

Northern Regional College

Audit & Risk Committee

Minutes of Meeting on 18 February 2026, 5.00pm online

Present: Mrs C McGovern (CMG, Chair); Mr B Devlin (BD); Dr P Graham (PG); Mrs J Taggart (JT)

In Attendance: Mr D Blair (DB); Dr C Guy (CG, item 95.7); Mr M Higgins (MH, Observer); Mrs S Scannell (SS); Mrs K Wallace (Secretary, KW)

External Attendees: Mrs P Wilson (PW) / Ms G Samm (GS), DfE; Mr D Archibald (DA), Henderson Loggie; Mr S Wade (SW) / Ms K Doey (KD), NIAO

95.1 Welcome and Introductions: The Chair welcomed all attendees.

95.2 Apology: D Macauley

95.3 Declaration of Interests: None declared.

95.4 Minutes of Previous Meetings

PG proposed and BD seconded approval of the minutes of 12 Nov 2025, 9 Dec 2025 and 26 Jan 2026 (subject to minor amendments).

95.5 Matters Arising

Actions noted as per action list attached at Appendix 1.

Action: Actions under matters arising will be added to the next full meeting of Committee.

Noted that the DfE ARAC Assurance Statement had been amended and submitted to the Department.

95.6 Chair's Communications / Correspondence

CMG updated members on meeting with Internal Audit on 9 February including discussion on additional items, assurance on intended methodology, confirmation that controls would be reviewed and assurance of fitness for purpose be provided, full review of all negative balances would be explored as part of audits and discussion on potential increase to number of audit days. Upcoming events including non-executive meeting with NIAO on 2 March and CEF Audit & Risk training on 6 March were noted.

95.7 Information Governance Report

CG joined the meeting at 5.10pm. She took members through the report, detailed the context for each of the cases and answered members' questions. She left the meeting at 5.25pm.

95.8 New Guidance

Documents provided in advance including letters on Accounts Directions and Government Financial Reporting Manual (FreM) were noted along with summary paper outlining the purpose, key points and impact for the College from each document.

Noted that new guidance would be a standard agenda item in future and notification of any technical reporting or resourcing issues would be advised to members.

95.9 External Audit

KD provided a verbal update on work to close the 2023/24 audit and noted that the College had confirmed no further evidence and to close out 2023/24 as soon as possible. She restated the likelihood of a disclaimed opinion and hoped to be in a position to share the C&AG report and the draft RTTCWG next week, subject to the outcome of the QA process. A broad timetable had been agreed with SS aiming to have the 23/24 accounts certified by end March 2026.

CMG challenged the length of time between provision of the draft reports and finalization of accounts. KD clarified the process and SW noted possible impact of the significant qualification from NIAO on C&AG's response. CMG noted that meetings could be arranged to facilitate clearing accounts as soon as available.

SW updated the position on the 2024/25 accounts, which would also be disclaimed. He noted tight timelines and focus on July 2025 accounts closing balances. He would continue close contact with MH and SS and keep members advised.

MH and SS had previously met with NIAO and DfE to discuss a pragmatic approach to moving forward with the July 2025 and March 2026 accounts. This would be discussed further at a meeting with NIAO/DfE next week, with a focus on limiting any negative impact on the Department's March 2026 accounts timeframe. Proposals on the way forward and level of work required to ensure alignment to timeframes would be brought to ARAC and GB for recommendation.

CMG agreed with the pragmatic approach, with members to be kept updated with a paper to outline proposals, implications and risks to College. She noted the importance of strengthening governance through lessons learnt.

BD welcomed the proposed date and timeframe for signoff of 2023/24 accounts and noted upcoming deadlines for 2024/25 and March 2026 accounts.

95.10 Risk Register

MH presented the RR and highlighted changes since the Governing Body meeting in January. Risk 1 was updated to reflect cyber security actions and Risk 2 was expanded to include the implications of the new HR system implementation and mitigations in place.

Necessary amendments to the RAG coding system were noted. In response to members' questions, MH clarified the College's involvement in sourcing a new HR system with current focus on data migration.

CMG questioned management of sensitive data transfer and was content with the plans outlined.

95.11 Internal Audit

IA Progress Report, Follow-up Reviews, Strategic IA Plan and NRC Progress report, had been provided in advance.

DA highlighted changes made to the Strategic Plan following feedback from the meeting on 9 February and advised that feedback on cyber security from today's meeting would be incorporated.

CMG was content with the plan and TOR subject to inclusion of reporting dates in the Progress Report. DA will incorporate the requested information into the report.

MH thanked DA for incorporating members' and matters NIAO identified during the July 2024 audit and was comfortable with the strategy. RTTCWG will be shared with IA when available.

DA referred to the follow-up reviews and noted that any outstanding issues would be followed up in future reports.

MH welcomed the plan and questioned the impact of mandatory reporting on data. DA confirmed that both individual and sector reports would be done within timescales to align to annual accounts timeframes.

CMG asked for members to be kept informed of any resourcing constraints by IA.

DB presented the internal NRC progress report and noted focus on partially implemented recommendations. No major risks.

CMG was content with the report.

95.12 Work Action Plan

Members discussed the plan and position paper which had been shared in advance.

SS outlined incorporation of changes to the document as requested by members and explained the new process for RAG coding tasks recorded as amber until fully checked and quality assured. Good progress was noted toward 24/25 accounts completion, specifically debtors and the support of SERC acknowledged. Optimistic, any slippages in the workplan can be recovered and remain on target to have draft accounts for the end of March. She clarified the impact of the re-living exercise which was unlikely to be fully completed

CMG was content with change to risk colour basis and agreed the need to close out 2024/25 accounts and work on 2025/26 as quickly as possible.

MH recorded his appreciation to SERC for the support and QA provided and to David McCullough for his work in supporting and guiding the team. He noted close work with the Department on timeframes. MH also paid credit to SS for her work to date and the work of the team in moving to a much stronger position.

PG welcomed assurance on progress with long term issues and congratulated all those involved.

95.13 Recovery Plan

MH outlined work to update the plan following feedback from recent meeting with the Department and to capture all extra scrutiny and oversight being carried out.

Action: Updated plan to be brought to full meeting of ARAC and Governing Body in March.

95.14 Other Registers

A NIL return for DAC, Fraud and Raising Concerns registers was noted.

Records of all gifts and hospitality were noted. The register would be published on the College website at the end of the year.

94.15 AOB

General satisfaction with progress to date was noted.

95.16 Date of Next Meetings

2 March – Non-executive meeting with NIAO

23 March – Full Committee meeting

An additional meeting may be convened early in March, subject to accounts being available and members were asked to make themselves available if needed.

Action: KW will poll dates for a meeting if needed.

Meeting closed at 6.30pm.

CMcGovern

Mrs C McGovern, Chair

Date: 18.02.26

K Wallace

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

APPENDIX 1

Audit & Risk Action Log

Ref	Page (item)	Action	Raised	Owner	Due Date	Status
Meeting 91 : 12.11.25						
MA-01	1 (4.3)	Assurance Mapping to be considered with IA for taking forward	CMG	DB	Ongoing	Open
Meeting 93: 26.01.26						
MA-02	2 (4)	Share audit timeline with members	CMG	SS	Next full Committee meeting	Open
MA-03	2 (4)	Revise workplan incl. version history and dates	CMG	MH / SS	Next full Committee meeting	Open
MA-04	2 (5)	Arrange face-to-face meeting with Internal Audit	CMG	KW	Completed	Closed
MA-05	2 (5)	Arrange non-executive meeting with External Audit	CMG	KW	Completed	Closed
MA-06	2 (5)	Add planned increase in touchpoints with IA/NIAO to Recovery Plan	CMG	MH / SS	March ARAC/GB meetings	In Progress
MA-07	3 (5)	Follow up on monthly bank reconciliations with Central Finance	SS	DB	Ongoing	Open
MA-08	2 (5)	EA to provide paper to ARAC/GB on audit sequencing and timelines	CMG	MH / SS	March meetings	In Progress
MA-09	3 (8)	Update DfE ARAC Assurance Statement and circulate	SL	SL	Completed	Closed
Meeting 95: 18.02.26						
MA-10	3 (11)	Add reporting dates, planned start/end dates to IA Progress Report	CMG	DA	Next ARAC meeting	In Progress
MA-11	4 (12)	Continue updates to Work Action Plan incl. RAG rating QA process	SS	SS	Ongoing	Open
MA-12	4 (13)	Incorporate DfE feedback into Recovery Plan	MH	MH	March ARAC/GB meetings	In Progress
Ma-13	4 (16)	Poll members for early March meeting if accounts available		KW	As required	Pending