

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 14 April 2025 on MS Teams commencing at 4.00pm.

Present: Mr D Small (Chair), Mrs L Crilly, Mr B Devlin, Dr P Graham, Mrs P Martin

In Attendance: Mr D Blair, Ms K Doey (NIAO), Mr I McCartney (RSM), Mr M Higgins, Mr S Lavery, Mr K Nelson, Ms P Wilson (DfE)

Secretary: Mrs K Wallace

85.1 Apologies

Mrs Brown and Mr Macauley.

85.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

85.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The draft minutes of meeting on 05.03.25 were approved subject to Ms Kate Guy's name being added to the list of attendees.

Proposed: PG Seconded: BD

85.4 Matters Arising

Members noted that updated figures on LMS performance and user experience would be brought to the next meeting.

85.5 Chair's Communication / Correspondence

Letter from the Permanent Secretary: DS commented that it was disappointing to note the references relating to the College made in the Department Accounts. Referring to issues listed in the letter from the Permanent Secretary, SL advised that some were not significant and had been resolved, but that work continued with the auditors on a small number.

MH noted that the letter had been considered at the Financial Accounts Improvement Committee (FAIC) on 07.04.25 and updated members on feedback at the Accountability meeting, which had also been discussed. Committee heard that a subsequent meeting with the Permanent Secretary had taken place earlier in the day, when MH had accepted that the College's performance could have been stronger and confirmed the College's current state of readiness, and the strengthened team and resources for the coming year.

Committee agreed focus on closing out this year's accounts but sought assurance that members would be provided with up-to-date information on events. Members were content to note that, alongside reporting to GB, MH proposed to share draft minutes of FAIC with ARC once reviewed by the FAIC Chair.

Action: Draft minutes of FAIC meetings to be shared with ARC.

PM queried and received clarification from DS on the College's contribution to the delay of the Departmental accounts.

Letter from S Hetherington: DS summarised the contents of this letter and emphasised the importance of ensuring accuracy of materials being sent to the Department, in order to help regain the confidence of both the Department and NIAO.

SL outlined assurances being provided to Committee and FAIC on planning, preparation and actions for the March accounts, along with regular communication taking place with the Department. He gave assurance that all work was up to date and a much improved position for the '25 accounts.

85.6 Accounts Update

DB took members through his paper and expanded on key actions required to close out College accounts including engagement with auditors and collaboration with other colleges on presentation and disclosure matters.

KD noted extensive work carried out over the past weeks, especially in relation to the audit trail. She was unable to confirm a timeline for completion of the accounts, especially given the busy Easter period, but would endeavour to progress as quickly as possible. She referred to a potential regularity issue which might need input from the Department.

MH noted Committee's appreciation for everything NIAO had done. He acknowledged the Department priorities on work needed from NIAO and confirmed the College's readiness to prioritise the Departmental accounts. DS noted the challenge presented to the finance team.

LC noted her concern at the situation and reiterated her request for Committee to be made aware of any issues and kept updated. DS and PG agreed with this request.

MH advised that FAIC would meet on 28.04.25 to review the position.

Action: Draft FAIC minutes and papers for the meeting on 28.04.25 would be shared with A&R.

DS and PG reiterated the importance of regaining confidence with the Department and NIAO.

85.7 Internal Audit Update

IMC presented the Progress Report and noted that the Safeguarding review had been issued for management responses with a proposed Satisfactory assurance. He updated Committee on progress on the ASF and Key Financial Controls reports.

Members noted the Emerging Risk Radar (ERR) report which would be circulated around relevant people and incorporated into the risk workshop in May.

MH referred to the latest position on Action Short Of Strike in particular withholding of grades and steps being taken by the FE Colleges to progress an affordable pay offer. The implication of ASOS and reconsideration of College risk appetite will be picked up in the risk workshop.

DS noted the paper on Global IA Standards and IMC outlined assurance that the IA manual for all UK staff was continually updated along with staff training.

Committee debated treatment of risks outside of College's control, including sectoral risks, and MH outlined actions taken to mitigate against those risks and to exercise influence wherever possible. This issue would be included in the risk workshop in relation to risk appetite.

85.8 Assurance Statement

MH presented the Assurance Statement and drew members' attention to changes which had been incorporated since the draft Statement, specifically referencing the accounts closure matters highlighted in report presented to ARC. He confirmed that information on lecturers' pay was in the public domain.

85.9 Any Other Business None.

85.10 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on 21.05.2025.

Action: The Secretary would poll Committee members on a date for a Risk Workshop week commencing 12 May.

The meeting concluded at 5.15pm.

Mr D Small *DSmall*

Date: 28.05.2025

Chair

Mrs K Wallace



Secretary

Action Log

Item No		Person Responsible	Date Due	Actioned
85.4	Update on LMS performance and user experience	DB	14.04.25	
85.5	Share draft minutes of FAIC to be shared with ARC	KW	asap	
85.6	Share papers for FAIC meeting on 28.04.25 with ARC	KW	asap	
85.10	Poll re date for risk workshop	KW	immediate	