

Pathway to excellence: foundations and priorities for change





Preamble

Legal foundations

The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) was created in 1993 after a series of national conferences on training standards and ethical requirements in psychotherapy that had been held annually since 1982. In 1993, UKCP created the first voluntary national register for both psychotherapists and training organisations that recognised and supported trainings in various modes of practice, which were then called sections.

UKCP grew rapidly. On 30 September 1996, UKCP became a company registered at Companies House with limited liability for members. This change of status to limited liability was essential to protect all those working on behalf of UKCP from personal liability as UKCP grew ever larger. At first, membership of the company with voting rights was only available to member organisations, mainly training organisations.

On 8 October 1996, UKCP was registered with the Charity Commission as a charity with charitable purposes, providing benefit to the public.

In 2009, UKCP extended full voting membership to all individual practitioners on the register as well as the original training and other types of organisations. In the same year, the development of sections into colleges was completed.

In 2013, UKCP's register was awarded 'accredited voluntary register' status by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA). The PSA is a statutory body with oversight of health and social care regulation in the UK. Accredited voluntary register status brings UKCP's registers into the framework of UK public regulation.

Ethical foundations

In those early conferences of the 1980s, practitioners of all kinds came together to work out what they had in common and collaborate in establishing standards for psychotherapy as a separate profession in the UK. This long process of gestation gave birth to a sense of belonging and a realisation of the value of coming together with people from different orientations and of having open and fair-minded discussions based on ideals of inclusiveness and tolerance. This has been the ethical and cultural bedrock of UKCP ever since, and it was this ethos that led to the original creation of the sections, later to become colleges, as a way of achieving the prime objective of fostering the self-organisation of the different modalities within UKCP.

Present challenges

Psychotherapy in the 1980s was wholly unregulated. The annual psychotherapy conferences of that era were therefore able to reach broad agreement on all issues and implement them without restriction. Today, UKCP is subject to external regulation from three principal sources:

- the Companies Act 2006 and Companies House
- the Charities Act 2011 and the Charity Commission
- the PSA.

A key challenge for UKCP today is therefore to manage necessary compliance with the legal and regulatory environment while still fostering the inclusive sense of belonging and self-organisation from which UKCP emerged. In other words, to balance essential 'top-down' management with equally essential 'bottom-up' inclusion and participation.

The opportunity

The governance review presents an opportunity to ensure that UKCP meets its statutory and regulatory obligations while simultaneously providing a space and a voice for all members to play a full part in shaping and creating it.





Introduction

Good governance is essential to the success of an organisation and to the impact it achieves. It is not done for the sake of it. It enables an organisation to focus on its strategic direction, impact, effectiveness and culture, while managing risk, protecting its resources and promoting its integrity and reputation. Importantly, good governance ensures that an organisation is accountable to those affected by its work, and that their voices help to shape it. In short, good governance is in the best interests of UKCP's members, the profession and the public.

This document sets out 10 key priorities for shaping UKCP's governance to enable the organisation to meet its statutory and regulatory obligations while simultaneously providing a space and a voice for all members to play a full part in shaping and creating it. In doing so, it will support the profession to thrive for the benefit of the public.

We welcome your views on the priorities and encourage you to feed back via one of the methods set out here.

What impact will the governance review have on members?

- More democratic engagement.
- Improved connection between members' views and experiences and UKCP's policy and strategic direction.
- Greater transparency around how key decisions are made.
- More focused and effective use of volunteer/practitioner/expert time.
- A better understanding of UKCP's governance structure.

What is governance?

There is no one definition of 'governance'. In the context of charity governance, an oft-cited description of governance is 'the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, effectiveness, supervision and accountability of an organisation'.¹

It has also been described as 'the process by which a governing body ensures that an organisation is effectively and properly run... governance is not necessarily about doing; it is about ensuring things are done'.²

The importance of behaviour as a key driver behind effective governance is also acknowledged. The Charity Governance Code³ (Code) emphasises, '... so much of good governance is relational – people have to work together to discuss, debate, interpret, imagine and decide'.

¹ Routledge (2003) *The Governance of Public and Non-profit Organisations: what do boards do?* Chris Cornforth

² NCVO (2002) *The Good Governance Action Plan for Voluntary Organisations*. Sandy Adirondak

³ www.charitygovernancecode.org/

What does good governance look like?

To answer this question, it is useful to look at two key sources relevant to UKCP.

Written by the sector, for the sector, the Code sets out universal principles of governance for charities to consider and helps to shape a common view of what good governance looks like. The Code is based on eight principles that focus on good practice in relation to:

1. foundation principle – the assumption that the charity is meeting its legal and regulatory responsibilities
2. organisational purpose
3. leadership
4. ethics and culture
5. decision-making
6. managing resources and risks
7. equity, diversity and inclusion
8. board effectiveness.

As the holder of a Professional Standards Authority (PSA) accredited register for psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, UKCP must also comply with the PSA standards on governance.⁴ These standards include two key expectations in relation to governance:

1. Good governance – The governing body and senior leaders put in place arrangements for the organisation to effectively protect the public and maintain public confidence.
2. Reporting on organisational performance and addressing concerns – The organisation publicly reports on its performance, identifies and acts on learning and addresses concerns about its performance.



⁴ www.professionalstandards.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Standards%20for%20Regulators%20and%20Accredited%20Registers%20%28March%202026%29.pdf

Why is UKCP reviewing its governance?

A well-run organisation will take time periodically to review its effectiveness, including the effectiveness of its governance. In recent times, it has become apparent that there are a number of areas of governance at UKCP that require review and development. These include:

- ensuring legal compliance
- clearer delegation
- good decision-making
- better management of risk
- enhancing UKCP's democratic and influencing structures
- a need to prepare for the future.

In addition, engagement with different parts of UKCP as part of the review has supported the need to develop UKCP's governance. For example, some individual members have reported feeling disenfranchised from UKCP; some organisational members have queried the purpose of colleges; some college leads have reported significant resourcing challenges; and some committee chairs have reported a lack of clarity in relation to delegated authority and the complexities of managing conflicts of interest, to name but a few.

This is an opportunity to start to resolve a number of these key issues.



Identifying the key priorities for change

The first stage in the governance review has been to identify the key, high-level priorities that must shape change. In order to achieve this, we have:

- undertaken an extensive engagement exercise, listening to the views of individual and organisational members, staff, the Board of Trustees, the members forum and key officers across colleges and UKCP's committees (see Appendix 2)
- looked at the applicable law and principles of good practice that apply to charities, member organisations and regulators
- looked at UKCP's objects, legal structure and charitable status and considered whether they are appropriate for UKCP now and in the future
- looked at external factors that influence UKCP's governance, such as statutory regulation
- spent time critiquing UKCP's current governance at a high level
- reviewed UKCP's governing documents, starting with the Articles of Association as a priority.

Governance that takes account of the unique characteristics and strengths of UKCP

By its very nature, a governance review focuses on areas for development. However, it is also important to identify what must be preserved under any future arrangements. These include:

- continuing to hold a space for and to support the culture of community and belonging created by members
- retaining and improving mechanisms for members to help shape the strategic direction of UKCP
- being able to hold together and support a rich diversity of therapeutic modalities, voices, thoughts and approaches in a vast sector
- supporting the central role of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors in setting high standards and in assessing whether those standards are met.

Ten key priorities for change

A governance framework that is legally compliant, manages risk effectively, is practical and fit for the future.

✓ Key priority 1

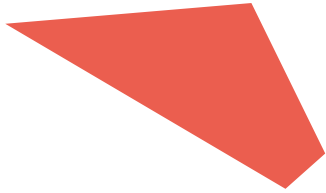
The rules setting out how UKCP is run must follow the law and work well in practice.

UKCP's governing documents must be legally compliant, fit for purpose and reflect the needs and practicalities of UKCP now and in the future. An initial review of UKCP's governing documents has identified a number of changes to be made to ensure legal compliance in full.

Furthermore, we have identified a number of areas where improvements could be made to reduce inconsistency, duplication and ambiguity, and to enable UKCP to be more agile, accessible and responsive. For example, general meetings of UKCP members can currently only be held in-person, as there are no express provisions in our documents allowing for online general meetings. We believe that our members would welcome the greater accessibility that the ability to participate in general meetings online would bring. Therefore, we believe this is something that needs attention.

It is also clear that UKCP's Byelaws and Standing Orders require updating. For example, a number of college leads have reported that it is very difficult to meet the requirements set out in the documents. Therefore, we believe that we need to change the documents to ensure that they reflect the practical reality of implementing them on the ground.





✓ Key priority 2

UKCP's governance arrangements must be no more complex than necessary.

As with any governance structure, form must follow function. An organisation's governance structure should act as an enabler, supporting its effectiveness and ensuring that the organisation's limited resources are aligned and used in furtherance of its charitable and strategic aims. UKCP's current structures are overly complex and resource-intensive, making them unsustainable financially and in terms of staff and volunteer time. An overly complex governance structure also presents UKCP with increased risk.

For example, committee chairs have reported a lack of resources to achieve what needs to be done and a duplication between college and UKCP committees, while college leads have reported a reduced and increasingly stretched volunteer workforce.

✓ Key priority 3

There needs to be a clearer system of who is authorised to make decisions, so there are better oversight and accountability, and people understand how decisions are made.

UKCP needs to have in place a clear scheme of delegation and terms of reference to support effective decision-making, oversight and accountability throughout the governance framework and to reduce the risks inherent in the current framework. Importantly, a scheme of delegation would also enable information and advice to flow better throughout all parts of the governance framework and support the effective implementation of decisions. We believe that improvements can be made here.

For example, some committee chairs have reported ambiguity in the boundaries of their decision-making authority and a lack of clarity in relation to how their committee fits with other parts of the governance framework. College leads have also identified a lack of clarity around how and where decisions are taken across UKCP's governance structure.

College lead – Without a designated lead and a revised system, it can be like working in a silo and being left to get on with things with very little oversight.



✓ Key priority 4

Governance arrangements should be as agile and flexible as possible so they can be adapted to meet future needs and developments.

The governance review is an opportunity for UKCP to implement changes that allow for greater flexibility to ensure it is better prepared for a changing environment. Future developments affecting UKCP's governance may include:

- the government introducing statutory regulation for counselling and psychotherapy
- UKCP obtaining status as a chartered body
- competition from new professional bodies or PSA-accredited registers
- new areas of specialist practice, new modalities, new membership categories, new specialist registers.

A governance framework that supports fair, ethical, well-informed decisions in the public interest.

✓ Key priority 5

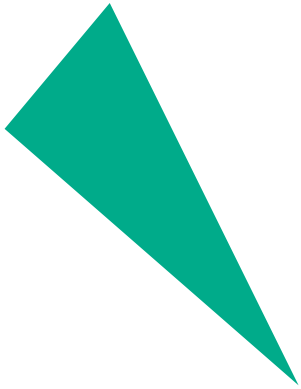
The governance framework must support decisions being well informed and made in the best interests of UKCP and the public.

UKCP must have arrangements in place that support effective decision-making at Board of Trustee level and across the governance framework.

Effective decision-making involves a number of factors. Drawing on Charity Commission guidance on decision-making⁵, it expects decision-makers to have:

- acted within their authority
- acted in good faith and in the best interests of the charity and people the charity is set up to serve
- been sufficiently informed
- taken account of all relevant factors and ignored irrelevant factors
- managed conflicts of interest
- reached a decision within a range of what would be considered 'reasonable'.

Decision-makers must also have the appropriate skills, experience, knowledge and/or training to support them to make good decisions, and they must be reflective in their decision-making, learning from complaints and other feedback. We believe there is work to be done here to strengthen decision-making across UKCP.



✓ Key priority 6

The governance of UKCP’s regulatory work must be demonstrably independent and focused on public protection and confidence.

The governance of UKCP’s regulatory work must be independent and focused on the protection of the public and the maintenance of public confidence. The PSA standards make this clear. This is an area that, we believe, the PSA will increasingly focus on as it reviews the requirements on accredited registers.

Modern-day regulatory bodies embed within their governance structures numerous checks and balances to ensure that decisions are made in the public interest, while being informed by relevant professional expertise. For example, lay people work alongside members of the regulated profession, on the Board and on committees to ensure the protection of the public is at the heart of all decision making. The current governance structure risks blurred boundaries between membership and regulation and the perception of and/or reality of bias in decision-making.



⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/decision-making-for-charity-trustees-cc27



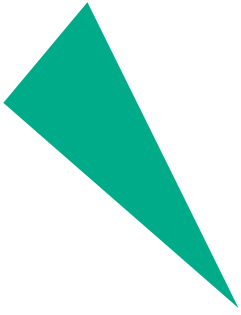
✓ Key priority 7

UKCP's governance must be fair, inclusive and reflect the different people UKCP serves.

While the composition of UKCP's Board and committees are largely reflective of the demographic of UKCP's membership, they do not reflect UK society as a whole or the client base of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors. We need to check that our governance does not include barriers to participation for those who are currently under-represented.

The Code identifies as a principle of good governance that 'the board has a clear, agreed and effective approach to supporting equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) throughout the organisation, including in its own practice'. Likewise, the PSA expects that an organisation 'promotes equality, diversity and inclusion and takes action to reduce inequalities and assure its policies and processes are fair and equitable to all.'





Approaching governance relationally by inviting input from key people with an interest in UKCP to influence its strategy, policies and effectiveness.

Key priority 8

Members must be given meaningful opportunities to share their views and experiences when important strategy and policy decisions are made.

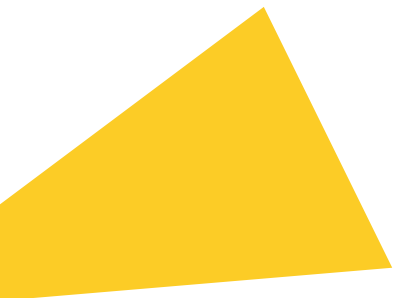
UKCP's governance arrangements must enable the views and experiences of its members, both as individuals and organisational members, to be heard where key strategic decisions are made. This is essential to ensure that decisions around strategy and policy do not become disconnected from the profession and the needs of the public.

It has become clear through engagement to date that existing routes for member influence and engagement at a strategic level are in need of review to ensure they are accessible and capture the member voice effectively and democratically.

In response to the survey of individual members:

- only 24% of members agreed with the statement that 'there are effective mechanisms in place to ensure the views and experiences of members are reflected in UKCP's strategic direction and priorities', while 33% disagreed and 43% neither agreed nor disagreed
- only 18% of members agreed with the statement that 'UKCP's policy positions accurately reflect the views and experiences of UKCP members', while 28% disagreed and 53% neither agreed nor disagreed.

'I welcome this survey and others as an additional means of gathering data from members... as it provides an accessible and more inclusive way of hearing from members. I think more democratic voting is needed for members to feel they are directly influencing UKCP..'





✓ Key priority 9

In addition to members, the views of people, including those who use member services, must be considered when important strategic and policy decisions are made.

UKCP's governance arrangements must ensure that the views of people, including those who use or have used psychotherapeutic services, are incorporated into strategic and policy decision-making to ensure that UKCP remains relevant and responsive to their needs now and in the future. Both the Code and the PSA standards highlight this as an area of importance and encourage meaningful involvement both directly and indirectly.

While there has been some good practice in this area, for example in the development of the UKCP Strategy 2024-2027, there is still much more that we can do.

✓ Key priority 10

There should be clear and transparent ways in which members can gauge the effectiveness of UKCP in advancing its charitable and strategic aims.

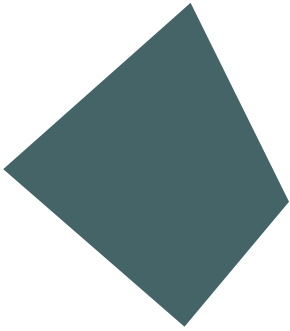
There should be mechanisms in place by which members, both individual and organisational members, can provide oversight and scrutiny at a governance level, helping to ensure that UKCP's strategy and performance advance its charitable and strategic aims.

Engagement with members to date has revealed that some feel disenfranchised from UKCP. Some have reported a lack of awareness of the mechanisms available to them to hold UKCP leaders to account, while some have reported a lack of confidence in the mechanisms available. For others, more needs to be done to create greater accountability.

In response to the recent survey of individual members, the ability to hold UKCP leaders to account was voted the second most important aspect of UKCP membership after 'enhancing professional credibility'.

'I'm not really sure how to have some of my concerns reflected at a governance level.'

Only **26% of members** agreed with the statement 'I am aware of the mechanisms available to me to hold UKCP leaders to account', while **45% disagreed** and **29% neither agreed nor disagreed**.



Feedback opportunities

The governance review will take place over a period of time. It is important to get it right and therefore any change cannot be rushed.

We would like to hear your views on the priorities for change and invite you to feed back in one or more of the following ways:

- complete our online survey: surveymonkey.com/r/priorities_change
- join the priorities for change discussion at the UKCP conference on 19 and 20 June 2026: psychotherapy.org.uk/ukcp-conference-2026
- attend an online meeting of the members forum in September 2026. Details will be sent out via a member update nearer the time
- committee chairs, college leads and organisational members will be invited to attend online meetings to discuss the priorities for change. Invitations will be sent directly.



Appendix 1: An overview of UKCP

- UKCP is a charitable company limited by guarantee.
- As such, it is subject to charity and company law and regulated by the Charity Commission and Companies House.
- As a holder of a Professional Standards Authority (PSA) accredited register of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, UKCP is also accountable to the PSA.
- In accordance with charity and company law, UKCP's Board of Trustees is the governing body of the charity. It holds ultimate legal responsibility for the direction and strategic leadership of UKCP. As the ultimate decision-makers, the Trustees are also the company directors for the purposes of company law. This is a collective responsibility, with decisions taken as a Board.
- UKCP's Board of Trustees is composed of a mix of UKCP psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, elected by UKCP's voting members, and lay people appointed by the Board of Trustees for the specific skills, knowledge and experience they bring to the governance of UKCP.
- UKCP's voting members have a number of rights directly relevant to the governance of UKCP. These include the right to elect and remove Trustees and to call a general meeting. No change to UKCP's Articles is effective unless approved by UKCP's voting members.
- Both charity law and company law place significant legal duties on charity trustees and company directors⁶. Charity trustees must:
 - ensure their charity is carrying out its purposes for the public benefit
 - comply with the charity's governing document and the law
 - act in the charity's best interests
 - manage the charity's resources responsibly
 - act with reasonable care and skill
 - ensure the charity is accountable.
- Trustees can potentially incur personal liability for breach of trust, for example, operating the charity outside its stated charitable objects, using charitable funds for non-charitable purposes, or using those funds to make unauthorised payments to one or more trustees.
- There are two key aspects to UKCP being 'charitable':
 - It has objects, sometimes called purposes, that have been approved by the Charity Commission as charitable. These are stated in its governing document, which, in the case of UKCP, is its Articles of Association.⁷ Importantly, a charity must operate within its charitable objects.
 - It exists for the benefit of the public.
- As stated in UKCP's Articles, the charity's objects are:
 - (1) to promote the art and science of psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling for the public benefit;
 - (2) to promote research in psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling and to disseminate the results of any such research; and

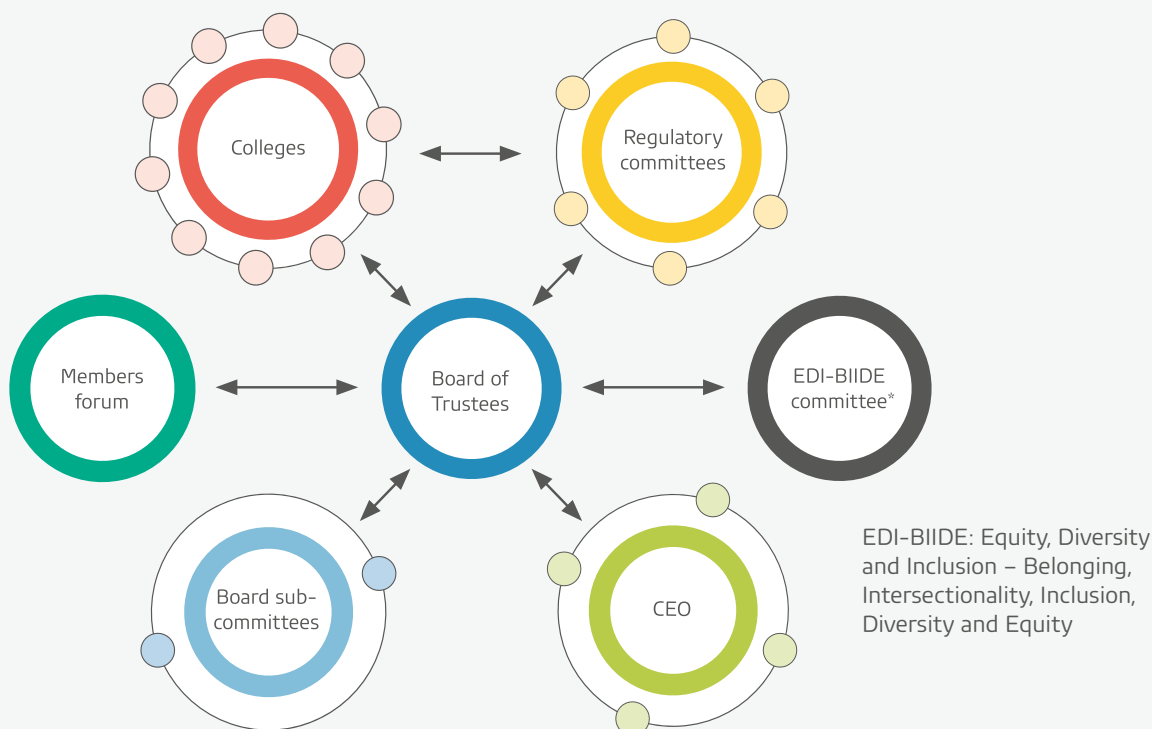
⁶ Charity Trustee legal duties: www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-trustee-whats-involved#trustees-6-main-duties.
Company Director legal duties: www.gov.uk/guidance/being-a-company-director

⁷ Articles of Association: www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/czchfd3w/ukcp_articles_of_association-approved_2019-09-20.pdf

(3) to promote high standards of education and training and practice in psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling

(4) to promote the wider provision of psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling for all sections of the public.

- In pursuance of its charitable objects, UKCP's strategy⁸ is built around four key pillars that guide its efforts to support both the public and its members while also driving forward the future of psychotherapy. The pillars are:
 - quality: upholding high standards of practice and safeguarding the public
 - membership: supporting the professional growth and development of our members
 - voice: amplifying the role of psychotherapy and advocating for its impact on society
 - organisation: building a future-fit, adaptable and financially sustainable organisation.
- UKCP's primary governing document is its Articles of Association which must be followed at all times. UKCP is also governed according to its Byelaws and Standing Orders.⁹ Where there is inconsistency, the Articles take precedence.
- Within this legal and regulatory framework, the Board of Trustees will delegate authority in a number of ways, for example to staff, volunteers, committees, individual trustees. The extent of the authority will vary – decision-making, advice, implementation. However, the Board of Trustees will retain ultimate accountability for the organisation.
- UKCP has many constituent parts. The diagram below shows these. More information can be found on the UKCP website.¹⁰



⁸ UKCP Strategy 2024 – 27: www.psychotherapy.org.uk/about-ukcp/ukcp-strategy-2024-27-psychotherapy-in-a-changing-world/

⁹ www.psychotherapy.org.uk/about-ukcp/our-aims/

¹⁰ www.psychotherapy.org.uk/about-ukcp/our-aims/

Appendix 2: Engagement to date and members of the governance working group

Stakeholder group	Engagement to date
Organisational members	<p>Online survey October – November 2025 (14 responses)</p> <p>Regular communication through member updates</p> <p>Attendance at members forum meeting on 7 March 2025 – presentation of member feedback and opportunity for input</p> <p>Online sessions with organisational members on 9 April 2026 and 22 April 2026 (seven attendees)</p> <p>Organisational member representatives on the governance working group: Hannah Friend (Metanoia Institute) and Hannah Sherbersky (AFT)</p>
Individual members	<p>Online survey October – November 2025 (506 responses)</p> <p>Regular communication through member updates</p> <p>Attendance at members forum meeting on 7 March 2025 – presentation of member feedback and opportunity for input</p>
Direct members	<p>Online survey October – November 2025 (56 responses)</p> <p>Regular communication through member updates</p> <p>Attendance at members forum meeting on 7 March 2025 – presentation of member feedback and opportunity for input</p>
Students and trainees	<p>Online survey October – November 2025 (62 responses)</p> <p>Regular communication through member updates</p> <p>Attendance at members forum meeting on 7 March 2025 – presentation of member feedback and opportunity for input</p>
Board of Trustees	<p>Engagement through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board and subcommittee meetings • Board away day • CEO briefings • Project sponsor meetings <p>Trustees on the governance working group: Bill Adlard, Courtenay Young (left April 2026)</p> <p>Project sponsors: Pippa Donovan, Matthew White</p>
College leads	<p>Direct input from college leads October/November 2025 through question responses</p> <p>Ongoing attendance at PRCCF meetings</p> <p>Online session with college leads on 5 March 2026 – update on governance review and an opportunity to input views</p> <p>Attendance at Universities Training College (UTC) AGM in March 2026</p>

Stakeholder group	Engagement to date
Professional Regulatory Committee of the Colleges and Faculties (PRCCF)	<p>Direct input from PRCCF chair October/November 2025 through question responses and follow-up conversations</p> <p>Ongoing attendance at PRCCF meetings</p> <p>PRCCF representative on the governance working group: Neil Green (UTC)</p>
Members forum	<p>Attendance at members forum meeting on 7 March 2025 – presentation of member feedback and opportunity for input</p> <p>Members forum representative on the governance working group: Janet Weisz</p>
Senior management team and staff	<p>Facilitated sessions run at staff away days on 15 October 2025 and 27 April 2026</p> <p>SMT ongoing attendance at meetings of the governance working group</p>
Regulatory committees, excluding PRCCF	<p>Direct input from committee chairs October/November 2025 through question responses and follow-up conversations</p> <p>Ongoing attendance at committee meetings</p> <p>Education, Training and Practice Committee (ETPC) representative on the governance working group: Julie Scully</p>
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion – Belonging, Intersectionality, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity (EDI-BIIDE) Committee	<p>Direct input from chair October/November 2025 through question responses</p> <p>Ongoing attendance at committee meetings</p> <p>EDI-BIIDE representative on the governance working group: Zahid Nawaz</p>
Legal advisers	Ongoing communication and advice
Charity Commission	Ongoing communication



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