

Northern Regional College

Governing Body

Minutes of meeting on 13 May 2026 in Ballymena at 5.00pm.

Present: Mr Colm McKenna (Chair), Mr Brendan Devlin, Dr Philip Graham, Ms Julie Hemphill, Mr Mel Higgins (Principal), Ms Paula Leitch, Mr Donal MacAuley, Ms Denise McIlwaine, Mr David Nichol, Mr Brendan Patterson, Mr Sam Snodden, Mrs Jayne Taggart

On Teams: Mr Parker Burke, Mr Ian Murphy, Ms Sinead Scannell

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Brown, Mr Craig Fairless (item 135.8), Mrs Karen Wallace (Secretary)

135.1 Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. New interim members Paula, David and Sam were formally introduced. It was noted that this would be Parker's final meeting, and the Chair recorded appreciation for his contribution to the GB.

135.2 Apology

An apology was received from Carla.

135.3 Declaration of Interests

No new declarations were made.

135.4 Minutes of Last Meeting

The draft minutes of 24 March 2026 were proposed by Philip, seconded by Denise and approved.

135.5 Matters Arising

Members noted that a task and finish subgroup to map curriculum provision has been established. Membership has been agreed, terms of reference drafted, and the first meeting scheduled for the following week.

All other matters were confirmed as complete.

135.6 Chair's Communication

The Chair updated members on a range of governance matters:

- Committee appointments: A&R – Sam; Education – Paula; Resources - David and Paula. Jayne will step down from the A&R and join the Education Committee.
- A recent stocktake meeting had taken place; the June meeting has been deferred until after the accountability meeting.

- Members noted the CDP Commissioning Letter which has been issued with a response deadline of 22 May; an extension has been requested by college Principals. Meetings involving Chairs, Principals, and the Department are ongoing to discuss curriculum development and contingency planning.
- The updated Instrument of Government is now available on the College website.

135.7 Accounts

SS provided an update on the College accounts position.

July 2024 Accounts: Members noted that draft accounts and the C&AG certificate had been received on 11 May 2026, including confirmation of a disclaimed audit opinion. No RTTCWG had been received to date.

March 2026 Accounts: Progress was reported at approximately 68–78% completion, with significant work completed on property, plant, and equipment and capital grants. The statutory deadline of 30 April 2026 had been missed. Close engagement with the Department was continuing and a revised short-term deadline agreed to enable submission of a near-complete accounts pack by 15 May.

Significant progress was reported with all key control accounts completed and reviewed, extensive reconciliation work undertaken and an improved position relative to the previous year.

The Department has requested additional information regarding presentation of the recovery plan and key improvements.

Members acknowledged the substantial progress made since January, attributing this largely to Sinead’s leadership and collaboration with the Department. Engagement with the NIAO has increased following a request to meet the C&AG. Further clarity on timelines is awaited.

July 2025 Accounts: Work has been temporarily paused to prioritise completion of the March 2026 accounts. It was noted that some of the work carried out on the component accounts would feed into the July '25 and March '26 accounts.

Action: To update A&R Committee following engagements with NIAO next week

Sinead left the meeting and Craig joined at 5.32pm.

It was agreed to reorder the agenda to facilitate early leaving by staff.

135.14 Strategic Plan

The draft Strategic Plan was presented. Members noted alignment with Ministerial priorities including regional development, productivity, green economy, and good jobs. Also, a deliberate focus on core principles, with detailed targets to sit within supporting strategies.

Members discussed strengthening articulation on community impact and local focus. The importance of external consultation, including engagement with businesses and stakeholders following Departmental approval, was also noted.

David asked for and received confirmation that Trade Unions (TUs) would be included in stakeholder engagement.

Governors were invited to submit comments and suggested amendments through the Secretary.

135.8 Principal's Report

The Principal presented his report and highlighted:

- Ongoing DfE-led Fit for the Future review, with a focus on a sector-wide curriculum framework. The Department would meet separately with Chairs and CE's week commencing 18 May. Task and finish groups would comprise College staff. Communication received had been shared with all staff. Progress updates are available on the Department website.
- Strong GB engagement in recent apprenticeship events.
- A review of the Senior Management Team is underway.

Members were briefed on a recent cyber incident affecting the Canvas platform, used across the sector. Reassurance was provided that no suspicious activity had been identified within the College. Members noted that existing security measures remain robust and they will be informed promptly of any future cyber risks.

135.9 Audit & Risk Committee

Brendan D provided a summary of business at the meeting held on 22 April 2026 and the draft minutes were endorsed.

Changes to the Risk Register were noted, in particular in relation to cyber. The College had agreed to a test of the incident plan, which would take place in June and reported back through ARC.

Denise queried action being taken in response to incidents of verbal abuse of a staff member. The Principal noted HR had been asked to draw up a policy and that future calls would be recorded. He confirmed that abuse of staff would not be tolerated.

Ongoing progress against the Recovery Plan was noted.

The Audit & Risk Annual Report will be presented to Committee for review before submission to the GB, once the RTTCWG has been received.

135.11 Education Committee

Philip briefly outlined matters considered at the meeting on 18 March 2026, with the first meeting of the task & finish group to take place week commencing 22 March.

The draft minutes of the meeting on 18 March were endorsed.

Christine highlighted positive figures on retention, enrolment and achievement of targets in skills competitions and innovation programmes. Members noted, however, that current levels of provision may not be sustainable in 2026/27 due to financial pressures.

The need to demonstrate the importance of the FE sector to achieving Ministerial priorities was noted.

135.12 Resources Committee

Ian presented the draft minutes of meetings held on 22 January, 26 March, and 23 April 2026. Members noted stable student and staffing metrics, effective management of HR issues, continued monitoring of cyber security and progress on net zero and estate matters.

The January, March and April draft minutes were endorsed.

135.13 Financial Management Oversight Committee

Minutes from meetings on 3 April and 7 May were endorsed.

The Committee Terms of Reference were agreed.

134.14 Disposal of Trostan Avenue Campus

The GB discussed the proposal for disposal of the Trostan Avenue site. Members noted ongoing costs and risks associated with the vacant site, including anti-social behaviour; the intention to achieve market value, taking account of demolition costs; and the importance of timely Departmental approval

Action: The proposal to seek Departmental approval for disposal of the Trostan Avenue site was approved.

135.15 Any Other Business

The Chair noted the importance of student representatives' contribution to the GB and asked that Parker encourage broader student engagement in governance going forward.

135.16 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 17 June 2026.

The meeting closed at 6.15pm.

Mr C McKenna, Chair



Date 17 June 2026

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary



Governing Body Action Log

Item no	Action	Owner	Date	Status
135.7	A&R Committee to be updated following engagements with NIAO next week	SS/MH	w/c 18 May	Complete
135.14	Seek DfE approval for disposal of Trostan Avenue	MH	Immediate	Complete