

Northern Regional College

Governing Body

Minutes of the Governing Body meeting held on 28 January 2026 in Ballymena commencing at 5.00pm.

Present: Mr C McKenna (Chair), Mr P Burke, Mr B Devlin, Dr P Graham, Mr M Higgins, Mrs C McGovern (online), Mr I Murphy, Mr B Patterson, Mrs J Taggart

In Attendance: Mr S Lavery, Ms S Scannell, Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

133.1 Apologies

Apologies were recorded for Mrs Brown, Mr Macaulay and Ms McIlwaine.

133.2 Declaration of Interests

PG reminded members of his interest regarding ETI matters.

133.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The draft minutes from meeting on 26 November 2025 were shared in advance.

On IM's proposal, seconded by PG, the minutes were approved.

133.4 Matters Arising

All actions from the previous meeting had been completed.

133.5 Chair's Communication

Members noted the minutes of the Stocktake meeting on 2 December 2025 and the Accountability meeting on 11 December 2025, which had been shared in advance. CMK reported a very successful Graduation event following the 2 December Stocktake meeting. The next Stocktake meeting would take place on 3 February, with the Accountability meeting set for 3 March.

CMK referred to notification of the decision not to reappoint 3 members of the Governing Body and expressed disappointment at the timing of communications, which were issued on the last day of their terms. This had left no opportunity to formally thank the members for their work with the College. The outlined approach to filling vacancies was noted. CMK advised that he had provided the Department with a matrix of members' skills and had received refresher training to allow him to sit on the recruitment panel, which would be chaired by a senior civil servant. It was hoped to have the 6 substantive members in place by end of June.

Members noted that Janis Scallon would take up the position of Director of FE from 16 February.

133.6 Accounts

The following papers had been shared in advance.

- NIAO position on July 2024 Accounts. SS reported positive meetings with NIAO since starting with the College. Whilst issues had been addressed, a disclaimed audit opinion was expected. The aim was for improved audit outcomes in 2024-2025 and unqualified opinions for 2026/27.
- Workplan July 2025. The draft Audit strategy for 2024/25 is not yet finalised. NIAO aim is to close out July 2024 accounts by end of February and start 2024/25 planning promptly. The 2024/25 accounts workplan will be updated with the aim of a good draft of 2024-25 accounts is expected end February.
- Draft Recovery Plan. The draft has been shared with DfE. A workshop is scheduled for next week involving MH, SS, Central Finance and FE team. EY forensic report findings will be fully incorporated into the recovery plan. SS confirmed that qualification would last for 2 years and would aim for an unqualified opinion for 2026/27.
- Lessons Learnt. Engagement with SERC is providing strong QA support. Work is underway to ensure compliance with DfE year-end (31/3/2026) timetable.
- EY Report. Forensic review was done by the Department and gives facts of findings. Report has been shared with governors and FAIC.

133.7 Principal's Report

MH presented the report which had been previously shared and updated on the following:

- FE Transformation being rephased, DfE will want to meet SMT and governors in due course.
- Six principals will meet next week to prepare proposals for the transformation project.
- DfE ALB partner meeting attended with key themes: cyber security risks affecting central government; College mentioned in report of Finance Director; financial briefing indicating a funding gap in next year's Department budget.
- Open Days planned for first week of February; College continues to experience significant growth.
- Four students shortlisted for upcoming apprenticeship awards.
- Shared Island funding opportunities discussed; potential cross-border initiatives to be explored.
- Engagement with local business community planned; will feed into Strategy Day discussions.

133.8 Audit & Risk Committee

Additional A&R meetings had been held on 9 December 2025 and 26 January 2026 focused on July 2024 accounts. December minutes were endorsed and a verbal update provided of January meeting when treatment of issue around the Department grant debtor was discussed, written record of information and summary of issues was requested from NIAO and strong progress on accounts was noted, with bank reconciliation now cleared. The need to accelerate steps to finalise responses to NIAO was noted.

CMK thanked CMG for taking up the Committee Chair role at short notice and proposed that the suggested adjustment be made for the deferred grant debtor. SS outlined steps needed to achieve a C&AG certificate for July 2024, once RTTCWG had been received.

EY report recommendations will be consolidated into an action plan.

SL introduced the Corporate Risk Register, previously supplied, and noted changes to the black and red rated risks, with cyber security moved to a red rated risk following disappointing College phishing exercise results; rated risks being moved into the Issues Log

IM advised that the cyber security report had been considered at Resources Committee on 22 January when serious concern had been voiced about the results of the simulated phishing exercise, especially given assurance previously taken from completion of cyber essentials certification by the College. Implications of a successful hacking attack on the College, in spite of security measures currently in place, were discussed and the need for further resources agreed.

Actions:

- **Cyber security training for governors to be rolled out and completed.**
- **Future controls to include additional multifactor authentication and enhanced monitoring alongside additional planned simulated phishing exercises;-factor authentication and enhanced monitoring**
- **Emphasis to be placed on staff training and cultural change.**

133.9 Education Committee

Minutes from meeting on 19 November 2025 were endorsed. A verbal update from meeting on 21 January 2026 was provided by PG including:

- Safeguarding Framework: Policy had been updated and changes were highlighted.
- Quality Improvement: WCQIP presentations given, very well received.
- Committee approved the QIP and Assurance Statements.
- ETI Evaluation: An update was provided, Committee continues to monitor progress.
- A very positive view of current educational delivery was noted.

- The continued need to align QIP, delivery and strategy was recognised
- MH advised that assurance has been provided to education committee meetings throughout the year, not just the latest meeting. Team members provided updates on programmes, action plan implementations along with evaluations from ETI.

Action: Recommend Assurance Statements to GB for sign off by Chair and Principal.

133.10 Resources Committee

IM gave a verbal update of meeting on 22 January 2026:

- College will meet its budget this year. Challenge will be to spend any additional allocated funds before yearend. Aware of potential pressures within DFE budget for next year.-end.
- New builds. Coleraine weather-related panel issue noted; otherwise progressing well with positive feedback from staff and students and increased enrolment interest. Ballymena completion progressing well.-related panel issue noted; otherwise progressing well
- Capital funds for new build may be carried into next year – plans to install additional PV panels and battery storage in Ballymena welcomed following successful grant application.
- Cyber security - covered under ARC discussions.

133.11 Financial Accounts Improvement Committee

Minutes from 15 December 2025 were endorsed. A verbal update from 15 January 2026 meeting was provided.

133.12 Any Other Business

Application for a two-year career break for a Science Lecturer was approved and temporary cover arrangements confirmed. -year career break for a Science Lecturer

Members were reminded of the Staff Awards Event in Magherafelt Campus on 30 January 2026.

133.13 Date of Next Meeting

Strategy Day: 25 February 2026. An agenda would be provided 2 weeks in advance. CMG requested better use of the time with more time for L&D and feedback.

Celebration of Apprenticeships: Members were invited to a business breakfast to celebrate Apprenticeships being held in Coleraine campus on 5 February 2026; the Minister would be attending.

Governing Body Meeting: 25 March 2026.

The meeting ended at 6.50pm.

Mr C McKenna, Chair



Date 24.03.26

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

