive improvements across all sectors, ensuring a resilient and prosperous economy. The following sections provide more detail on how internal audit helps to safeguard investment, protect jobs, and support sustainable economic growth.

What do internal auditors do: Assessing the management of risk

Internal auditors independently evaluate and assess an organisation's management of risk. All organisations face risks, for example, risks to the organisation's reputation if it treats customers or employees unfairly, health and safety risks, risks of supplier failure, risks associated with market failure, cybersecurity, and financial risks to name some key areas.

To evaluate how well risks are being identified, managed, and mitigated the internal auditor will assess the quality of risk management processes, systems of internal control and corporate governance processes, across all parts of an organisation and report this directly and independently to the most senior level of executive management and the board's audit committee.

What do internal auditors do? Assisting management in improving internal controls

An internal auditor's knowledge of the management of risk also enables them to act as a consultant providing advice and acting as a catalyst for improvement in an organisation's practices. For example, if a line manager is concerned about a particular area of responsibility, working with the internal auditor could help to identify improvements. Or perhaps a major new project is being undertaken – the internal auditor can help to ensure that project risks are clearly identified and assessed with action taken to manage them.

Where does internal audit add value?

Internal audit carries out independent risk assessments and provides independent assurance that the controls and measures put in place to manage and mitigate these risks are effective.

Here are some of the ways internal audit supports organisations:

Risks	How does internal audit add value?
Fraud	Internal audit conducts risk assessments, recommends fraud detection procedures, and helps ensure compliance with anti-fraud policies. These measures help internal audit identify vulnerabilities, detect fraudulent activities, and recommend improvements to reduce the likeliness and impact of fraud.
Cybersecurity & data security	Internal audit plays a crucial role in supporting the organisation to mitigate cybersecurity and data security risks. By conducting systematic assessments, internal audit can identify weaknesses in cybersecurity controls and measures and recommend improvements.
Legal and regulatory compliance	Internal audit plays a vital role in monitoring compliance with laws and regulations. By supporting adherence to legal and regulatory requirements, internal auditors assist organisations in mitigating legal and reputational risks.
Climate change and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance)	Internal audit can support the management and mitigation of climate change and ESG risks by conducting independent assessments of the organisation's sustainability practices, carbon footprint, climate transition and ESG compliance. Internal audit can recommend adopting environmentally friendly practices, promoting ethical conduct and responsible corporate behaviour.
Human capital, diversity and talent management	Internal audit can evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment, retention and employee development strategies. By identifying gaps and recommending improvements, internal audit helps the organisation optimise its human capital potential, assessing diversity, equality and inclusion, and reducing risks associated with talent acquisition and workforce retention.
Geopolitical & macroeconomic	Internal audit can play a role in independently evaluating and assessing the organisation's preparedness for geopolitical and macroeconomic events and the associated risks. By analysing and evaluating geopolitical and macroeconomic risks, internal auditors can provide advice and recommend risk mitigation strategies.

The difference between internal and external audit

	External Audit	Internal audit
Reports to	Shareholders or members who are outside the organisation's governance structure.	The board and senior management who are within the organisation's governance structure.
Objectives	Add credibility and reliability to financial reports from the organisation to its stakeholders by giving opinions on the report.	Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes. This provides members of the boards/senior management with assurance that helps them fulfil their duties.
Coverage	Financial reports, financial reporting risks.	All categories of risk, their management, including reporting on them.
Responsibility for improvement	None. However, there is a duty to report problems.	Improvement is fundamental to the purpose of internal auditing. But it is done by advising, coaching and facilitating in order to not undermine the responsibility of management.

What types of organisations have internal audit?

In the UK and Ireland, the requirement for having an internal audit function is not universal across all types of organisations. Whether or not an organisation has an internal audit function will largely depend on its size, complexity, and risk profile. However, certain types of organisations and businesses are mandated or encouraged to have internal audit functions.

Organisations	Requirement for an internal audit function
Public sector organisations	Central government departments, local authorities, and other public sector bodies are often required to have internal audit functions to ensure accountability and compliance with public finance regulations.
Financial services sector	The Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) are the regulatory bodies responsible for overseeing financial institutions in the UK. The PRA Rulebook ¹ and the FCA Handbook set out the regulatory requirements for financial institutions, including the expectations for risk management, governance, control, and internal audit. This includes the requirement to establish and maintain an independent internal audit function which is separate and independent from the other functions and activities of the firm. Meaning internal audit is mandatory across financial services.
Publicly listed companies and public interest entities (PIEs)	The decision to establish an internal audit function is typically left to a company's management and board of directors. The UK Corporate Governance Code, issued by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC), sets out principles related to corporate governance for listed companies. While it does not mandate internal audit, it emphasises the importance of reviewing the effectiveness of the company's internal audit function or, if none exists, considering annually whether one is needed and making a recommendation to the board. The 2024 update to the Code further highlights the need for a robust internal control and risk management framework, including a requirement for the Board to declare that material controls have operated effectively. This is likely to result in Boards seeking greater independent assurance, including from internal audit functions.
Charities and Non-Profit organisations	The Charity Commission for England and Wales ² provides guidance on internal controls and governance, advising that larger or more complex charities may need an internal audit function or audit committee. Smaller charities should regularly review the need for these functions and ensure alternative methods to check financial controls are in place.
Energy sector	Recently Ofgem strengthened its Financial Responsibility Principle ³ (FRP) meaning that energy suppliers should have an internal audit function. The FRP outlines "Where internal audit capability is not present, suppliers should provide an explanation for its absence and how independent internal assurance is achieved, as well as consider annually whether there is a need for internal audit capability, including making recommendations to the board."

About us

The Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors represents over 10,000 internal audit professionals working for companies across all sectors in the UK and Ireland. We champion the contribution internal audit makes to good corporate governance, strong risk management, and a rigorous control environment leading to the long-term success of organisations.

Contact us

We hope that you find this briefing useful in understanding the role and value of internal audit. For any enquiries regarding this briefing or if you would like to set up a meeting to find out more about how we can support your work as a parliamentarian please contact: Gavin Hayes, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at gavin.hayes@iia.org.uk.

¹ The Prudential Regulation Authority 'PRA Rulebook' <https://www.prarulebook.co.uk/>

² Gov.UK 'The Charity Commission' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/internal-financial-controls-for-charities-cc8/internal-financial-controls-for-charities#internal-audit-functions-and-audit-committees>

³ OFGEM 'Financial Responsibility Principle' <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/decision-strengthening-financial-resilience>