

Meet The Experts

Amelia Clark

Head of Internal Scrutiny

Amelia's background seems tailor-made for her role as Head of Internal Scrutiny at Strictly. With a background in accountancy and audit, plus experience leading educational settings and all that entails, it is a role that brings her passion for well-run education and her audit experience together.

Starting out with a Business & Law degree, Amelia worked for the V&A in London before becoming a Chartered Accountant specialising in external and internal audits with a leading accountancy firm Baker Tilly. Here, she helped public sector bodies such as Local Authorities, District Councils and NHS Trusts scrutinise their operations to provide efficient and effective services to residents or patients, whilst ensuring value for money.

Amelia also has hands-on experience of running businesses in the education sector, both in out-of-school care and preschool.

"I had a baptism of fire in the world of education," says Amelia, "but it gave me great insights into the challenges every school and college faces every day."

Now, as a **Chartered Internal Auditor** and Head of Internal Scrutiny at Strictly, Amelia draws on her practical experience and professional skills to provide expert guidance and support to a wide range of schools and MATs.

Quickfire Questions with Amelia Clark

How did you end up working in the education sector?

When I was expecting my second child, I wanted to find something fulfilling which would also allow me to spend more time with my children. There was no wraparound care available locally – so I set it up! I was soon running a popular business, collecting children from 12 schools and offering outdoor learning and holiday clubs to help working parents. I loved it.

I am very passionate about education and children's learning, and soon branched out to take over a local preschool, with around 50 children a year and 12 teachers. It was a busy time, but profoundly fulfilling. From undergoing an Ofsted inspection (judged Outstanding on every count) to recruiting staff, dealing with safeguarding, working with SEND and outside agencies, this experience made me realise how different every day can be in the world of education, and how everyone involved is juggling a host of responsibilities.

Why did you choose the education sector?

I realised I could combine my passion and practical knowledge of education with my professional training as an auditor. My experience in the business end of education is very special to me, and I wanted to play a part in helping pupils gain the best outcomes.

I am delighted that my internal scrutiny role now gives me the opportunity to give clear, actionable advice that really helps our clients, supporting them to create the best outcomes for children and young people, and a strong foundation for lifelong success.

Describe your role in a nutshell

I lead the internal audit team which provides internal scrutiny of educational services. We give an independent, objective assurance opinion to the school or MAT that their financial and operational controls are both compliant and effective; and help them manage their resources efficiently to achieve their educational objectives.

Unlike an external audit scrutinising financial accounts, our internal audits are geared towards helping manage risk and add value. We hope clients will see us as a 'slightly critical friend' – helping them to review key areas and sharing our wider knowledge of the sector. Our audit reviews can be broad, and include areas such as:

- **Financial practices**
- **Governance structures**
- **Risk management**
- **Human resources**
- **Payroll**
- **Attendance**
- **Cyber and data security**
- **Estates and premises**
- **Safeguarding**
- **Business continuity planning**
- **SEND provision**

We scrutinise the issues faced by the education sector in general, and the unique issues facing our particular client school, then use our expertise to offer guidance and advice on best practice, share templates, and help them mitigate and manage risks. Our clients find this an invaluable service, as we have a much broader, deeper understanding of their issues than any external financial auditor.

What does a typical week look like?

There really is no typical school or typical week! The education sector is dynamic, ever evolving and no two days ever look the same – but the week is always punctuated with reminders of the very real impact our work has on children's lives.

Our team works remotely for much of the time, but we enjoy visiting schools too. For example, we may meet on site to understand the unique culture and situation of a school, or when we are helping them juggle practical issues where we can have a direct impact on how they manage resources effectively.

Most weeks I will spend time with client audit committees to make sure I understand their circumstances, their strategic ambition and risk environment, so that I can draw up an appropriate audit strategy. I also spend time working with my professional services colleagues understanding what emerging issues are in all fields from governance to cyber to keep abreast of technical changes and risks. I also organise and deliver a tight programme of CPD to ensure everyone is kept up to date.

What do you love about your role?

I love the variety of my job. Every client has changing priorities, and I really enjoy collaborating with their trustees and executive leaders, looking at their strategic aims as well as what is going on in the sector, and tailoring our programme of scrutiny to focus on risks that are truly important to them. My team all have practical experience in education so we are extremely well-placed to deal with our clients' challenges.

What project are you most proud of?

I am proud that our reviews deliver far more than just an audit – we bring in real-life examples of risk management solutions, share best practice and templates. As a result, we help schools and MATs become more efficient and effective, so that their saved money and time can be used to improve educational outcomes for learners.

Recently, we have helped several Trusts to review their emergency procedures (for example, how do you lockdown children in Reception?). Help with practicalities such as this leaves children safer and staff more empowered. We do so much to help our clients deal with challenges from risk management to Business Continuity planning, always focussing on the best solutions for their unique circumstances. It's an exciting and rewarding job which makes me proud every day.

What does success look like in a day's work for you?

For me, success is about making a difference. Whether it's helping a school enhance its operational efficiency, or contributing to a safer, more effective learning environment for students - those moments when I can see the direct impact of our work on both staff and pupils truly define a successful day for me.

What is the most interesting thing you have learnt at Strictly ?

Working with a range of clients at Strictly has developed my understanding of how multifaceted the education sector can be, and how unique every single school or educational establishment is. I have learned how essential it is to adapt our approach to these unique needs, to truly have an impact.

I have also been struck by the sheer number of roles and responsibilities that leaders in education have to juggle – the breadth of one individual's duties can be overwhelming. Seeing this first hand reinforces for me the value of what we are doing: helping to make their roles a bit easier and allowing them to focus on what truly matters – the educational success of their students.

How do you envision the role of your support services consultancy evolving to meet the changing needs of schools/ academy trusts in the next five years?

Central to our approach is keeping our finger on the pulse of the ever changing landscape of the education sector. The risks continue to emerge and change and we must adapt our focus to address these challenges for our clients. For example, rising costs associated with SEND, along with declining attendance and falling rolls post COVID, are now significant concerns for MATs. In response, we have targeted work in these areas, supporting our clients to monitor and mitigate risk.

The recent [National School Trust Report](#) revealed over 50% of Trusts will focus their efforts on technology, data and infrastructure in the short to medium term. We are spending more time with our clients on their IT Strategy, data and cyber risks. As schools increasingly explore Artificial Intelligence, internal scrutiny will play a role helping our clients evaluate, understand and communicate the extent to which it can create value in line with their strategic priorities, embracing its benefits while identifying and addressing associated risks before they are realised.

Fun question – What is your favourite school memory?

I think when I was cast as a cheerleader in my end of school musical production “A Baseball Game”. I love musical theatre and getting that part – especially as I was cast alongside my best friend – felt amazing. I was incredibly nervous as I was quite shy at that time but it pushed me out of my comfort zone. Rehearsing with my friends and classmates was really fun and created some unforgettable memories. It was an experience that taught me that you can usually find a way through even something that seems daunting, and my confidence definitely grew as part of the process. Now the challenge is getting the microphone away from me!

Give us a quick introduction to the rest of your team

I selected my team to provide the key ingredients that I know will give the best service to our clients. Unlike external financial auditors, my internal scrutiny team have all worked within education and so have the practical experience to give significant and effective advice in the education sector.

We are all qualified or qualifying auditors who have chosen to focus on becoming Chartered Internal Auditors because we are passionate about applying our financial knowledge to the education sector. We’d love to help you get the best for your students, and look forward to working with you.

To arrange a meeting with Amelia Clark please contact:
enquire@strictlyeducation.co.uk or **contact us on 03430 123 2549**

