

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held on 27 May 2026 on MS Teams at 4.00pm

Present: Dr Philip Graham (Chair), Mr Parker Burke, Ms Julie Hemphill, Mr Mel Higgins (Principal), Mrs Paula Leitch, Mr Brendan Patterson, Mrs Jayne Taggart

In Attendance: Mr Aaron Ballantyne, Mrs Christine Brown, Ms Helen Hampsey, Mr Stephen McCartney, Ms Joanne McCourt, Mr Matt Murray, Mr Stephen Price, Ms Lynsey Sloan, Mrs Karen Wallace (Secretary)

78.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all members, with a particular welcome extended to Paula and Jayne on their first meeting of Committee. Members were advised that this would be Parker's final meeting as Student Governor.

No apologies were recorded.

78.2 Declaration of Interests

PG reminded members of his connection to ETI.

78.3 Minutes of Last Meeting on 18 March 2026

On the proposal of Mel and seconded by Brendan, the minutes were agreed.

78.4 Matters Arising

The Committee noted that the majority of actions from the previous meeting had either been completed or had been overtaken by developments, particularly the establishment of a new Task and Finish (T&F) Group to progress strategic curriculum planning and provision. It was acknowledged that this group would now take forward a number of previously identified actions.

No outstanding actions.

78.5 Chair's Communication / Correspondence

The Committee received and discussed a number of updates relating to sectoral developments and departmental communications.

It was reported that:

- The March Progress Report for 2025/26, previously shared with the Governing Body, indicated that all key performance indicators remain on track and are currently rated green.
- The sectoral traineeship QIP continues to demonstrate satisfactory progress, with the Department expressing overall satisfaction. Actions arising would come forward in due course.
- Essential Skills Returns are being submitted in line with agreed milestones and reporting requirements. In relation to QIP, members noted that six themes are being reported

across the sector. Five themes are currently rated green, while one remains amber due to a small number of actions requiring further progress. Targeted staff training is scheduled for early June to address this.

Brendan queried mitigations in place in relation to the impact of staff absence on quality of teaching, learning and pedagogy. Christine noted that all possible measures were being taken to ensure cover for classes to run during any period of sickness or absence.

- The Committee noted the CDP 2026/27 Commissioning letter and was advised that work is ongoing, with an extended submission deadline providing additional time for development and alignment.

78.6 Student Governor Reflections on Time in Office

Parker delivered a reflective summary of his experience as Student Governor. He described the role as both rewarding and demanding, highlighting the privilege of contributing to discussions that directly influence the student experience.

He emphasised the importance placed on student voice within the Committee and noted his appreciation of how student feedback is actively considered and used to inform decision-making. Parker also reflected on his own personal development, particularly in relation to leadership, collaboration, and understanding governance processes.

Members expressed their sincere thanks to Parker for his commitment, positive attitude, and meaningful contributions. His engagement both within formal meetings and at wider College activities was commended. Members wished him every success in his future endeavours.

78.7 Curriculum Director Summary Report

The Curriculum Director's report for March-May 2026 was taken as read, with key areas highlighted for discussion including:

- Progress remains aligned with priorities set out in the March CDP report.
- Significant work is underway to prepare for the 2026/27 planning cycle, including contingency planning.
- Service delivery processes continue under Quality & Academic Standards Committee oversight

In relation to student experience, the number of complaints was reported as consistent with previous years, with no significant concerns identified. Themes arising from complaints are being monitored and addressed where necessary.

The Committee also noted positive engagement with ETI during a recent visit, with encouraging verbal feedback received and a formal report awaited. Thanks were extended to motor vehicle staff who engaged with ETI during the visit.

Members welcomed a number of positive developments, including:

- Successful outreach events involving primary and post-primary learners.
- Strong performance in regional skills competitions, including award successes.

- College listed for the OCN national awards.

Mel commended staff and students for their achievements and ongoing commitment. He noted that a workshop on SEN would be held in June, and a report was awaited.

In response to questions, Helen confirmed positive feedback from primary schools on taster events. She outlined taster sessions held throughout the year for a variety of age groups.

78.8 Curriculum Provision 26/27

The Committee considered proposals put forward by Matt, Aaron, Stephen P and Lynsey, relating to curriculum provision for the 2026/27 academic year, including both new and withdrawn programmes.

The proposals were informed by detailed analysis of labour market trends, employer engagement, and learner demand. Projected figures indicate approximately 8,259 individual learners and 15,288 enrolments, broadly in line with current activity levels, with some planned growth subject to funding confirmation.

Members noted:

- New provision has been developed to meet identified skills needs and strengthen employer engagement.
- Some programmes with low recruitment have been suspended on a temporary basis to allow for review.
- Sustainability and future skills requirements, including emerging priorities such as technology and environmental sustainability, are being considered within programme design.

Action: Following discussion and on the proposal of Paula and seconded by Jayne, the Committee approved the proposed curriculum changes and accepted provisions as outlined.

78.9 Curriculum Strategy 2026-29

An update was provided on the work of the T&F Group following its initial meeting on 19 May. The Group is developing a streamlined and focused three-year strategy, with an emphasis on:

- Reducing duplication across the sector.
- Building on institutional strengths.
- Aligning provision with strategic priorities and future demand.

Members discussed the importance of balancing growth, quality, and sustainability within the strategy. It was noted that further detailed discussion would take place at upcoming meetings.

Action: Karen to circulate the TOR to Committee members for approval.

78.10 HE Sectoral Update

Aaron updated the Committee on developments within the HE sector, including replacement of the Widening Access and Participation Plan (WAPP) with proposed changes and widening of participation in the Access, Participation and Outcomes Plan (APOP).

It was noted that the revised approach is expected to:

- Place greater emphasis on student progression, retention, and achievement.
- Offer increased flexibility in programme delivery.
- Potentially reduce administrative burden through streamlined reporting.

Members noted that reporting would be integrated with the CDP and welcomed the proposed direction, noting its potential benefits for both students and the College.

78.11 Entrepreneurship Update

Joanne provided an update on entrepreneurship activity across the College including a number of programmes, greater integration of entrepreneurship into the curriculum and enhanced collaboration with other college hubs and regional partners.

The Committee noted strong levels of student engagement and positive feedback from participants and welcomed a number of internal successes. Members discussed the importance of tracking the longer-term impact of entrepreneurship initiatives, particularly in relation to graduate outcomes and progression over a 3-5 year period.

Opportunities to strengthen evaluation mechanisms, including the use of surveys and partnerships with external organisations, were highlighted.

Members congratulated Joanne on achievements to date and Jayne encouraged connecting with Enterprise NI on support and introductions.

Action: To track impact on students and feature student successes

Action: Jayne agreed to act as link governor on entrepreneurship with Joanne, for reporting purposes.

78.12 Any Other Business

The Committee recorded its formal thanks and best wishes to Parker on completion of his term.

78.13 Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed

The meeting closed at 5.39pm.

Dr P Graham, Chair



Date 06.10.2026

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

