# Higher Education Scheme of Delegation 2026-27

**Approved by the Board of the Corporation – 30 June 2026**

Alison Shaw, Chair

| Revision No. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Date | | | | | | | | |

# HE Board and Committees Structure and Scheme of Delegation

## Higher Education Academic Governance

Education Partnership North East (EPNE) includes Sunderland College, Hartlepool Sixth Form College and Northumberland College, and throughout this document will be referred to as "the College" and/or EPNE. It is committed to the highest standards of educational governance. In line with the EPNE Group Scheme of Delegation, the College recognises that effective leadership, governance, clear accountability, and robust academic assurance are essential to maintaining confidence among students, awarding bodies, regulators, and other stakeholders.

Higher Education (HE) governance is structured to ensure that academic standards, quality, and the student academic experience are subject to appropriate academic oversight, while remaining fully integrated within EPNE's wider corporate governance framework. This approach ensures both academic independence and institutional accountability, consistent with the Instrument and Articles of Government, and the Office for Students' regulatory framework.

The Higher Education Scheme of Delegation ("HE Scheme", this document) forms part of the Corporation's governance framework and sets out the formal delegation of authority for Higher Education academic matters. It should be read alongside the EPNE Group Scheme of Delegation ("Group Scheme") and is a key mechanism through which the Corporation ensures effective academic oversight, assurance, and regulatory compliance.

This HE Scheme adopts and builds on the Seven Principles of Public Life which provide an ethical framework for governance based on values and behaviours of governing with:

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

This HE Scheme sets out EPNE's approach to delegation between the different layers of HE leadership and governance within our HE Board and Committees Structure, defining transparently the matters which are to be decided by the full Board of the Corporation and those delegated.

All bodies exercising delegated authority under this HE Scheme must act primarily in the interests of students and the protection of academic standards.

## HE Board and Committees Structure

The Board of the Corporation is the accountable body for EPNE and holds ultimate responsibility for the educational character, mission, and solvency of the organisation. In accordance with the Group Scheme, the Board retains a defined set of reserved matters which cannot be delegated, including matters that materially affect the educational character and mission of the institution.

Subject to these reserved matters, the Board of the Corporation delegates operational and academic authority through the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee (CQSE Committee) and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). The CQSE Committee provides focused oversight of Higher Education quality, standards, and student outcomes on behalf of the Corporation, supporting the Board in discharging its assurance responsibilities. The Board, in turn, delegates day-to-day responsibility for Higher Education academic governance to the Higher Education Board (HE Board), within an agreed framework of policies, regulations, and reporting arrangements.

The Higher Education Oversight Group supports CQSE in providing additional governor-led scrutiny of the College's readiness for Degree Awarding Powers. It reviews and assures the development and maturity of the shadow regulatory framework, academic and corporate governance arrangements, supporting services and the proposed pre-DAP governance architecture, and reports and recommends to CQSE for onward assurance to the Board of the Corporation. The Group does not exercise delegated academic authority or replace the responsibilities of CQSE, ELT, the HE Board or its committees and panels.

ELT provides institutional oversight of Higher Education through strategic leadership, resource stewardship, and regulatory compliance. It does not direct, determine, or override academic judgement relating to standards, quality, assessment, or academic outcomes, which are exercised independently through the Higher Education Board and its committees within the approved governance structure.

This layered model ensures that authority is delegated appropriately, decisions are taken at the correct level, and assurance flows upward through the governance structure.

The current Higher Education Board and Committees Structure is set out at Annex 1 and maintained in its live form on the EPNE Policy Hub.

The detailed composition, quorum, attendance, chairing and voting arrangements for each body are set out in the relevant Terms of Reference maintained on the EPNE Policy Hub. This Scheme identifies the governance bodies through which delegated authority is exercised, recognising that membership is normally role-based to secure appropriate academic, professional services, management and governance oversight.

Student membership is included within relevant governance bodies where it supports effective student voice, academic assurance and governance oversight. This includes, as applicable, HE Boards of Studies, the Higher Education Board, the HE Oversight Group, the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee and the Board of the Corporation, as reflected in Annex 1: HE Board and Committee Structure. Where reserved, confidential or individual student matters are considered, student participation is managed in accordance with the relevant Terms of Reference and College procedures.

## The Higher Education Board

The Higher Education Board (HE Board) is the principal academic governance body for Higher Education provision at EPNE within the context of awarding body agreements.
It operates with academic independence (within the framework of awarding body requirements) and holds delegated authority for academic decision-making relating to programmes at Level 4 and above, within the context of awarding body agreements.

The HE Board is responsible for:

- Strategic academic oversight of the HE portfolio.
- Safeguarding academic standards and student outcomes.
- Approving HE academic policy documents, regulations, and quality assurance frameworks within delegated authority.
- Overseeing compliance with the UK Quality Code, Office for Students conditions, and awarding body requirements.
- Receiving assurance and recommendations from HE committees and panels.
- Identifying and escalating academic and regulatory risks to ELT and, where appropriate, CQSE and/or the Board of the Corporation.

The HE Board is responsible for providing assurance of compliance with Office for Students Condition B3 through effective oversight of student continuation, completion, and progression outcomes, including the identification of risks and the implementation of appropriate improvement actions. It also ensures that assessment frameworks, academic regulations, and external examining arrangements meet the requirements of Condition B4, including the validity and reliability of assessment and the ongoing credibility of academic awards. In discharging these responsibilities, the HE Board monitors performance trends and differential outcomes across Higher Education provision to ensure that regulatory expectations for student success and academic standards are consistently met, and that any emerging risks are identified, scrutinised, and escalated in line with the College's HE Board and Committees Structure.

The HE Board provides consolidated academic assurance to ELT and CQSE and contributes directly to institutional assurance for governors.

The HE Board is the principal body responsible for the assurance of academic standards and quality for all Higher Education provision, exercising this authority independently within the delegated framework of the Corporation.

## Committees and Panels Supporting the HE Board

To enable focused scrutiny and effective operation, the HE Board is supported by a number of specialist committees and panels. These bodies operate within approved Terms of Reference and delegated authority and report formally to the HE Board.

*HE Board of Studies*

The HE Board of Studies is responsible for programme-level academic assurance and enhancement. Its role is to ensure that the quality of the student learning experience is consistently high and that academic standards are maintained across all HE provision.

Key responsibilities include:

- Approving Annual Monitoring and Review (AMR) reports.
- Reviewing External Examiner reports and approving responses.
- Monitoring programme performance data and student outcomes.
- Considering student voice intelligence, including NSS and Graduate Outcomes.
- Escalating risks, themes, and recommendations to the HE Board.

*HE Academic Panel*

The HE Academic Panel supports the HE Board by providing detailed academic scrutiny of curriculum-related matters. It exercises delegated authority for defined academic approvals within agreed policy frameworks.

Its responsibilities include:

- Approving Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) applications.
- Scrutinising programme design, development, approval, and modification proposals.
- Reviewing resource sufficiency, including library and learning resources.
- Approving External Examiner nominations at pre-approval stage, within the context of awarding body agreements.
- Advising on scholarly activity and enhancement themes.

*HE Quality Panel*

The HE Quality Panel provides operational oversight of quality assurance processes and mechanisms. It plays a key role in ensuring consistent application of academic regulations and effective management of academic risk.

Responsibilities include:

- Approving Recognised Teacher Status (RTS) decisions.
- Conducting thematic reviews and quality investigations.
- Overseeing HE complaints, appeals, and academic concerns.
- Monitoring the accuracy and compliance of published information.
- Analysing External Examiner feedback and monitoring action plans.

*Performance, Quality and Standards Group (PQS)*

The Performance, Quality and Standards Group (PQS) provides in-year scrutiny of performance and outcomes across FE and HE, supporting evidence-based decision-making.

Its role is to:

- Monitor HE performance data and KPIs Track progress against quality interventions and enhancement actions.
- Review learning resource sufficiency Assure reports to the HE Board.

PQS operates in an advisory and assurance capacity.

*Leadership Excellence Group (LEG)*

The Leadership Excellence Group (LEG) supports the strategic development of HE provision by focusing on leadership, people, and the external environment.

Its remit includes:

- Horizon scanning for HE sector developments.
- Advising on strategic priorities and Codes of Practice.
- Promoting consistency and best practice across HE provision.
- Supporting HE staff development and scholarly activity.
- Advising on HE marketing and student recruitment.

LEG provides strategic advice and recommendations.

*HE Boards of Studies*

HE Boards of Studies (operating within curriculum clusters) provide local programme-level oversight and monitoring. They are responsible for:

- Day-to-day academic monitoring.
- Reviewing student experience and engagement.
- Contributing to AMR and External Examiner responses.
- Identifying issues requiring escalation to the HE Board of Studies.

*HE Research Ethics Panel*

The HE Research Ethics Panel ensures that all HE research activity undertaken within EPNE meets ethical and governance requirements.

Responsibilities include:

- Reviewing and approving HE research ethics applications.
- Monitoring compliance with ethical standards.
- Identifying research requiring external ethical approval and ensuring appropriate referrals are made.
- Escalating serious or systemic concerns to the HE Board.

## Assurance and Reporting

All HE committees and panels report formally to the Higher Education Board, providing regular assurance on quality, standards, and risk. The HE Board, in turn, reports to ELT, CQSE and hence contributes academic assurance to the Board of the Corporation as part of EPNE's overall governance and risk framework.

This structure ensures that Higher Education provision is governed through a clear, coherent, and defensible academic governance model, fully aligned to EPNE's Group Scheme of Delegation while preserving academic independence and integrity.

## Operating Framework - Higher Education Scheme of Delegation

The Higher Education Board, its committees and panels, and all individuals exercising delegated authority for Higher Education academic matters shall act at all times within the framework established by:

- the Instrument and Articles of Government of the Corporation;
- the Funding Agreement between the Department for Education and Education Partnership North East, and other applicable funding agreements;
- the AoC Code of Good Governance for English Colleges;
- the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice;
- the College Group's Financial Regulations; and
- the Office for Students Regulatory Framework.

In the event of any doubt or conflict relating to the exercise of delegated authority for Higher Education academic governance, the provisions of these overarching documents shall prevail.

This Higher Education Scheme of Delegation should be read in conjunction with:

- EPNE Group Scheme of Delegation;
- the Corporation's Standing Orders;
- the Terms of Reference for the Higher Education Board and all subordinate HE committees and panels as maintained on the EPNE Policy Hub; and
- the role description of the Chair of the Corporation, insofar as it relates to academic governance, assurance, and oversight.

Where the Board of the Corporation delegates authority for Higher Education academic matters (through the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee and the ELT) to the Higher Education Board, and where the HE Board further sub-delegates authority to its committees and panels, there must be clear, robust, and effective reporting, assurance, and escalation arrangements in place. These arrangements ensure that delegated authority is exercised appropriately, that academic standards and the student experience are safeguarded, and that material academic or regulatory risks are escalated promptly.

Where assurance is sought or provided under this Scheme, the relevant body must actively scrutinise evidence, apply appropriate academic challenge, and require corrective or enhancement action where weaknesses are identified. Where concerns persist or systemic risks emerge, further scrutiny must be commissioned and matters escalated in line with agreed reporting and escalation arrangements.

Assurance is therefore understood as an active, evidence-based process, rather than a passive receipt of information.

In exercising delegated authority under this Scheme, all bodies must ensure that Higher Education provision aligns with and delivers the requirements of the Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration, with particular reference to Condition B3 (student outcomes) and

Condition B4 (assessment and awards). This includes ensuring that continuation, completion, and progression outcomes meet required expectations, and that assessment practices are valid, reliable, and support the credibility of academic awards. The Higher Education Board is responsible for providing assurance that these conditions are met through robust monitoring, scrutiny of evidence, and escalation of risks where outcomes or standards fall below expected thresholds.

Indeed, all bodies must ensure that Higher Education provision is delivered in full compliance with the requirements of relevant awarding bodies and validation partners. This includes adherence to academic regulations, programme approval processes, assessment frameworks, and external examining arrangements. The Higher Education Board is responsible for assuring that such requirements are consistently met and that any risks to compliance, academic standards, or student outcomes are identified, monitored, and escalated in line with agreed governance and reporting arrangements.

This scheme reflects current regulatory expectations and awarding body arrangements and will be subject to biennial review (or sooner where required) to maintain alignment with OfS requirements and sector best practice.

Definitions of Delegation Terms

In this delegation, the following terms have the meanings set out below and apply to the exercise of Higher Education academic governance authority within this HE Scheme:

- **Consult** - the individual or group that should be consulted as part of completing a particular task.
- **Deliver** - the individual or group responsible for undertaking a delegated task and reporting on its delivery at appropriate intervals.
- **Approve** - the individual or group with primary responsibility for authorising completion of a task and determining how it should be undertaken.
- **Develop** - the individual or group responsible for developing proposals for discussion and approval.
- **Recommend** - the individual or group responsible for making recommendations to the appropriate decision-making body.
- **Report** - the individual or group responsible for reporting on delivery or notifying irregularities or issues.
- **Review** - the individual or group responsible for scrutinising whether a task is being carried out satisfactorily and requiring action where necessary.
- **Assure** - the individual or group responsible for gaining sufficient confidence, through receipt and scrutiny of evidence, reports, and assurances, that agreed standards, compliance, and outcomes are being met, and that risks are being appropriately managed.
- **Comply** - the requirement to adhere to approved policies, regulations, and procedures.
- **Act** - the individual or group responsible for taking appropriate and timely action in response to matters raised, assurances received, or risks identified, within their delegated authority,

and for ensuring that actions taken are followed through and, where required, reported or escalated.

To assist interpretation of the matters delegated, the HE Scheme of Delegation matrix below provides additional explanatory comment where appropriate. The matrix should be read from right to left, reflecting the flow of activity from operational delivery through to institutional assurance and approval.

**Scheme of Delegation – EPNE Group Level Matrix (HE Board and Committees Structure)**

Strategy, Standards, And Regulatory Oversight

| Function or Task | Board of the Corporation | Executive Leadership Team (ELT) | Higher Education Board | HE Committees / Panels |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Educational character and academic mission (HE)** | Approve & Review (Reserved Matter - Articles para. 3(a)) | Review | Comply | Comply |
| **HE academic strategy** | Approve & Assure | Develop and Recommend (Strategy & Leadership) | Review & Recommend | Consult & Report |
| **Compliance with UK Quality Code, OfS, awarding bodies** | Assure & Approve (Audit Committee recommendations) | Review, Act & Report (Compliance) | Review & Report | Deliver / Comply |
| **Academic risk (regulatory / standards)** | Review & Assure (Risk Oversight) | Review, Act & Escalate | Monitor, Review & Report | Identify & Report |
| **HE Assets – Review and approval of group wide policy** | Approve and Assure | Review & Recommend | Recommend (where Corporation approval required) and Approve (within delegated academic authority)<br><br>Report | Develop, Deliver & Report |
| **Prepare HE Terms of Reference** | Approve and Review | Review | Recommend (where Corporation approval required) and Approve (within delegated academic authority) | Develop, Deliver & Report |

*Group Scheme cross-reference:* Governance Structure and Reserved Matters (Articles of Government paras. 3(a)-(f)).

Programme Approval, Monitoring, And Review

| Function or Task | Board of the Corporation | ELT | Higher Education Board | HE Boards of Studies |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Programme approval frameworks** | Review (Education & Curriculum)<br>Approve overall College curriculum plan (CQSE Committee recommendations) | Review & Recommend | Approve (within delegated academic authority and awarding body agreements) | Develop / Recommend |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Programme approval & major modification** | Review (by exception) | Review | Approve (for recommendation to awarding body) | Recommend |
| **Annual Monitoring & Review (AMR) framework** | Review | Review | Approve | Deliver & Report |
| **AMR reports (programme level)** | — | — | Receive Assurance | Approve & Report |
| **External Examiner oversight** | Review themes | Review | Review & Assure | Review, Act & Report |

*Group Scheme cross-reference:* Education & Curriculum functions.

Quality Assurance, Enhancement, And Student Outcomes

| Function or Task | Board of the Corporation | Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee | ELT | Higher Education Board | HE Quality Panel / PQS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **HE quality assurance framework** | Approve and Assure | Review & Assure | Review | Approve & Assure | Develop, Deliver & Report |
| **Thematic reviews and investigations** | — | — | — | Review & Receive Reports | Deliver & Report |
| **Return to Study (RTS) decisions** | — | — | — | Receive Assurance | Approve & Report |
| **Complaints, appeals, academic concerns** | Assure | Review (themes) | Review | Review & Assure | Deliver, Act & Report |
| **Student outcomes** | Assure | Review | Review | Review & Assure | Analyse & Report |
| **Student Voice** | Assure | Review | Review | Review & Assure | Analyse & Report |

*Group Scheme cross-reference:* Education & Curriculum; Student Experience.

Academic Development, Scholarship, And Staff Approvals

| Function or Task | Board of the Corporation | ELT | Higher Education Board | HE Academic Panel / LEG |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **HE scholarly activity priorities** | Review | Review | Approve | Develop & Recommend |
| **Programme design & development** | — | — | Approve (for submission to the awarding body, as appropriate) | Review & Recommend |
| **APL decisions (within policy)** | — | — | Receive Assurance | Approve & Report |
| **External Examiner nominations** | — | — | Approve (for submission to the awarding body) | Review & Recommend |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **HE staff capability & leadership development** | Review & Assure | Review & Act | Review & Assure | Develop & Recommend |

*Group Scheme cross-reference:* Education & Curriculum; HR & Operations.

Research Ethics

| Function or Task | Board of the Corporation | ELT | Higher Education Board | HE Research Ethics Panel |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **HE research ethics framework** | Review | Review | Approve & Assure | Develop, Deliver & Report |
| **Research ethics applications** | — | — | Assure | Approve & Report |
| **Serious ethical breaches** | Review & Assure | Review & Act | Review, Assure & Escalate | Identify & Report |

*Group Scheme cross-reference:* Compliance, risk and escalation.

### Reserved Matters

In line with the Group Scheme of Delegation - Reserved Matters (Articles of Government para. 3(a)-(f)), the following interpretation applies specifically to Higher Education:

- Decisions affecting the educational character and mission of the Group include material changes to the HE academic framework, Degree Awarding Powers strategy, or validation authority.
- Academic regulations, frameworks for assessment, and external examining are developed and operated with academic independence through the HE Board but remain subject to *corporation-level approval* where they constitute Group-wide policy.
- Nothing in this Scheme constrains the HE Board's duty to act independently in guarding academic standards, academic freedom, and student outcomes, consistent with Office for Students expectations.
- Where tension arises between corporate and academic considerations, matters are escalated to ELT and, if required, the Board of the Corporation for resolution, preserving academic integrity.

### Assurance, Reporting, and Escalation

| Function or Task | Board of the Corporation | ELT | Higher Education Board | HE Committees |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic assurance reporting** | Receive, Review and Assure | Receive & review | Report & Assure | Contribute & Report |
| **Escalation of material academic risk** | Review & Assure | Receive & Act | Review & Escalate | Identify & Report |
| **Compliance with approved policies** | Review & Assure | Review & Act | Monitor & Assure | Comply |

*Group Scheme cross-reference:* Reporting, accountability, and assurance.

### Summary Matrix

| Area | Board of the Corporation | CQSE | ELT | Higher Education Board | HE Committees |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic mission & strategy** | Approve / Assure | — | Develop and Recommend | Recommend / Review | Consult & Report |
| **Programmes & curriculum** | Assure | — | Review | Approve (within delegated academic authority) | Develop, Review & Recommend |
| **Quality & standards** | Assure | Review & Assure | Review | Approve & Assure | Deliver & Report |
| **Student outcomes** | Review & Assure | Review | Review | Review and Assure | Analyse & Report |
| **Academic risk** | Review & Assure | — | Receive & Act | Review & Escalate | Identify & Report |

## Review and Alignment

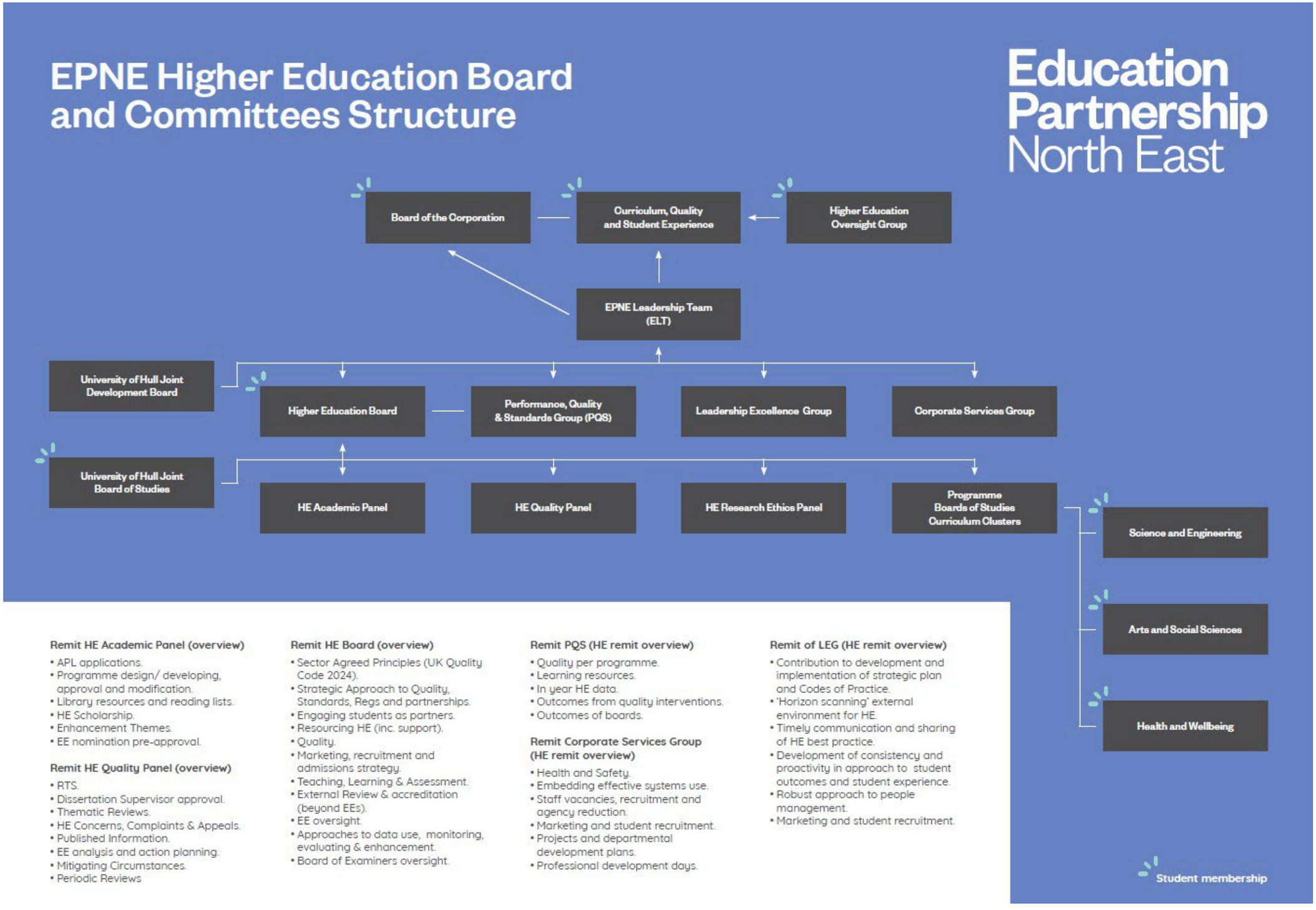
This matrix forms the technical annex to the HE Scheme of Delegation. It is reviewed annually by the Higher Education Board and approved by ELT, ensuring ongoing alignment with the EPNE Group Scheme of Delegation, the Instrument and Articles of Government, and external regulatory expectations.

**Annex 1 – HE Board and Committees Structure**

This annex presents the approved Higher Education Board and Committees Structure that underpins the Scheme of Delegation.

The authoritative and most up-to-date version of the structure is maintained on the EPNE Policy Hub. Where minor operational changes occur, the Policy Hub version shall prevail without requiring amendment to this Scheme.

Policy Hub Location.



**Annex 2 – HE Board and Committees Structure Terms of Reference**

The current, approved Terms of Reference for the Higher Education Board and all subordinate HE committees and panels are maintained on the EPNE Policy Hub and the EPNE Website

These Terms of Reference form part of the authoritative governance framework for Higher Education and are incorporated into this Scheme of Delegation by reference.

The Policy Hub provides the single source of truth for Terms of Reference, ensuring version control, approval history, and accessibility.

**Policy Hub location**, **EPNE Website location**