

Northern Regional College

Governing Body

Minutes of meeting on 17 June 2026 in Magherafelt campus at 5.00pm.

Present: Mr Colm McKenna (Chair), Mr Brendan Devlin, Ms Julie Hemphill, Mr Mel Higgins (Principal), Ms Paula Leitch, Mr Donal MacAuley, Mrs Carla McGovern, Ms Denise McIlwaine, Mr David Nichol, Mr Brendan Patterson

On Teams: Dr Philip Graham, Mr Ian Murphy, Mrs Jayne Taggart

In Attendance: Mrs Christine Brown, Mrs Helen Hampsey (item 136.9), Mrs Sinead Scannell; Mrs Ruth Toms (Acting Secretary)

136.1 Apologies

An apology was recorded for Sam Snodden.

136.2 Declaration of Interests

No new declarations were made.

136.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The draft minutes of 13 May 2026 were approved on the proposal of BD and seconded by DN.

136.4 Matters Arising

MH noted that the D1 process in respect of the disposal of Trostan Avenue Campus has commenced.

136.5 Chair's Communication

CMcK acknowledged that this is the last meeting for IM, he expressed thanks to IM for his work and invaluable contribution to the GB over many years, noting his role as Vice-Chair, also thanking him for his work as Chair of the Resources Committee. He further noted that this is the last meeting for JH and expressed thanks to her for her input over the past 4 years as Professional Services Staff Representative.

CMcK provided a summary of meetings and events attended recently, including: GB Chair's meeting on 18.5.26; NI FE Sector LEAD Programme Launch Dinner 21.5.26; EQIA/CDP and CEF meetings on 1.6.26; Meeting with Janis Scallon on 5.6.26; FE Excellence Awards on 4.6.26; and the GB Chairs' meeting with DfE on 11.6.26.

CMcK provided an update on the governor recruitment competition, noting there was a very strong field of applicants. He advised that shortlisting had taken place and interviews will commence shortly, with a view to completing the process by 9 July 2026.

CMcK provided feedback from the DfE Accountability Meeting held on 16.6.26, noting that it was a positive meeting, with the Permanent Secretary acknowledging the improvements which have been made and noting that the College is now in a much better place. He noted that the quarterly Accountability Meetings will be in the diary until the end of this calendar year.

MH noted that DfE have approved the Recovery Plan, they have acknowledged the actions being taken and the evidence submitted, which provided DfE with confidence in our direction of travel.

The draft GB meetings schedule for 2026/27 was shared with members in advance. There were no amendments to the schedule and the dates for GB meetings were agreed. CMcK noted that the sub-committee meetings schedule will be confirmed by the respective committees at their first meeting.

CMcK referred to the DfE College self-assessment process which is underway and noted that dates have been agreed for the annual appraisal process to be conducted by the Chair in July.

CMcK noted the appointment of a new staff governor, Fiona Johnston, Education Support Co-ordinator, subject to DfE sign-off. It was unanimously agreed to approve this appointment.

CMcK referred to the letter from the Permanent Secretary in relation to the NIAO Audit Plan and DfE Accounts timeline and noted the helpful position which has now been established. He provided an overview of the letter, noting the agreed sequential audit plan, he also referred to the support being offered by DfE to strengthen our Finance Team.

MH outlined the steps leading to the position regarding the audit plan, acknowledging that the agreed way forward causes a delay to DfE's statutory deadline in respect of laying their March 2026 accounts. MH referred to the College approach from February 2026, with resource diverted to the March 2026 component accounts, resulting in a delay in completion of the statutory July 2025 accounts. MH advised that DfE are aware of our position and the impact of the direction which was implemented.

CMcK acknowledged the support of the Permanent Secretary in reaching this satisfactory position, noting the significance of his decision in the context of the impact on the DfE statutory timescale.

DMcI sought and received clarification on the 3 options which had been presented by NIAO.

136.6 Accounts

An Accounts Update Paper, as presented to Resources Committee 3 June 2026 and to FMOC on 15 June 2026 was shared in advance with members.

SS provided an overview of the paper. July 2024 Statutory Accounts, following approval at this meeting will be submitted to NIAO on 18.6.26. SS noted progress with the July 2025 Statutory Accounts; she advised of the request to NIAO for sight of their Audit Strategy, noting that NIAO have indicated that they will be starting planning in July, with fieldwork

potentially commencing late July/early August. SS noted that she will be meeting with them in early July to establish the next steps.

CMcG expressed concern regarding the potential slippage by NIAO at this early stage and asked if we could exert any influence to improve the position.

BD noted the change in response from NIAO, with them quoting the summer recess as the reason for their delay.

PG expressed his view that it is worthwhile that we put on record our disappointment in the position, with an aim to accelerate progress.

CMcK advised that he and MH have agreed that they will be writing to NIAO to express urgency to progress the audits and noted the sequence of planned communications. GB Chairs and members will be kept informed.

SS noted the submission of the component pack on 22.5.26, she expressed thanks to Sharon Hetherington and the financial accounting team at DfE for their invaluable support in the period prior to submission. The NDPB checklist was signed and submitted to DfE on 5.6.26. SS noted the outstanding matters in relation to historical issues which we are continuing to update and advised that DfE are fully aware of the position.

SS noted that March 2026 statutory accounts are well progressed in line with the component accounts and noted that the team are currently working on the annual report element.

DMcI expressed thanks to SS for the clear and detailed paper.

136.7 Principal's Report

The Principal's Report on key college matters was shared with members in advance and noted.

136.8 Audit & Risk Committee

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2026 were endorsed.

A verbal update from the meeting held on 15 June 2026 was provided by CMcG, noting that the Draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2023/24 had been reviewed and with a minor edit, were being recommended to the Governing Body for approval.

A paper providing an overview of the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023/24 was shared with members in advance and reviewed in conjunction with the Report and the Report to Those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG).

CMcG referred to the Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 and, whilst noting the difficult position stated within the NIAO recommendations, acknowledged the improvements already in place and the increased strength in governance and controls which have since been effected. She noted the tracking system in place in respect of the recommendations. CMcG noted that it was reassuring that although the C&AG could not give an opinion on regularity, there were no fraudulent matters, just one instance of irregular spend, as noted within the

report.

CMcG noted the minor edit in the Report, with the removal of a line as agreed at the ARC meeting; she also noted the clarity sought at that meeting regarding further transparency on the issue of the unadjusted errors.

SS provided clarity on the recording of unadjusted errors within the report and referred to Paragraph 17.

MH confirmed that he is content the Report is a true and fair reflection of the position and that there is no amendment required; he is comfortable that the Report is considered for approval by the Governing Body.

CMcG confirmed that she is content with the clarification provided that the Report, as presented, is adequate in respect of this matter.

The Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24, as recommended by Chair of ARC were unanimously approved for submission.

CMcG noted the expectation for upcoming ARC meetings, relating to Internal Audit Reports, which are due to be shared at the meeting on 8 July 2026 and the Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27, to be reviewed at the first ARC meeting of 2026/27, alongside the recommendations within the RTTCWG.

CMcG noted the draft Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report, as agreed at ARC on 2 June 2026, which had been shared previously with members. She referred to her request for clarification submitted following the ARC meeting and noted that a final draft Report will be shared by email for members to consider and adopt.

The Corporate Risk Register was shared with members in advance and reviewed.

MH referred to key Risks within the Register and noted the increased risk applied to 5 Risks (50% of the RR) due to the uncertain budget position, noting that Risk 4, Financial Health has moved from red to black. MH noted the additional matters included and the mitigations.

DMcI, referring to the ARC minutes from the meeting on 2 June 2026, sought clarification on the reference to jeopardisation of improvements being made within the finance team.

MH responded and clarified the background to this, noting the delay in preparation of the March 2026 component accounts, caused by additional work required for working papers.

136.9 Education Committee

The draft minutes of the meeting on 27 May 2026 were endorsed.

PG provided key highlights from the meeting, particularly noting the importance of the student voice on the committee.

Review of provision and developing capacity.

The Terms of Reference for the Curriculum Strategy 2026-2029 Task & Finish Group were shared in advance with members.

PG outlined the purpose of the Group, in developing the Curriculum Strategy for the College for 2026-29, with a focus on reviewing provision and developing capacity. He noted that it is the aim of the group to have a substantive draft by early September.

Members were content to endorse the ToR.

Helen Hampsey, Assistant Curriculum Director, was welcomed to the meeting.

The Draft CDP 2026/27 was shared with members in advance and reviewed, along with an overview Presentation.

HH presented the key points to note within the Draft CDP 26/27, highlighting the impact of potential budget reductions.

She noted that the CDP development is running in parallel with contingency planning and as such the draft CDP has been revised to reflect this and include what is deliverable within the 2026/27 academic year. She noted that current assumptions include the cessation of Step Up and reduction across other funding streams.

HH noted the potential 6% reduction in individual learners and 6.5% reduction in enrolments, along with the impact on KPIs and performance targets.

MH advised that, if the budget had remained constant, the College was on an upwards trajectory, noting that within the FE sector, NRC has been showing the fastest growth over the past 2 years. He noted that the impact to the College of a potential reduced budget is a reduction in enrolments of between 13 and 15% over the next 3 years, which is very disappointing in light of the growth which we have achieved. He noted that it is a very challenging position for the whole public sector. The savings which we have proposed are those which are deliverable.

CMcG asked about the impact on staff utilisation.

MH responded, advising of the review of curriculum provision which will be ongoing from the start of term, along with an assessment of staff timetables.

PG asked about the student/lecturer ratio.

Action Point: CB to confirm the student/lecturer ratio

BP referred to the impact within communities in relation to the reduction in provision to those cohorts who will be most affected.

CB acknowledged the disproportionate impact on such cohorts.

PL raised a concern regarding staff morale given the good work which has been achieved to increase provision and student numbers.

It was acknowledged that this will be a concern.

CMcK acknowledged the view of the GB in relation to their disappointment in the position, noting that we will have to work with what we have been allocated.

It was emphasised to the members that this is contingency planning; there is no confirmation of the final position.

HH was thanked for her presentation and left the meeting.

136.10 Resources Committee

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2026 were shared previously with members, reviewed and endorsed.

The Financial and Budget Update Paper, as presented to Resources Committee on 3 June 2026 was shared previously with members and noted.

136.11 College Equality Report

The Annual Equality Progress Report was shared previously with members and noted.

CMcG commended the report, acknowledging the support given to staff and students.

136.12 Strategic Plan Update

The final draft of the Strategic Plan was shared in advance with members and noted.

Consultations requested by GB had taken place. MH advised that this will be submitted to DfE prior to consultation.

136.13 Financial Management Oversight Committee

CMcK provided a verbal update from meeting held on 15 June 2026, noting that in respect of our accounts and finance team, we are in a much better place than we were 6 months ago. He noted the strong relationship which has been built with DfE.

134.14 Any Other Business

None.

136.15 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 30 September 2026.

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm.

Mr C McKenna, Chair



Date 7 October 2026

Mrs R Toms, Acting Secretary



Governing Body Action Log

Item no	Action	Owner	Date	Status
	Confirm student/lecturer ratio	CB		