

Northern Regional College

Audit & Risk Committee

The Committee met privately with NIAO representatives at 5.00pm prior to the meeting commencing.

Minutes of Meeting on 22 April 2026 at 5.20pm online

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

In Attendance: Mr D Blair (DB); Dr C Guy (CG, item 97.6); Mr M Higgins (MH); 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

97.1 Apologies

Mrs J Taggart, Mr D Macauley

97.2 Declaration of Interests

None declared.

97.3 Minutes of Previous Meetings

PG proposed and CMG seconded approval of the minutes of the meetings held on 9 February and 18 February 2026.

A verbal update was provided on the Financial Management Oversight Committee meeting held on 3 April 2026, minutes had been previously circulated to members. It was agreed that ARC will continue to receive an overview of key matters from FMOC on a bi-monthly basis.

97.4 Matters Arising

The Committee reviewed the Actions Log attached at Appendix 1. Most actions were either completed or progressing, with ongoing actions noted in relation to: monthly bank reconciliations; updates to the Work Action Plan and Recovery Plan; audit sequencing and timelines

No additional matters were raised.

97.5 Chair's Communications / Correspondence

- **NIAO Report:** Acknowledged and noted. Management confirmed work is ongoing to meet revised timelines.

- **Partnership Working:** Good progress noted on refreshing the Code of Conduct and addressing recommendations.
- **Raising Concerns:** A deeper review will be undertaken, with a focus on staff training, awareness, and visibility of reporting arrangements. MH advised that the recommendation in respect of surveys contained within the raising concerns report will be picked up by the College.
- **Feedback from accountability and stocktake meetings:** The Committee noted feedback from recent meetings with the Department which focused primarily on:
 - Disclaimed opinions on July 2024 accounts
 - Progress on July 2025 and March 2026 accounts
 - Lessons learned and readiness activities
 - SS's significant contribution was noted along with the need to strengthen the finance function and QA arrangements.

Draft minutes from the accountability meeting had been shared with FMOC on 3.4.26. Minutes of the stocktake meeting will be circulated once finalised.

- The **Final Year-end Assurance Statement** submitted to the Department on 14 April 2026, was noted. No queries were raised by the Committee.

97.6 Information Governance Report

CG joined the meeting at 5.35pm and gave a brief summary of the report previously provided. She referred to exchanges and MH advised that abusive behaviors will not be tolerated, and this will be taken forward to provide protection to staff. She left the meeting at 5.25pm.

97.7 New Guidance in Period

DB outlined the basis of information provided in the report and noted that the tracker would be revised.

Progress on sustainability reporting was outlined. A baseline ESG report has been completed, with action plans submitted for review. Key areas of focus include reducing travel-related emissions, which represent a significant proportion of the College's carbon footprint.

The Committee welcomed the structured approach and noted the inclusion of ESG reporting within annual accounts.

97.8 External Audit

NIAO confirmed the July 2023/24 audit is nearing completion, subject to final QA and C&AG approval, it was complex requiring further time to incorporate feedback from NIAO technical team. A definitive date was not given. SW hopeful it will be early next. Draft certification and reports will be shared with management for factual accuracy checking, followed by formal consideration by ARC prior to Governing Body approval. The College will be provided with an opportunity to provide comments at a high level on changes and improvements made.

For July 2025, it was noted that a disclaimed opinion is expected regardless of audit effort. The focus will therefore be on establishing accurate closing balances and strengthening assurance going forward. Engagement with NAO is ongoing to agree the minimum appropriate audit approach with a suggestion to focus on closing balances and demonstrate fundamental changes. This will lead to consideration if a full review is required on certain balances and what areas to review. Leading to a foundation to get back-out of a disclaimed opinion supported by robust evidence.

CMG referred to earlier meeting and was keen to have a call arranged between NIAO and SS as early as possible.

MH welcomed the update and the opportunity to feedback when received. He asked if any further issues had been identified aside from those outlined in the assurance statement and NIAO confirmed that nothing had fundamentally changed.

SS stated the priority for the next week would be meeting DfE priorities but would work with NIAO as best as possible. SW understood the urgency but emphasized that issue of the relevant documents would depend on C&AG consideration.

The Committee emphasised the importance of clear communication, early sight of draft audit strategies, and alignment with departmental deadlines

MH queried planned sequencing and timeframe of audit work to provide assurance that no significant issues would impact on Department 2026 accounts. SW noted that timescales were being considered by the Department and he would have the same conversation with them and the NAO as with the College to provide assurance. He also noted that the C&AG would have a view on the approach.

97.9 July 2024 Accounts

SS noted that the Accounts, RTTCWG and Letter of Rep were not yet available. The Draft ARC Annual Report 2023/24 would also be revised once the documents had been received.

SW noted that the draft RTTCWG would be with him shortly for review.

97.10 Risk Register

MH noted the biggest change to the RR was the move of cyber risk from level 1 to level 10 following a review of processes as a result of a recent presentation from NI Fraud Forum. He noted that a deep dive into specific risk areas would be looked at for future meetings.

CMG agreed the cyber rating and was content with other risks and information.

97.11 Internal Audit

The Cyber Security review was presented. Positive assurance was noted in relation to training, controls, and monitoring arrangements. A key recommendation relates to strengthening the documentation and management of cyber risks at a more granular level.

Management confirmed the incident response plan will be tested.

Other internal audit reviews remain on track, with sufficient evidence anticipated to support the annual opinion.

CMG welcome the high assurance level. Members noted that work on the instant response plan would be presented to a future meeting.

DA updated on the 3 financial audits, which were progressing well.

97.12 Accounts Update

July 2025 and March 2026 Accounts

Significant progress was reported:

- July 2025 accounts approximately 75% complete
- March 2026 accounts progressing well, with month-end processes embedded
- Major improvements noted in balance sheet accuracy, reconciliations, and system integrity compared to 2024

Additional temporary and specialist resources have been deployed to address bottlenecks and maintain business-as-usual activity.

The Committee commended the finance team for the progress achieved and the level of assurance now being provided.

SW and KD left the meeting at 6.30pm.

SS referred to the workplan and clarified the rationale for progressing the July 2025 accounts based on working to the same deadlines as other colleges, given that audit strategies had not yet been agreed.

MH noted that the College would engage with the Department in the event of any slippage from the 30 April timeline and would keep Committee informed.

97.13 Recovery Plan

Updated trackers till 10.4.26 were presented covering: Lessons Learned, Risks on Accounts and Issues Log.

Key developments include:

- Appointment of specialist audit support with Deloitte appointee having started with the College on 21.4.26
- Improved staffing resilience
- Migration of the Recovery Plan to a structured MS Project management framework

SS noted the goal of doing a full review of the finance function over the summer months. It was then planned to re-engage with SERC on training.

The Committee expressed assurance with progress to date and stressed the importance of aligning updates with forthcoming audit outcomes.

97.14 Other Registers

Direct Awards Contracts, Raising Concerns, and Fraud reports were all nil return as at 22 April 2026.

94.15 AOB

Members will be polled to schedule an additional ARC meeting ahead of the Governing Body meeting in mid-May, subject to audit documentation availability.

97.16 Date of Next Meeting

Meeting agreed for 12th May.

Meeting closed at 6.46pm.



Mrs C McGovern, Chair

Date: 2 June 2026

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary



APPENDIX 1

Audit & Risk Action Log

Ref	Page (item)	Action	Raised	Owner	Due Date/Action	Status
Meeting 93: 26.01.26						
MA-03	2 (4)	Revise workplan incl. version history and dates	CMG	MH / SS	Revised worked plan in pack 18/2/2026	Closed
MA-07	3 (5)	Follow up on monthly bank reconciliations with Central Finance	SS	DB	Finance Division (FD) confirmed receipt and review of bank reconciliations up to 31.12.25, noting that bank accounts are being reconciled and differences are now being investigated by the College. FD will continue to work closely with the College over the coming months re remaining bank reconciliations for the 25-26 financial year	Closed
MA-08	2 (5)	EA to provide paper to ARAC/GB on audit sequencing and timelines	CMG	MH / SS	March meetings	In Progress
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

NB Items highlighted in blue have been closed since review at the meeting