

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 5 March 2025 on MS Teams commencing at 4.00pm.

Present: Mr D Small (Chair), Mr B Devlin, Dr P Graham, Mrs P Martin

In Attendance: Mr D Blair, Mrs C Brown, Ms E Taggart (NIAO), Mr I McCartney (RSM), Ms K Guy (item 84.6), Mr M Higgins, Mr S Lavery, Mr I Murphy, Ms I Kerr (DfE), Mr S Wade (NIAO)

Secretary: Mrs K Wallace

84.1 Apologies/Welcome

DS welcomed SW, ET and IK to the meeting.

Apologies were received for Mrs Crilly and Mr Macauley.

84.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

84.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The draft minutes of meeting on 16 December 2024 were approved.

Proposed: Dr Graham Seconded: Mrs Martin

84.4 Matters Arising

Items outstanding from the previous minutes were addressed as follows:

Sector wide insurance: Consultation ongoing with self-insurance being considered.

Progress of new disposal schedule: Currently with PRONI; will be circulated around sector in due course.

Corporate Policy audit: Will be included as a priority for the 2025/26 audit schedule.

Members noted that all other items had been completed or would be ongoing.

84.5 Chair's Communication / Correspondence

DfE Group Annual Report and Accounts: Consideration was given to the letter to all ALBs dated 27.01.25, which had also been discussed at the Financial Accounts Improvement Committee (FAIC) on 26.02.25.

IK advised that NIFON's request for flexibility on deadline had been raised with DoF. SL provided the context for the request which, IK confirmed, had subsequently been declined.

SW reported that the Department Accounts had been certified with a disclaimed audit opinion. Members noted that the resultant report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) would reference the College's contribution to the delay in the accounts being finalised. DS acknowledged College issues that had been relevant to the delay and emphasised the importance of work for the coming year being carried out as quickly as possible.

SW advised that the report would also include a number of other issues associated with the delay. He explained the sequencing of the C&AG's press release and agreed to give sight to the College once the Department had been notified, to enable the College to formulate a position.

MH expressed disappointment at this outcome and detailed steps being taken by the College to improve its position and strengthen recruitment. He expressed his thanks to DB and the College Accountant for their work in this respect.

In response to a query from PM, SW advised that the Department would be doing a fundamental review of accounts production and would be in touch with component bodies in the near future. Governors expressed concern at the imminent deadline and level of risk so close to going into another finance cycle. SL and DB noted the improved resources and processes which had been put in place to improve timescales for achieve necessary deadlines.

FAIC: DS explained the context and rationale for this Committee, with meetings currently taking place fortnightly. MH advised Committee membership, oversight and reporting arrangements in place to oversee governance arrangements.

84.9 External Audit

It was agreed to take this item next in the meeting.

ET updated Committee on the status of the statutory audit of the accounts. She acknowledged a high volume of queries from auditors but noted productive conversations with College staff and their efficiency in returning sample information. She confirmed audit were working towards 14 April for signing off the accounts.

DB confirmed a good working relationship between the College and auditors.

DS and PM welcomed this information and was encouraged to hear that accounts closure and management of schedule changes would be completed at the same time.

ET left the meeting at 4.35pm.

KG joined the meeting at 4.40pm.

84.6 Information Governance

DS welcomed KG who had recently been appointed to the role of DPO.

KG expanded on the topics in the report and confirmed that staff were thorough in following up on data breaches/ near misses. She also noted excellent uptake of mandatory training modules.

MH thanked KG for the comprehensive update and highlighted that the College continued to record all issues in order to learn from any mistakes made.

KG left the meeting at 4.50pm.

84.7 Internal Audit

IMC presented the Progress Report and noted a Satisfactory rating for New Build Project Governance, with no recommendations identified. Members noted the New Build report which was also provided.

DS and PM welcomed the Satisfactory assurance for the new build project. MH advised that this would allow close down of the project and progress with the Gateway review for Ballymena over the next weeks. An update on the outcome would be shared with the NBPB and A&R and lessons learned would again be shared with the Department.

IMC commented on a few setbacks with progressing the safeguarding audit, which started earlier in the week. SL confirmed that the issues referred to were being dealt with. In response to a question from PM, SL advised progress of work on the Safeguarding audit following staff sickness. He paid tribute to the New Build Project Manager and Programme Management Officer for their work on the new build projects. DS concurred with SL's thanks and noted an excellent report, including results of key performance indicators.

IMC drew members' attention to the Benchmarking report and thematic overview of actions checklist, which would be circulated around the SMT for information.

DS noted the important assurance provided to Committee by good audit reports and subsequent approach taken to follow up on recommendations. PG supported these comments.

SL reminded members that the Internal Audit contract would shortly be going out for tender.

84.8 Progress Against Outstanding Audit Issues

DB presented the quarterly update to 31.01.25 and noted that work on areas partially implemented but subject to sector wide policies was being tracked to ensure completion as early as possible. PM noted that issues in this area seemed to be the slowest to resolve.

DS emphasised the importance of ensuring minimum slippage of target dates and asked that change from prior reports be captured.

DB will include movement tracking in future reports and would investigate what further the College could do to encourage movement on sector work.

Members noted that an update on LMS performance and user experience should be available for the meeting on 14 April.

84.10 Accounts Update

With accounts information covered under earlier topics, Committee heard that progress was continuing in line with expectations.

84.11 Draft Audit & Risk Committee (ARAC) Annual Report 2023/24

Committee noted that the report would be finalised after the accounts had been signed off (April 2025) and would then be sent to the Department.

SL confirmed that the report had been updated to include an A&R Committee opinion to GB.

84.12 Corporate Risk Register

SL referred members to the summary of changes detailed on page 19 of the report.

Committee was content with the changes subject to possible revision of wording on Risk 2 later.

DS referred to the root risk of failure and suggested a possible discussion around this at the next meeting of Committee.

PM suggested a deep dive into the corporate and departmental risk registers to ensure full reflection of all risks.

MH advised that this would be included in a risk management workshop to be held before the end of June and would feed into the planning cycle for the new academic year.

ACTION: Risk Workshop in last quarter of 2024/25 academic year.

CB left the meeting at 5.29pm.

84.13 Other Registers

Information on Gifts & Hospitality, Fraud, Raising Concerns and Direct Awards Contracts was noted.

84.14 Any Other Business None.

84.15 Date of Next Meeting 14 April 2025, to consider annual accounts.

The meeting concluded at 5.52pm.

Mr D Small *DSmall*

Date: 14.04.2025

Chair

Mrs K Wallace



Secretary

Action Log

Item No		Person Responsible	Date Due	Actioned
84.8	Movement tracking to be provided in future reports of Progress Against Outstanding Audit Issues.	DB	Ongoing	Ongoing
	Update on LMS performance and user experience	DB	14.04.25	
84.12	Risk Workshop in last quarter of 2024/25 academic year.	SL	Before end of academic year	Scheduled