

Northern Regional College

Governing Body

Minutes of the Governing Body meeting held on 26 March 2025 in Farm Lodge campus commencing at 5.00pm.

The meeting commenced following a presentation by the Creative Industries curriculum team including Mr S Price, Mrs D Birkett, Mr S Cullen and Mr R Wilsdon.

The feedback from members was enthusiastic and several questions were raised and answered by the Team. In relation to the Foundation Degree validation at end of April 2025, PG offered to provide input, which was welcomed.

The team were thanked for the excellent presentation; the style of presentation and team's enthusiasm were commended.

Present: Mr K Nelson (Chair), Mrs L Crilly, Mr B Devlin (online), Dr P Graham (online), Mr M Higgins, Mr A Hoey, Mr G McAllister, Mr D MacAuley (online), Mrs McGovern, Ms D McIlwaine, Mr R McKernan, Mrs P Martin, Mr I Murphy (online), Mr B Patterson, Mr S Shevlin, Mr D Small, Mrs J Taggart

In Attendance: Mrs C Brown

Acting Secretary: Mrs R Toms

126.1 Apologies

Ms J Hemphill.

126.2 Declaration of Interests

None. Members were reminded they could also notify the Secretary during the meeting of any declarations.

126.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2025 were approved.

Proposed: JT

Seconded: PG

126.4 Matters Arising

The External Board Review draft report was shared with the Team; it was noted that members' feedback has been included

126.5 Chair's Communications

KN provided feedback from the DfE Partnership Event held on 19/3/25; he noted that the Minister was in attendance. Key points in relation to Risk Appetite were shared. CB, who was also in attendance, provided feedback.

KN provided feedback from the CEF Meeting held on 25/3/25 and referred to the EY report, including the role of the Independent Convenor. MH provided an update on the current status of the CEF, noting the draft constitution.

KN noted his attendance at upcoming GB Committee meetings, in preparation for annual governor assessments: Resources, 7/4/25; A&R, 14/4/25; and Education, 14/5/25.

MH noted that the Board Effectiveness Report has been updated to include the College Continuity Plan and the FAIC committee and advised that if all content, we need to respond to confirm.

DS raised a query on some recommendations and how they are being taken forward.

MH responded to clarify the Action Plan which will be drawn up to show implementation of recommendations.

ACTION: Action Plan on Board Effectiveness

Members unanimously confirmed they were content with the Report.

126.6 Principal's Report

The Principal's Report was shared with members and MH highlighted key points, including: 2025/26 Budget position; Wider Management Team Workshop held on 11/3/25; launch of Women in Business event on 21/3/25; increase in Admissions across campuses; ETI report on Step Up received, to be reviewed at next Education Committee meeting; student achievements and intercampus competitions; success of student Breakfast Club; overview of Accounts position; and council LEPs and their impact on college resources.

RMcK enquired about key areas of growth in respect of admissions; MH highlighted the strengths within the curriculum and noted the core business of L3 and trade areas are particularly strong; increase in Average Class Size noted.

DS noted the negative impact of potential budget reductions on provision.

The increased level of scrutiny in respect of public sector budgets was discussed.

MH clarified the potential level of savings required within the FE sector and noted the associated challenge with such reductions.

AH left the meeting at 6.05 pm

126.7 Education Committee

PG presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 3/3/25, which had been shared with members for endorsement and noted the key topics presented at the meeting. The Digital Skills presentation was also shared with members.

The minutes were unanimously endorsed.

PG referred to the Admissions figures referenced in the Principal's Report and noted the importance of also considering outcomes as an important measure of success.

An extract from the Community Education Presentation was shared, noting the balance of regulated and non-regulated enrolments.

MH provided clarity from the College and sector perspective in respect of non-regulated enrolments.

Members engaged in discussion about the benefits of both regulated and non-regulated enrolments in the context of the Minister's priorities and in particular in respect of *Good Jobs*.

The importance of seeking clarification on DfE's position in respect of non-regulated enrolments was emphasised and clarifying the purpose of FE provision in this regard.

It was agreed this will be picked up at the upcoming Accountability Meeting with DfE.

It was agreed that this should be a topic for the next GB Strategy event.

PG referred to ETI Traineeships feedback in the context of provision.

126.8 Resources Committee

IM presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 27/1/25, which had been shared with members, for endorsement and noted the key topics presented at the meeting, including the College Accounts and New Build.

Members unanimously endorsed the minutes.

126.9 Financial Accounts Improvement Committee

KN presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 26/2/25, which had been shared with members, for endorsement.

IM provided an overview of the FAIC meeting; he referred to the published DfE accounts and noted their qualified status, which had not been caused by NRC, despite the College being named at the bottom of the statement. He noted the satisfactory way in which the College had reacted to this matter. He noted the current position in relation to the ongoing audit and recruitment of suitable staff.

Members noted the important work of the committee and emphasised the need to ensure that the College position is strengthened to avoid a repeat of any of the issues over the past two years.

The GB confirmed their contentment with the governance information provided and the approach.

CMcG raised some outstanding matters, including the Internal Financial Controls Audit; and the management accounts, to be provided to GB to provide reassurance.

Action: Management Accounts to be provided to GB Members.

MH noted that IA will be progressing as agreed and referred to the budget profile within the finance reports and the team will be progressed with management accounts. MH noted increased resources in the Finance Department.

PM asked what was happening to ensure no recurrence in respect of DfE March 2025 accounts.

MH provided a summary of the actions ongoing, including weekly DfE meetings with the Finance Team. MH noted improved continuity within the Finance Team, providing an increased knowledge base when dealing with the year-end matters. He noted the biggest risk would be any further losses within the Finance Team.

CMcG referred to the matter raised by SL previously in relation to the Audit Team who also were involved with the DfE audit. MH advised that we have requested NIAO to provide continuity in respect of their Team.

126.10 Audit & Risk Committee

DS presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 5/3/25, which had been shared with members, for endorsement. He outlined the key topics therein, including: Accounts progress; and an excellent Audit Report on New Build and a review of the risk register.

Members unanimously endorsed the minutes.

126.11 Finance

MH presented the Finance Paper, summarising the key points within.

There was a request for GB's delegated authority for the A& R Committee to approve College July 24 Accounts on 14 April 2025.

CMcG sought clarification on sharing of the draft accounts and MH confirmed that they would be shared with all members.

Action: Draft Accounts to be shared with all GB Members.

Members unanimously agreed to delegate authority for A&R Committee to approve Annual Accounts.

126.12 College Partnership Agreement

The College Partnership Agreement was re-shared with members for noting.

KN referred to 2 key matters:

- Succession plan appendix (to include skills matrix); and
- Recommendation: document decision on GB Chair sitting on selection panel for new GB members.

Members unanimously agreed to the recommendations.

126.13 Annual Governance Update

The Corporate Risk Register was shared with members for review. MH drew members' attention to the overview of recent changes on Page 18 of the report.

MH referred to the Draft Year-end Assurance Statement 2024/25 and associated DfE correspondence, which had been shared with members for consideration.

MH referred to the matters highlighted within the statement, including: holiday pay, lecturers' pay and implication; budget position; and Essential Skills equivalency.

Following lengthy discussion on the ES matter, it was agreed that at the upcoming Principals' meeting, legal advice should be considered by the sector.

Members unanimously agreed to accept the Draft Assurance Statement.

126.14 New Build Update

MH presented the New Build Update paper which was shared with members for noting. He highlighted the key matters, including the bid to DfE for additional capital funding. MH noted that a Gateway 4 review will be progressed imminently to provide assurances.

126.14 Any Other Business

None.

126.15 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 28.05.2025 in Magherafelt Campus. The presentation in advance will be Magherafelt development proposals; due to be tabled at Resources Committee on 7 April 2025.

The meeting ended at 6.25 pm.

Mr K Nelson, Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Kenneth Nelson'.

Date 28.05.25

Mrs R Toms, Acting Secretary

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'R Toms'.