



Department of
Education
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CORPORATE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

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DE Corporate Governance Framework

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SECTION 1

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This document sets out details of the Department's corporate governance arrangements. It provides information on the arrangements which have been established to ensure proper and effective management of the Department's affairs and is a key aspect of the Department's Governance and Control Framework.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Corporate Governance is the way in which an organisation is directed, controlled and led. It defines relationships and the distribution of rights and responsibilities amongst those who work with and in the organisation, determines the rules and procedures through which the organisation's objectives are set and provides the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance.

2.2 The effectiveness of direction and control of an organisation depends on:

- governance: how well an organisation plans, sets, communicates, undertakes and monitors its corporate objectives;
- risk management: how the organisation identifies, considers and manages the risks to the achievement of corporate objectives; and
- business controls: how the Board of the organisation assures itself and its stakeholders that it is in control of its business and the risks to the achievement of its objectives.

2.3 This framework provides an overview of the corporate governance processes and responsibilities within the Department.

2.4 The relationship between Ministers, civil servants and the Assembly is based on the following key elements:

- a Department works under the direction and control of its Minister;
- civil servants are accountable to their Departmental Minister;
- Ministers are accountable to the NI Assembly;
- civil servants attend Assembly Committees on behalf of their Minister; and
- only in the Accounting Officer role is a civil servant directly accountable (for limited and specific responsibilities) to the NI Assembly as represented by the Public Accounts Committee.

2.5 The Departmental Board supports the Permanent Secretary by contributing to the corporate management of the Department within the strategic policy and resources framework set by the Minister and the Executive.

2.6 The Framework reflects the key principles in the Corporate Governance in central government departments: Code of Good Practice NI 2013.

3. REVIEW

- 3.1 The Framework is intended to be a living document. It will evolve as the Department's corporate practice develops. It will therefore be kept under continuing review.

SECTION 2

4. ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURES

Department's Strategic Priorities

4.1 The Vision of the Department is:

Every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding.

4.2 Our Strategic Priorities as set out in Every CHILD, DE's Corporate Plan 2023-2028, are:

- **CHAMPIONING** the needs and aspirations of all our children and young people and the positive impact of education;
- **HELPING** all our children and young people by supporting their well-being learning;
- **INSPIRING** all our children and young people to make a positive contribution to society;
- Meeting the **LEARNING** needs of our children and young people and developing their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential;
- **DELIVERING** an effective, child-first, collaborative and high-quality education system.

4.3 The key organisational structures which support the delivery of corporate governance in the Department are the:

- Departmental Board; and
- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

4.4 There are also less formal management structures including:

- a weekly Ministerial issues meeting;
- a weekly top management group meeting attended by members of the Senior Civil Service; and
- a monthly Senior Management team meeting chaired by the Permanent Secretary and attended by all Deputy Secretaries and the Chief Inspector.

Departmental Board

4.5 The Departmental Board exists to lead the Department's strategic planning and assist the Permanent Secretary and Principal Accounting Officer in meeting his corporate governance responsibilities for the Department. The Board follows Corporate Governance best practice. The Board's Terms of Reference – which set out the functions, aim and responsibilities of the Board and its membership – are at Annex A.

4.6 The Board operates as a collegiate forum, under the leadership of the Permanent Secretary, to manage the running of the Department. The Board is

not the principal policy making body within the Department, as policy is determined by the Minister. However, the Board may discuss policy in the context of analysing options, strategic planning and operational management. In the policy area, the Board operates in an advisory and consultative capacity, offering guidance when sought.

4.7 Deputy Secretary Board Members and the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate:

- are the main policy advisers to the Minister for their areas of responsibility, subject to the overall direction of the Permanent Secretary;
- participate in the high-level corporate decision-making process as members of the Departmental Board;
- contribute to corporate governance arrangements within the Department; and
- provide support for the Permanent Secretary.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

4.8 The Board is supported in its role by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Board with no executive powers. The role of the Audit Committee is to support the Board in its responsibilities for issues of risk control and governance by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Board and Accounting Officer's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's Terms of Reference are set out at Annex B.

Ministerial Issues Meeting

4.9 The Ministerial issues meeting is normally held on a weekly basis and is attended by the Minister, the Minister's Special Adviser, the Permanent Secretary, and Deputy Secretary Board Members. The meeting is held to facilitate discussion on day-to-day Departmental issues of interest to the Minister.

Senior Management Team Meeting

4.10 The Senior Management Team meeting is held on a monthly basis. The purpose of the meeting is to highlight departmental issues, to provide advice and direction to senior management on specific items of business that need to be progressed and to identify upcoming key business issues. The meetings are chaired at Permanent Secretary level and membership comprises other Departmental Senior Civil Servants below Permanent Secretary; and the Principal Information Officer.

Permanent Secretary / G3 Stocktake

4.11 This is a weekly meeting chaired by the Permanent Secretary and attended by Deputy Secretaries and the Chief Inspector. The meeting looks at strategic issues affecting the Department.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Permanent Secretary

- 5.1 The Permanent Secretary is the Minister's principal adviser across the full range of his/her Ministerial responsibilities. In terms of the Department's corporate governance arrangements, the Permanent Secretary is the administrative head of Department and Chair of the Departmental Board. The Permanent Secretary is also the Principal Accounting Officer for the Department.
- 5.2 As Chair of the Board, the Permanent Secretary is responsible for:
- ensuring the Board fulfils its responsibilities;
 - ensuring that the business of Board meetings is conducted efficiently and effectively, that there is open debate and that all views are heard;
 - summing up Board debates and seeking agreed decisions;
 - controlling the order of Board meetings;
 - ensuring that systems are in place to provide Board members with accurate and timely information of good quality to allow the Board to consider properly all matters before it;
 - ensuring that a Board effectiveness review is performed annually with independent input as necessary, and that results are acted upon;
 - ensuring adherence to the principles set out in the 2017 DFP Corporate Governance Code;
 - notifying the Board of any matters that threaten the regularity, propriety or value-for-money with which the Department carries out its business;
 - notifying the Board of any significant issues which may impact on the Department's leadership, medium-term capability and significant risks to delivery of policy, along with mitigating actions taken; and
 - disclosing any Ministerial Directions to the Board at the earliest possible opportunity (normally the meeting following the issue of any such Directions).
- 5.3 The Chair should encourage all Board members to express their views frankly and challenge constructively in order to improve the standard of discussion in Board meetings.

Accounting Officer

- 5.4 As Accounting Officer, the Permanent Secretary must be able to assure the Assembly and the public of high standards of probity in the management of public funds. The Accounting Officer must personally sign:
- the organisation's accounts;
 - the annual report; and
 - the governance statement.

- 5.5 Acting within the authority of the Minister(s) to whom he or she is responsible, the Accounting Officer should ensure that the organisation, and any subsidiary to it or organisation sponsored by it, operates effectively and to a high standard of probity. The main duties of Accounting Officers are set out in the Managing Public Money Northern Ireland which can be accessed using the link: [Managing Public Money NI \(MPMNI\) | Department of Finance \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
- 5.6 This guidance emphasises that Accounting Officers must also take personal responsibility and accountability for:
- propriety and regularity;
 - prudent and economical administration;
 - avoidance of waste and extravagance;
 - ensuring value for money, judged for the Executive as a whole, not just for the department;
 - efficient and effective use of available resources; and
 - the organisation, staffing and management of the Department.

Executive Board Members

- 5.7 The following are members of the Departmental Board:

Executive Board Members

- Permanent Secretary (Chair) – David Malcolm
- Acting Deputy Secretary – Suzanne Kingon
- Acting Deputy Secretary – Paul Brush
- Deputy Secretary – Heather Cousins
- Chief Inspector of Education and Training Inspectorate – Faustina Graham
- Director of Finance – Neil Palmer
- Departmental Strategic HR Business Partner – Marcella Phillips

Independent Board Members

- Independent Board Member – Paul Corrigan
- Independent Board Member – Anna Carragher

- 5.8 The Board provides corporate leadership to the organisation as a whole, taking responsibility for the Department's performance and provides support for the administrative head of the Department.

Directors are responsible for:

- the development of strategy and for supporting the delivery of that strategy. This includes taking steps to ensure that the business is prioritised and decisions implemented in accordance with the objectives set by the Board;
- notifying the Board of any matters that threaten the regularity, propriety or value-for-money with which the Department carries out its business; and

- notifying the Board of any significant issues which may impact on the Department's leadership, medium-term capability and significant risks to delivery of policy, along with mitigating actions taken.

5.9 The non-executive Independent Board Members (NEBMs) have been appointed on merit with due regard to guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. They bring an important external perspective and challenge as Board members.

All Board members are required to adhere to the Seven Principles of Public Life set by the Committee on Standards in Public Life; which are set out at Annex C.

6. INTERNAL CONTROL AND RISK MANAGEMENT-

6.1 At the end of each financial year the Department's Annual Report and Accounts is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly in accordance with section 10(4) of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. On approval, the Annual Report and Accounts is published under the Copyright Act 1911 and made available on the Department's website.

6.2 As part of the Annual Report and Accounts the Accounting Officer is required to sign a Governance Statement. An effective governance framework including a risk management process involving a systematic approach to the evaluation and control of risk is required to support this.

Internal Audit

6.3 The Accounting Officer and the Board are independently advised by an internal audit service operating in accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The primary objective of Internal Audit is to provide the Accounting Officer and the Board with an independent and objective opinion on risk management, control and governance, by measuring and evaluating their effectiveness in achieving the Department's agreed objectives.

Risk Management

6.4 Risk management is the culture, process and structures that are directed towards the effective management of potential opportunities and threats facing an organisation in striving to meet its objectives. To assist in the process of identifying and managing risk, the Department has developed a Risk Management Framework which sets out the Department's approach to the identification and management of risk. The Risk management Framework is available on the home page of the [DE Risk Management Application](#).

6.5 Risks can be managed at a number of levels, including corporate, group and directorate. The Corporate Risk Register is endorsed by the Accounting Officer and Departmental Board and is subject to quarterly monitoring, review and revision. The Corporate Risk Register and all other DE Risk Registers are available to view on the Risk Management Application.

- 6.6 The following key principles underpin the Department's approach to risk management:
- the Accounting Officer assumes responsibility for risk management across the Department as a whole;
 - there is an open and receptive approach by the Departmental Board to discussing and addressing risks across the Department;
 - there is a recognition and disclosure of the financial and non-financial implications of risks;
 - monitoring of key risks is a priority for senior management;
 - senior management supports Directorates in the management of risk; and
 - the risk management process is integrated with normal management processes and informs the annual business planning cycle so as to link risk management and internal control to the Department's ability to fulfil its business objectives.

Subsidiary Statements

- 6.7 Another key element of the system of internal control is the Subsidiary Governance Statements provided by Grade 5 Directors and the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate which feed into the Annual Governance Statement prepared by the Accounting Officer. The DE Governance Statement is also informed by supporting statements from the NDPBs for which the Department is accountable. These statements provide summaries of progress in delivering business plan commitments and information on how key resources are managed, on sponsored Arm's Length Bodies and on risk management.

Register of Interests

- 6.8 The Board holds and maintains a Register of Interests which is reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Board members are required to declare any personal or business interest which may or may be *perceived* (by a reasonable member of the public) to influence their judgement. The Register of Interests is also placed on the Departmental Publication Scheme.

Register of Gifts, Hospitality and Awards

- 6.9 The Board also holds and maintains a Register of Gifts, Hospitality and Awards to record any offers in accordance with the current NICS and Departmental policy. The Register of Gifts, Hospitality and Awards is also placed on the Departmental Publication Scheme.

Relationships with Arm's Length Bodies

- 6.10 The Department is responsible for 9 Arm's Length Bodies. These are:

Executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs):

- Education Authority
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland¹
- Middletown Centre for Autism
- Youth Council for Northern Ireland²

Tribunal non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs):

- Exceptional Circumstances Body

6.11 The Department's Accounting Officer has responsibility for safeguarding the public funds which are given to these bodies. He is supported in this role by the Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of each body. They are responsible for running their respective bodies and for ensuring regularity and propriety is adhered to. Individual Governance Statements are prepared by the Accounting Officer of each body and published through their annual report and accounts. Additionally the external audit statement on each set of Accounts includes a regularity opinion. With the exception of the Exceptional Circumstances Body, the governance and performance of Arm's Length Bodies is scrutinised at regular Governance and Accountability (GAR) meetings with the Department, with the outcome formally reported to the Departmental Board on a quarterly basis.

6.12 Each executive NDPB has an agreed Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM), which sets out the broad framework within which an NDPB operates. From 2021, the MSFMs will be phased out and replaced by *Partnership Agreements*, which will encourage a more collaborative style of working between the Department and its ALBs, with a continued focus on honest open and constructive relationships within the overall governance framework. Until these new Partnership Agreements are agreed with each ALB, the existing MSFM will continue to form the framework of ALB governance.

The Board's Oversight of Arm's Length Bodies

6.12 The Departmental Board is responsible for ensuring that there are robust governance arrangements with each ALB Board and this assurance is sought by the Board in its consideration of regular reports covering Governance and Accountability review meetings.

¹ In December 2021, the Education Minister announced her decision to stand down the Council and its committees with immediate effect, and to bring forward a Bill for the Council's dissolution. A public consultation will determine whether a replacement body is established, or if the Council's functions could be best delivered through an alternative mechanism.

² The Youth Council is not currently constituted. A public consultation on replacing the Youth Council with a non-statutory forum is being prepared.

Other Processes

6.13 There are also a number of other processes which contribute to corporate governance including:

- the business planning process and associated monitoring and reporting process;
- the Performance Management System for reviewing and assessing the performance of individual members of staff;
- HR policies to ensure the Department has staff with suitable skills to meet its objectives;
- budgets and priorities setting and in-year monitoring processes;
- the Departmental Anti-Fraud Policy which details responsibilities regarding the prevention of fraud and a Response Plan which specifies the procedures to be followed in the event of a fraud being detected or suspected. Both documents relate to fraud and loss within the Department and its sponsored bodies;
- Annual Business Area Security Returns, which form the basis of the Annual Departmental Security Report; and
- Assurance statements from ALBs.

6.14 A framework detailing governance and accountability arrangements for the oversight of ALBs can be found using the following link: [Governance and Accountability Arrangements for the Oversight of DE's Arm's Length Bodies | NICS Intranet \(nigov.net\)](#). This guidance is reviewed and updated on an annual basis (latest version published June 2022).

DEPARTMENTAL BOARD

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OBJECTIVES

Purpose

1. The Departmental Board (the Board) provides corporate leadership to the organisation as a whole, takes responsibility for the Department's performance and provides support for the head of the Department who provides advice to the Minister.

Membership

2. The Board is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Department. The Board Chair is responsible for the appointment of all the Board members and the appraisal of their performance. Executive Members of the Board will have their performance assessed through the Department's Performance Management system.
3. The other Executive members of the Board are:
 - Paul Brush, Acting Deputy Secretary for:
 - Special Educational Needs – Reform & Inclusion Development
 - Special Educational Needs - Strategic Policy & Legislation
 - Education Workforce
 - Early Years, Childcare and Children & Young People's Strategy
 - Raising Aspirations and Supporting Learning
 - Suzanne Kingon, Acting Deputy Secretary for:
 - Investment & Infrastructure
 - Qualifications, 14-19 Strategy and Statistics & Research
 - Teaching and Learning Excellence
 - Teacher Development
 - Curriculum Reform and TransformED Implementation
 - Heather Cousins, Deputy Secretary for:
 - Collaborative Education & Youth
 - Finance
 - Strule Shared Education Programme
 - Sustainable Schools Policy & Planning
 - Transport and Food in Schools
 - Corporate Services and Education Government
 - Chief Inspector Education and Training Inspectorate, Faustina Graham

- Director of Finance, Neil Palmer
- Departmental Strategic HR Business Partner – Marcella Phillips

There are also two non-executive Independent Board Members (NEBMs):

- Paul Corrigan – appointment term 1 May 2022 – 30 April 2026
 - Anna Carragher – appointment term 1 May 2024 – 30 April 2026
4. All members will receive appropriate induction and training in the Board's responsibilities and procedures.
 5. Departmental Business Services Team will provide a Board secretariat. The secretariat will be responsible for ensuring compliance with Board procedures and maintenance of a Register of Interests for the Board.
 6. An effective board secretary is essential for an effective board. Under the direction of the Permanent Secretary the board secretary's responsibilities should include:
 - developing and agreeing the agenda for Board meetings with the chair, ensuring all relevant items are brought to the Board's attention;
 - ensuring good information flows within the Board and its committees and between senior management and independent board members, including;
 - challenging and ensuring the quality of Board papers and Board information;
 - ensuring Board papers are received by Board members according to a timetable agreed by the Board;
 - providing advice and support on governance matters and helping to implement improvements in the governance structure and arrangements;
 - ensuring the Board follows due process;
 - providing assurance to the Board that the Department adheres to the 2017 Corporate Governance Code's principles and supporting provisions on a comply or explain basis (which should form part of the report accompanying the resource accounts);
 - acting as the focal point between independent board members and the department, including arranging detailed briefing for independent board members and meetings between independent board members and officials, as requested or appropriate;
 - recording Board decisions accurately and ensuring action points are followed up; and
 - arranging induction and professional development of Board members.

Reporting

7. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee reports regularly to the Board on their work.

8. The Board will undertake an annual effectiveness review with independent input at least every three years and ensure that the results are acted upon.

Responsibilities

9. The objective of the Board is to provide collective leadership for the Department by scrutinising and advising on:
 - strategic clarity / the delivery of the Programme for Government;
 - risk capabilities; and
 - performance efficiency.
10. In order to achieve these objectives, a formal schedule of **matters always dealt with by the Board** – that is, those which should not be delegated within the Department – is maintained. This covers decision-making in relation to the following matters:
 - NICS of the Future;
 - setting the strategic direction for the Department through its corporate and business plans to achieve Ministerial and Programme for Government objectives;
 - appropriate operational strategies to implement policies set by the Minister;
 - acting under the direction of the Minister, financial planning and management, including allocation of resources to match delivery requirements and in-year monitoring and management of expenditure;
 - monitoring departmental performance against objectives and targets and assessing the risks to delivery;
 - risk management policies, registers, including the risk appetite of the Department;
 - finance, human resources and other strategies affecting long term capability of the Department; and
 - corporate governance arrangements within the Department and with its Arm's Length Bodies.

The Board expects to receive reports on significant **matters delegated** to Departmental Directors including performance against internal targets and commitments.

11. The **main categories of information considered** at Board meetings include:
 - strategic management and governance matters;
 - progress against business plan targets;
 - progress and status of significant projects;
 - performance against key efficiency metrics;
 - risk management;
 - scrutiny of performance of the Department's sponsored bodies; and
 - management information relating to use of resources compared to budgets, cash flow and balance sheet movements.

12. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, on behalf of the Departmental Board will review, prior to publication, the draft **Departmental report and accounts**, including the governance statement.
13. The governance and performance of arm's length bodies is scrutinised at regular Governance and Accountability (GAR) meetings with the Department with the outcomes formally reported to the Board on a quarterly basis.

Rights

14. The Board may:
 - invite other staff or individuals to attend the Board as deputies, observers or to present a paper;
 - co-opt additional members to provide specialist skills, knowledge and experience; and
 - procure specialist ad hoc advice.

Meetings

15. The Board will meet at least 6 times each year, to deal with corporate management issues. The Board maintains a work programme which is developed on a rolling basis. It includes matters always dealt with by the Board; matters that are delegated but where the Board expects to receive reports for approval or decision as necessary; and the usual governance expenditure, risk management and performance reports for the Department and its ALBs.
16. A minimum of 4 members must be present for the Board to be deemed quorate.
17. Members should attend Board meetings and committee meetings regularly, attend events when required and contribute to discussions. Decisions should be taken both corporately and objectively, acting in the public interest in keeping with the Nolan principles of public life.
18. Members should record in the Register of Interests any issues on which they might have a conflict of interest. The Board as a whole should consider how matters on which a member may have a conflict of interest will be handled.
19. Where members have concerns about the running of the Department or a proposed action which cannot be resolved, they should ensure that these are recorded in the minutes.
20. An agenda and papers will be circulated at least three working days in advance and a summary of Board outcomes will be circulated to staff within three working days of the meeting. The formal minutes will be produced within three working days of the following Board meeting. The secretariat will maintain an induction pack and programme for new members.

Board Sub-Committees

21. The Board may delegate other matters for consideration to sub-committees, chaired by a Board member. The Board will consider formally the work and recommendations of the sub-committees.
22. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee operates in accordance with Department of Finance and Personnel and HM Treasury guidance. The Committee is chaired by an Independent Board Member, with at least one committee member having recent and relevant financial experience.

Review

23. The Board ToR will be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis and at least every two years. This will include updating of the “Membership” of the Board ToR as and when there is a change of circumstances or a change of key personnel.

Audit and Risk Committee Terms of Reference as at May 2025

1. Role and Authority

- 1.1 The Department of Education's Departmental Board established an Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) to support it in its responsibilities³ for issues of risk, control and governance and associated assurance.
- 1.2 The ARAC is a sub-committee of the Departmental Board and is an independent advisory committee with no executive functions.
- 1.3 The Terms of Reference for the ARAC is approved by the Departmental Board and is reviewed annually. The Terms of Reference were most recently agreed in June 2024.

2. Membership

- 2.1 The Committee comprises 2 Non-Executive Members of the Departmental Board and 2 Independent Members who are serving senior civil servants in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).
- 2.2. The present members of the ARAC are:

<u>Non-Executive Board Members (NEBM):</u>		
	<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>End of term</u>
Paul Corrigan (Chair) ⁴	1 May 2022	2 May 2026
Anna Carragher ⁵	1 May 2024	2 May 2026

³ DAO (DoF) 03/18 – Issue of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI) 2018 - <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/audit-committees>

• HM Treasury- Audit and Risk Committee Handbook- Updated 2025 [ARAC Handbook -2025 Updates](#)

⁴ Paul Corrigan was appointed as Non- Executive Board Member on 1 May 2022 for an initial term of 2 years. He was appointed to the role of ARAC Chair on 1 March 2024 and his term of office was extended for a further 2 years.

⁵ Anna Carragher was appointed as Non- Executive Board member on 1 May 2024 for an initial term of 2 years.

<u>Independent Members:</u>		
	<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>End of term</u>
Gavin Patrick ⁶	19 March 2019	18 March 2025
Patrick Butler ⁷	1 November 2022	1 November 2026
Richard Logan ⁸	10 March 2025	10 March 2027

2.3 Any appointments to the ARAC shall normally be for an initial period of 2 years and may be extended for a further period by mutual agreement up to a maximum of 6 years.

2.4 All members will be provided with a suitable programme of induction and training.

2.5 The Committee is chaired by a Non-Executive Board Member and is provided with a secretariat function by Finance Directorate.

3. Meetings

3.1 The ARAC will meet at least 4 times a year; however, the Chair of the Committee may convene additional meetings as deemed necessary.

3.2 A minimum of 2 Non-Executive Board/Independent Members of the ARAC will be required to be present for the meeting to be deemed quorate.

⁶ Gavin Patrick's term of office came to an end on 18 March 2025.

⁷ Patrick Butler was appointed as Independent Member and took up post on 1 November 2022. During this year his tenure was extended for a further 2 years to 1 November 2026.

⁸ Richard Logan was appointed on 10 March 2025 for an initial period of 2 years.

- 3.3 Committee meetings will normally be attended by the Permanent Secretary, the Deputy Secretary with responsibility for finance and performance management, the Finance Director, the Head of Internal Audit and a representative of External Audit.
- 3.4 The Committee may ask any other officials of the organisation, and/or the DE Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), to attend to assist it with its discussions on any particular matter.
- 3.5 The Committee may ask any or all of those who normally attend, but who are not members, to withdraw to facilitate open and frank discussion of particular matters.
- 3.6 The Departmental Board may ask the Committee to convene further meetings to discuss particular issues on which it seeks the Committee's advice.
- 3.7 Each member of the Committee should take personal responsibility to declare pro-actively any potential conflict of interest arising out of business undertaken by the organisation(s), arising on the Committee's agenda or from changes in the member's personal circumstances. The Chair of the Committee should then determine an appropriate course of action with the member.
- 3.8 The members of the ARAC will meet with the Department's External Auditors, the NI Audit Office (NIAO) and its Internal Auditors once a year in separate closed sessions, which would exclude DE officials.
- 3.9 The Chair will attend the monthly Departmental Board. The Chair will also meet separately with the NIAO Director and the Head of Internal Audit at least once a year. The Chair may also meet with the Accounting Officer and the Finance Director, outside of the formal Committee structure.
- 3.10 The need to meet with other key bodies within the Departmental group throughout the year will be considered.

4. Access

4.1 The Head of Internal Audit and the representative of External Audit will have free and confidential access to the Chair of the Committee.

5. Rights

5.1 The Committee may:

- Co-opt additional members for a period not exceeding a year to provide specialist skills, knowledge and experience; and
- Procure specialist ad-hoc advice at the expense of the Department, subject to budgets agreed by the Accounting Officer/Departmental Board.

6. Reporting

6.1 The Chair will formally report to the Departmental Board after each meeting. This written report will clearly communicate the ARAC's advice and recommendations to the Departmental Board. When it is not possible to provide a written update due to meeting timings, the Chair will provide a verbal update to the Board, with the written report for noting at the following Board meeting.

6.2 The Committee will produce an Annual Report summarising its conclusions from the work it has done during the year and providing its opinion on the comprehensiveness and reliability of the assurances available to support the Departmental Board and the Accounting Officer in their accountability obligations.

7. Responsibilities

7.1 The Committee will advise the Departmental Board on:

- the strategic processes for risk, control and governance and the Governance Statement;
- the accounting policies, the accounts, and the annual report of the organisation, including the process for review of the accounts prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified, and management's letter of representation to the external auditors;
- the planned activity and results of both internal and external audit;
- adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including external audit's management letter;
- assurances relating to the management of risk and corporate governance requirements for the organisation; and
- anti-fraud policies, whistle-blowing processes, and arrangements for special investigations.

8. Information Requirements

8.1 For each meeting the Committee will be provided with the following.

Risk Management

8.2 A report summarising any significant changes to the Department's strategic risks and a copy of the Corporate Risk Register.

8.3 A high level summary of the current key risk/concerns in relation to each of the Department's NDPBs on both operational and financial levels will be shared twice a year in September and March.

Internal Audit

8.4 A progress report from the Head of Internal Audit summarising:

- work performed (and a comparison with work planned);

- key issues emerging from Internal Audit work;
- management response to audit recommendations;
- changes to the agreed Annual Audit Plan; and
- any resourcing issues affecting the delivery of Internal Audit objectives.

External Audit

- 8.5 A progress report from the External Audit representative(s) summarising work done and emerging findings and any wider issues that may impact on the Department.

Finance and Governance

- 8.6 As appropriate the Committee will also be provided with:
- Draft Governance Statement and Accounts;
 - Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report and Opinion;
 - Proposals for the Terms of Reference of Internal Audit/ the Internal Audit Charter;
 - The Internal Audit Strategy and Audit Plans;
 - Fraud Reports;
 - Quality Assurance reports on the internal audit function;
 - A report on any changes to accounting policies;
 - External Audit's management letters (Reports to Those Charged with Governance);
 - A report on any proposals to tender for audit functions;
 - A report on co-operation between Internal and External Audit;
 - The Department's Risk Management Framework; and
 - Key information on issues relating to governance and/or internal controls of its ALBs.

Key Operational and Strategic Issues (Mission Critical)

- 8.7 The ARAC will be provided with appropriate updates on key operational and strategic issues impacting the Department and wider Education sector to keep

them informed and abreast of mission critical programmes and projects and to assist them in their role to provide advice, scrutiny and challenge.

8.8 The list above is not exhaustive; the Committee will be provided with any additional relevant information and updates as necessary and appropriate.

9. Evaluation of Performance

9.1 The ARAC will assess its own effectiveness on an annual basis. It will formally report the results of its review of effectiveness to the Departmental Board.

9.2 The Chair of ARAC also seeks appraisal of his/her performance from the Accounting Officer during the year.

The Seven Principles of Public Life

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.