

## **Northern Regional College**

### **Governing Body**

#### **Minutes of meeting on 24 March 2026 in Ballymena at 5.00pm.**

**Present:** Mr C McKenna (Chair), Mr P Burke (Teams), Dr P Graham (Teams), Mr M Higgins, Ms D McIlwaine (Teams), Mrs C McGovern, Mr I Murphy, Mr B Patterson, Mrs J Taggart

**In Attendance:** Mrs C Brown, Mr S Laverty, Ms S Scannell, Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

#### **134.1 Welcome**

The Chair welcomed all members and noted remote participants joining via Teams.

#### **134.2 Apologies**

Apologies were recorded for Mr B Devlin, Ms J Hemphill and Mr D Macaulay (absent).

#### **134.3 Declaration of Interests**

No new declarations were made.

#### **134.4 Minutes of Last Meeting**

The draft minutes of 28 January 2026 were proposed by IM, seconded by CMG and approved.

Notes from the Strategy Day on 25 February 2026 were considered.

PG provided a summary of the Curriculum component of the day and his suggestion that a mapping exercise of curriculum provision to date be undertaken and a small task-and-finish (T&F) subgroup (5–6 members) established to examine future direction.

CMK referred to recent discussions with DfE on turning strategic thinking into deliverable propositions and noted this as an example.

CB advised curriculum strategy refresh is timely and aligns with corporate strategy.

CMK emphasised the need to consider external funding sources if departmental allocations cannot support identified future developments.

#### **Action: Task & Finish Subgroup to be established and selected members contacted.**

Noted that work would progress over the summer and updates be provided thereafter. MH referred to the consultation timeframe, obtaining feedback from Department and that wider management views are being sought.

CMK will communicate this strategic direction to DfE and sector colleagues.

#### **134.5 Matters Arising**

No outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

Members who had still to complete cyber-security training were encouraged to do so.

## **134.6 Chair's Communication**

The Chair updated members on activities which had taken place since the previous meeting or were due to take place shortly including: College, DfE and CEF event, and oversight meetings. He noted that the meeting with the Minister on Reform had been postponed to 14 April.

## **134.7 Accounts**

**Change of Accounting Date:** Members reviewed the proposed amendment to the College's year end to 31 March and noted that submission to DfE was in progress.

**Action: The Change of Accounting Date was formally approved.**

**July 2024 Accounts:** MH and SS summarised engagement with NIAO and noted that the completion date of end March previously indicated by NIAO had not occurred and no revised date confirmed. All issues flagged from continuing NIAO technical team reviews had been reported to DfE and GB.

CMK had expressed strong dissatisfaction with this position at the Stocktake Meeting. DfE recognised College efforts and acknowledged delays lie primarily with NIAO technical review but were unsure that a meeting with the C&AG would be beneficial at this stage.

PG emphasised need for continuity and suggested meeting with C&AG.

CMK reported it unlikely that the College would be called to PAC but could go in front of the Economy Committee and felt that he should write to the C&AG on behalf of the GB. MH referred to waiting for outcome on July 2024 accounts then meeting with NIAO thereafter to engage on audit planning for July 2025.

**Action: A letter to the C&AG would be drafted to go out this week.**

**July 2025 Accounts Work Plan update:** 75% complete. First review of balance sheet items completed. Key areas to be finalised: fixed assets, deferred capital grants, revaluation reserves. Priority being given to working towards March 2026 component accounts submission deadline of 30 April. Significant progress made on the in-year transaction with DfE, agreed up to February 2026. MH recorded thanks to the DfE team and SERC for their help in supporting workplan and training activities.

Requests for meeting with NIAO had not been responded to, and no audit strategy received for 2025 which requires previous year to be closed down.

Dashboard improvements were noted; further granularity requested by CMG who queried capability levels. SS reported on the job training, with new templates and workpapers implemented. She noted capacity constraints but improvements and new processes have been implemented for example. Monthly Reporting introduced with a hard General Ledger close for February 2026 completed for first time in many years. However, issues with system balances and reports remain ongoing. The receivables control accounts remain outside College's control. This has been forwarded to Intersect, the service provider, for resolution.

Further work has had to be undertaken to reflect the opening balances for 1 April 2025 in the system. These had been done off-line and were not reflected in system. Priority to get this completed as this impacts the 31 July 2025 and 31 March 2026.

PB left the meeting at 6.00pm.

MH noted the College was in a stronger position this year, with SERC training to increase once March 2026 accounts were submitted. Work to identify necessary reallocation of resources was also underway.

Members's request for staff appraisals to address performance issues where necessary, were noted.

MH noted that the RTTCWG would hopefully be available for the ARAC meeting on 22 April when NIAO would update on progress.

**Recovery Plan:** Overall status of the plan is amber with March 2026 accounts expected to also move to amber next month. Monthly assurance meetings will continue; DfE acknowledged College making strong progress despite NIAO bottleneck.

CMG's request that delayed scheduling of the March 2026 audit be mentioned in the letter to the C&AG was noted.

#### **134.8 Principal's Report**

MH presented his report and highlighted a number of key themes including strong attendance levels at Open Day, College achievements, with special mention to Daniel Evans, Zoey Hopkins and Paige Bell; and staff awards. Funding for Mature Skills and Childcare (NA region) micro-credentials was welcomed and maximisation of funding for renewable energy and equipment replacement noted.

Members noted significant system updates in HR, Finance and Student Services.

#### **134.9 Audit & Risk Committee**

CMG provided a brief summary of topics covered at the meetings on 26 January, 9 February and 18 February 2026, and the minutes were endorsed.

CMG updated on meeting with NIAO on 2 March 2026, noting largely positive feedback around lessons learned and progress, with some areas of concern around wider governance and control environment awaiting IA assurance.

Ongoing concern was noted at NIAO's inability to give commitment on accounts sign-off.

Members reviewed and noted the Corporate Risk Register. Members were advised a separate Resources meeting on cyber will review and advise on the risk rating.

#### **134.10 Education Committee**

Minutes from meeting on 21 January 2026 were noted and endorsed.

PG provided a verbal update of the meeting on 18 March 2026 including: subgroup planning for curriculum aligned to regional need and DfE priorities; MASN uplift request for additional 38 places; positive ETI verbal feedback with written report pending; strong Safeguarding (SG) mid-year review with improved student engagement; retention 92%; and enrolments exceeding target at 14,422.

BP commended the work of SG and pastoral support teams.

SG training would be available for all members by June.

**Action: Circulate Mid-Year Student Experience Report for information.**

#### **134.11 Resources Committee**

IM gave a verbal update of meeting on 22 January 2026 and briefly outlined discussion on new build progress and funding; cyber security, with a recent open session presented by Bill McCluggage; and finance with scenario planning for a challenging budgetary environment to begin in April.

**Action: SL will draft a letter to formally recognise KM's work on new builds over the last years, for signing by the Chair on behalf of the GB.**

#### **134.12 Financial Accounts Improvement Committee**

Minutes from meetings on 15 January and 24 February were noted.

CMK advised that we should consider standing down FAIC and consider how best to ensure proper oversight of Financial Management going forward. This to be discussed and agreed at the forthcoming internal ARAC on 3<sup>rd</sup> April.

#### **134.13 College Partnership Agreement and Engagement Plan**

The Partnership Agreement and Engagement Plan was annually noted.

#### **134.14 Annual Governance Update**

The following documents were noted:

- Commissioning Letter, Year-end Assurance Statement and Mid-year Assurance Follow-up. Key items highlighted: irregular spend, disclaimed accounts (College and Department), pay issues and Board composition. Issues broken into three categories raised by auditors and would be shared with DfE. Formal response to follow.
- Accountability Letter
- NRC Executive Summary – Accountability Meeting 2026
- NRC Return-to-Sector Tracker

The RtS racker along with the draft assurance statement was endorsed by the GB.

#### **134.15 Any Other Business**

No additional items.

### 134.16 Date of Next Meeting

13 May 2026.

The meeting closed at 6.50pm.

Mr C McKenna, Chair



Date 13.05.26

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary



### Governing Body Action Log

Item no	Action	Owner	Date	Status
134.4	Establish T&F subgroup map curriculum provision to date and contact selected members.	CB/PG	Ongoing	Open
134.7	July '24 Accounts - draft letter to C&AG.	MH/SS	25.03.26	Complete
134.10	Circulate Mid-Year Student Experience Report to all members.	KW	31.03.26	Complete
134.11	Draft letter to formally recognise KM for signing by Chair.	SL	31.03.26	Complete