PUBLIC

Edge Hill University

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2025

Present

Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Helen Smallbone		Clerk to the Board
Claire Blennerhassett	Teaching staff member	
Leon Culbertson	Academic Board nominee	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	Vice-Chair of the Board
Antony Lockley	Independent member	Chair, Remuneration Committee
Jo Nettleton	Independent member	
Paul Nyamwela	Student member	
Sophie Rowley	Student member	
Helen Stalker	Independent member	
Mike Tate	Independent member	Chair, Audit & Risk Committee
Mark Wilkinson	Independent member	Chair, Finance Committee
Michael Young	Ex-officio	Vice-Chancellor

In Attendance

Lynda Brady	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) & University Secretary
Lynn Hill	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Resources)
Paul Malone	Chief Executive, Edge Hill Students' Union
Liam Owens	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration)

Apologies

Andrew Cooper	Independent member
Ann Kennedy	Support Staff member
Gayle Wells	Independent member

BG.24.131 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

BG.24.132 Chair's Announcements

.01 Board membership

The Chair welcomed and introduced two new Student Governors, Sophie Rowley and Paul Nyamwela.

.02 Senior Staff Updates

Claire Austin, Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) and Dean of the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Social Care will be retiring in September 2025. As this was the final formal meeting of the Board before her retirement, the Chair confirmed that he would speak with her on behalf of the Board. He extended sincere thanks to Claire for her valuable contributions to the University and conveyed best wishes for her future endeavours.

.03 University Chancellor

The Chair provided an update on Chancellor Dawn Airey's continued support for the University. He noted that she remained impressed with ongoing developments, particularly referencing several research projects on which she had recently received presentations. The Chancellor had reiterated her willingness to remain actively involved with the University. The Vice-Chancellor expressed that he felt privileged to work with someone of the Chancellor's calibre and looked forward to continued dialogue and collaboration. Unfortunately, the Chancellor is unable to attend the forthcoming graduation ceremonies due to a scheduling conflict.

.04 Graduation Ceremonies

Governors were reminded that graduation ceremonies were scheduled for the following week. These events are important opportunities to celebrate the achievements of students and the Chair expressed hope that Members would be able to attend and participate in what was a significant occasion in the University calendar

BG.24.133 Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action.

BG.24.134 Minutes of the previous meeting

Received: *Document BG/098/24*

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

BG.24.135 Action Log

Received: *Document BG/099/24*

No comments were made and the Action Log was received.

BG.24.136 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

SECTION A ITEMS

BG.24.137a Vice-Chancellor's Report

Reported: The Vice-Chancellor proposed that, with effect from this meeting, this item will be delivered as a verbal report to brief Governors on matters of interest to the Board. The item will continue to provide context on the University's operating environment to inform deliberation and decision-making.

Core highlights of the Vice-Chancellor's overview included:

- The Vice-Chancellor had enjoyed meeting many stakeholders as part of his induction to the University. He reported that over 700 staff members had attended one of his three 'Meet the VC' events, and he had attended 32 departmental sessions where colleagues had shared valuable insight into their work.

- **Ten-Year Health Plan for England:** Noting the publication of this key Plan and its emphasis on integrated care systems, the Executive will consider how the University works with, and engages, key stakeholders in this space. This will include potential opportunities in curriculum development and research partnerships.
- **Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (anticipated):** Whilst the full White Paper was awaited, a recent speech by Jackie Smith at the Scope Skills Summit provided a useful preview to key themes including: improved collaboration across the education sector, and widening participation, particularly in relation to care-experienced students.
- **Lifelong Learning Entitlement (from January 2027):** Further details are awaited but it is expected that modular funding eligibility will be limited to providers with Silver or Gold TEF ratings, or a Good/Outstanding Ofsted rating. This potentially represents the first instance of such quality ratings being directly tied to funding eligibility in this context.

.01 HCPC MSI Nurse Paramedic Programme: Update

- The University has submitted a formal response to the HCPC report, challenging both the review process and its conclusions. Additional evidence was included to address key points for consideration.
- HCPC confirmed registration for the current graduating cohort, ensuring they could enter the profession.
- The situation for continuing students remains complex; the University has worked closely with affected individuals to explore alternative pathways, including transfers to Paramedic Practice or Nursing programmes, which had generated strong interest. The University aims to ensure all affected students have a clear contingency route, though the preferred outcome remains that the recommendation not be upheld.
- The PVC (Student Experience) & University Secretary confirmed the University continued to contest the original recommendation, while also progressing contingency planning. An initial indication from the Panel is expected by the end of July, with a final decision due in September if the Panel was minded to uphold.
- The dual award programme offers registration as both a nurse and a paramedic. The NMC responded constructively and has approved a contingency MSci Adult Nursing award. Engagement with HCPC had been more challenging, though some progress was observed in

early July when the University submitted a contingency proposal for a BSc in Paramedic Practice as a single-registration alternative. This will be discussed in a follow-up meeting with HCPC scheduled for 16 July.

.02 Chemistry Degree

The University has decided not to proceed with a proposed Chemistry degree previously mentioned to the Board. While a small number of applications had been received, the underlying business case did not justify the significant investment required to launch the programme successfully. The Vice-Chancellor will review the University's strategic approach to the academic portfolio and will keep Governors apprised of any recommendations and links to institutional sustainability.

.03 Project Transform Update

[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]

.04 Professional Services Review Update

The PVC (Resources) provided an update on the Professional Services Review, following the conclusion of the due diligence phase. The HR team have now gathered all necessary data, and a short summary document is being finalised for discussion with director-level colleagues, including a proposed timeline for next steps.

The Board was reminded of the significant scale and scope of the review, which encompasses approximately 1,000 roles across the professional services structure, with an associated pay bill of nearly £40 million. Once vacant roles are removed, the revised structure under review consists of approximately 84 departments across 22 organisational groupings, including the three academic faculties.

The PVC (Resources) added that staff engagement levels during this phase have been positive, with 287 completed questionnaires received, representing approximately 33% of professional services staff. Additionally, it was noted that every Head of Service and Director participated in one-to-one meetings with HR, allowing for in-depth exploration of the purpose, structure, and key challenges within their functions.

Emerging themes from this phase of the review include:

- The need for greater clarity and simplification across professional services functions.
- A desire to reduce duplication and clearly define responsibilities.
- The opportunity to realign services, potentially involving a shift in where certain functions sit between central and devolved structures.

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors' questions, the following information was noted:

- The overarching aim of the Professional Services Review is to design and implement a structural model that ensures long-term financial sustainability for the University. This work was informed by current financial analysis and aligned to the budget planning already undertaken for the next academic year.

- *[Exempt from publication – confidential]*

- A draft implementation timeline has been developed by the HR team and will be discussed with Executive colleagues. *[Exempt from publication – confidential]*

- The Board will receive a further formal update on the Professional Services review at its strategy day in September, including an overview of key milestones, risks, opportunities and financial phasing.

Action: Vice Chancellor

- In relation to the HCPC issue, it was acknowledged that the likelihood of regulatory reversal is uncertain; however, the University had taken all reasonable steps to challenge the process and protect student interests.

Agreed: To receive the Vice-Chancellor's Report.

BG.24.137b Student Recruitment Update

Received: *Document BG/100/24*

Reported: The PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration) updated on the current admissions cycle. It was noted that the admissions figures presented in the report represented a position between the budgeted base case and the more optimistic upside scenario. Members acknowledged that while these figures indicate a more positive trajectory than originally forecast, the final position remains subject to significant variability and further developments as the cycle progresses.

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors’ questions, the following information was noted:

- The institutional budget was based on an assumption of a net decline of 3% in student numbers. Members sought clarification on how current performance aligns with this baseline, noting the importance of continuing to track movements carefully as the cycle matures.
- *[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]*
- While acknowledging the highly competitive nature of the current recruitment environment, Governors agreed that any response must remain grounded in the principles of integrity, transparency, and regulatory compliance. There was consensus that the University should seek to act assertively within these boundaries, supported by a clear policy framework that reflects institutional risk appetite. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that a policy proposal is already in development and will be brought forward for consideration at the appropriate time, enabling a proactive and well-governed approach as the recruitment cycle progresses.
- Members agreed that it was increasingly necessary to have an agile response to the evolving admissions landscape, acting in-cycle rather than waiting for the commencement of a new recruitment cycle to adapt practices. While the University must operate within a defined policy and risk framework, it was noted that timely and assertive actions are required to remain competitive in a rapidly shifting market.
- *[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]*
- Significant postgraduate recruitment activity is planned throughout the summer period, with in-person engagement events on campus and continued follow-up. As a data point, it was reported that between the end of June and early September in the previous cycle, the University received over 750 new PGCE applications and more than 500 for PGT programmes.
- A request was made for an update on the University's brand and marketing strategy. It was noted that the forthcoming Strategic Plan, to be presented to the Board in due course, would be supported by

a series of subsidiary plans, potentially five in total, which would translate strategic ambitions into operational delivery. One of these supporting plans would focus specifically on recruitment and marketing, ensuring that these functions are directly aligned with the University's overarching priorities. Members noted that the discussions scheduled for 2 September would feed directly into the development of these supporting plans. In particular, the outcomes of the session would inform the shaping of key priorities and performance indicators within the recruitment and marketing strand.

Agreed: To receive the Student Recruitment Update.

BG.24.138 Student Report

Received: *Document BG/101/24*

Reported: The Students' Union (SU) Representative (SR) confirmed that the circulated report remained accurate and there was nothing further to add.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- Governors welcomed the update on the development of Liberation Officer roles and noted positively the progress made in embedding these positions within the institution. Five Liberation Officers are currently in post, aligned with core categories defined by the national officer framework with representation from a diverse range of minority groups. The SU were considering an additional three roles, in order to improve representation of additional minoritised or marginalised groups, such as students for whom English was not a first language. This work remains under development and is subject to further consultation and resourcing considerations.

- The Student Governor was invited to comment on whether Liberation Officers have experienced any resistance or 'anti-woke' sentiment in the course of their work. It was acknowledged that such pushback occasionally emerges, particularly during periods of wider racial or societal tension. In most cases, concerns or criticisms arise anonymously or through indirect channels, rather than through open confrontation. Rather than being viewed as antagonistic, the SU uses such moments to raise awareness, promote dialogue, and support understanding of the purpose and value of the Liberation Officer structure. However, the SU monitors these types of interactions through the Student Advice Centre and would flag any concerning incidents to the University's Student Casework Team.

Agreed: To receive the Student Report.

BG.24.139 Board Assurance Framework: Summary Report

Received: *Document BG/102/24*

Reported: The PVC (Resources) confirmed that the circulated report remained accurate and there was nothing further to add.

Discussed: In response to questions, the following information was noted:

- Governors explored the role of students in identifying and co-creating mitigation strategies for risks impacting the student experience. It was confirmed that student representation is built into all major University committees and working groups. For student-facing risks, the Student Life Team routinely convenes focus groups to gather feedback and inform institutional responses. The University's forthcoming Risk Management Strategy will explore how to embed student input more systematically into relevant areas.

- The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee expressed openness to having student representation on formal Board committees, noting the value of diverse perspectives. It was agreed that this proposal would be considered within the scope of the upcoming governance effectiveness and "ways of working" review planned for later this calendar year.

Action: Clerk

- While student representatives are active in committees, it can be difficult to gather broad-based student input on complex issues. This was flagged as an area requiring further attention to strengthen representation and feedback loops.

- In reference to Risk 5, Members highlighted the importance of effective communication and inclusive engagement during the Professional Services Review (PSR) to ensure successful change.

The Executive confirmed that staff engagement is embedded as a dedicated workstream within the PSR, with clear emphasis on internal communication and cultural alignment.

Agreed: To receive the Board Assurance Framework: Summary Report

BG.24.140 National Student Survey 2025

Received: *Document BG/102i/24*

Reported: The Board welcomed the recently published National Student Survey (NSS) results, noting significant improvements across multiple areas.

Key items of note included:

- While progress had been gradual, the outcome reflects the sustained effort and leadership focus over the past 12 months, including actions agreed by the Student Experience Improvement Board. Key appointments to senior roles across the faculties have been instrumental in maintaining a consistent and strategic focus on NSS-related priorities.
- The majority of responses came from Primary Education. Internal student voice data had already indicated that Primary was likely to perform strongly, and this had now been reflected in the external results.
- An updated action plan, approved by Academic Board in early July, was now in implementation, with continued alignment to student feedback through open comment analysis.

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors' questions, the following information was noted:

- The University achieved particularly strong results in Learning Resources, which includes the work of Learning Services, library functions, learner support, study skills, and facilities such as the Health Simulation Centre. These results reflect both quality of provision and the way in which students perceive the availability and usefulness of these services.

- The Faculty of Education has made significant progress, increasing satisfaction scores by over 20 percentage points in two years. Members noted this as the most improved area institution-wide and were supportive of a suggestion that the faculty be invited to present a short case study to Governors on the key drivers of change and their positive impact for students.

Action: Chair/Clerk

- It was proposed that the Board explore incorporating such positive examples more routinely into its schedule of business. Members welcomed the suggestion of using part of the Board calendar for development or insight sessions, not only to provide assurance but to deepen Governors' understanding of the University's core academic and operational activities.

- The Chair added how positive the move forward was and thanked Directorate for their hard work in turning around the outcomes.

Agreed: To receive the National Student Survey 2025 report.

BG.24.141 Management Information (Financial Performance for the year to date)

Received: *Document BG/103/24*

Reported: The PVC (Resources) introduced the update on the University's projected year-end financial position. Key items of note included:

- Based on current data from the first 10 months of the financial year, the outturn was noted as expected to fall between the base case and the upside scenario. This reflects the continued application of strong financial controls, with further in-year pay savings contributing positively to the position.
- While the final figures remained subject to audit and year-end adjustments, the current working estimate places the year-end deficit in the range of £2 million to £4 million. Members were advised that a definitive figure would be dependent on negotiations with auditors and final adjustments in the coming weeks.
- No material risks have been identified at this stage that would negatively impact the year-end position, and no additional notifications are required to the Finance Committee at this time.

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors' questions, the following information was noted:

- Governors discussed forward planning in relation to cash flow and exit costs associated with the Professional Services Review (PSR). Careful planning will be critical in early 2026 to avoid any risk of entering an overdraft position. The exit costs linked to PSR, alongside the communications and change management required, would represent a significant operational and financial challenge.

- A fortnightly review process of the University's cash flow is in place, jointly led by the PVC (Resources) and the Chair of the Finance Committee. This includes scenario modelling against budget and forecast, incorporating emerging risks and opportunities as they develop throughout the year.

Agreed: To receive the Management Information (Financial Performance for the year to date) report.

BG.24.142 Protecting the Interests of All Students

Received: *Document BG/104/24*

Reported: The PVC (Marketing, Student Recruitment and Student Administration) reported that the Student Protection Plan has been updated to reflect the ongoing challenges with the HCPC.

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors' questions, the following information was noted:

- Governors sought clarification on how learning from complaints, though relatively low in number, was captured and fed back into institutional improvement, recognising the high value such insights can offer. It was reported that complaints are managed through a structured and learning-focused process, overseen by the Student Casework team. Where learning from an individual case is identified, it would be shared with the relevant faculty or service area. In addition, monthly reports summarising complaint activity and key themes are circulated to those areas and submitted to the Student Experience Subcommittee, ensuring institutional visibility and cross-University learning.

- The Student Casework team maintains a strong emphasis on early resolution and preventative learning, contributing to a continued reduction in overall complaint volume. Complaints are broadly distributed across faculties and services, with no persistent patterns or clusters indicating systemic concerns.

- Governors welcomed the assurance and endorsed the current approach, noting as a sign of a fair and well-functioning complaints process.

Agreed: To receive the Protecting the Interests of All Students report.

BG.24.143 Board of Governors Meeting Calendar and Schedule of Business 2025/26

Received: *Document BG/105/24*

Reported: The Chair reminded the Board of the ongoing commitment, arising from previous discussions and recommendations of the Governance and Nominations Committee to undertake an informal review of the Board's effectiveness and ways of working over the remainder of the calendar year. This includes reflecting on lessons since the last external review, adapting to evolving external governance expectations (including from CUC and the OfS), and considering the context of the new Vice-Chancellor's arrival.

The review will cover both structural aspects (e.g. frequency and format of meetings, schedule of business) and broader working practices, including the dynamic between the Board, the Executive, and the Chair/Vice-Chancellor relationship.

Initial discussions will take place between the Chair, the Clerk, and the Vice-Chancellor in August, with proposals to be developed for further input from the Board in due course. Governors were invited to continue submitting comments, particularly regarding the guiding principles outlined in the supporting paper, by the end of the month.

Action: Governors

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors' questions, the following information was noted:

- Board Members expressed broad support for the draft principles, noting that the process should remain flexible but purposeful. It was agreed that any proposed changes must balance practicality, scrutiny, and transparency, while reflecting what was reasonable and proportionate for effective governance.

- A number of Governors stressed the importance of maintaining a structured but adaptive approach, allowing room for development-focused time within the governance calendar, particularly for, external benchmarking, and sector intelligence. The Board agreed that enhancing the "outward facing" dimension of governance activities could strengthen strategic oversight.

- The Chair confirmed that the next phase would involve reviewing Governor feedback and bringing forward options for discussion at a future meeting, not as final decisions but as part of an iterative development process.

Agreed: To receive the Board of Governors Meeting Calendar and Schedule of Business 2025/26

SECTION B ITEMS

BG.24.144 Committee Chair Updates:

.01 Remuneration Committee (14 July 2025)

Reported: The Chair of the Remuneration Committee provided a brief update following the Committee's meeting earlier that day. Key points included:

- In light of current financial constraints, the Committee confirmed that no performance-related bonuses would be awarded for 2024/25.

- The University had budgeted for a 3% pay award in 2024/25. However, following the national negotiations, the final offer stands at 1.4%. This increase would be implemented from 1 August 2024, noting that industrial action at the national level was anticipated.

- The Committee also received verbal updates on a small number of staff performance matters, all within normal parameters for this time of year.

Agreed: To receive the Committee Chair's Update

BG.24.145 Risk Management Strategy

Received: *Document BG/107/24*

Reported: There was no information to add to the circulated paper recommending that the current Risk Management Strategy is rolled forward.

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors' questions, the following information was noted:

- The existing approach remains operationally effective, but a revised strategic architecture is being developed as part of the broader institutional strategy process.

- This new framework, expected to be presented on 2 September, will propose aligning the strategic plan, risk register, institutional KPIs, and assurance/monitoring mechanisms into a unified model. It was noted that this evolving approach may render a standalone "risk management strategy" document unnecessary in future, depending on the outcome of that process.

Agreed: **To approve the use of the current Risk Management Strategy for 2025/26**, with the understanding that a more integrated and strategic model would be brought forward in due course.

BG.24.146 Board Standing Orders

Received: *Document BG/108/24*

Reported: The Board was asked to approve the continuation of the current Board Standing Orders for a further three-year period.

Discussed: In discussion, and in response to Governors' questions, the following information was noted:

- A brief clarification was provided on the purpose of the Standing Orders, which set out the framework for how the Board operates and how Members engage in meetings. Further discussion on Board ways of working is scheduled for August, and any outcomes from that session may inform future amendments to the Standing Orders.

Agreed: **To approve the Board Standing Orders for 2025-2028**

BG.24.147 Any other business

.01 Board Leadership

[Secretary's Note: The Chair of the Board left the room for this discussion]

Discussed: In the absence of the Chair, the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee led a discussion regarding the continuity of Board leadership. The following was noted:

- Clive Elliott's three-year term as Chair is due to end in November 2025. In view of recent and upcoming changes in Board and Executive leadership, including a new Vice-Chancellor, outgoing Vice-Chair, and broader institutional transition, there is a strong case for extending the Chair's tenure by 12 months to ensure continuity and stability.
- The proposed extension would take the Chair's term to November 2026, aligning with the end of his permissible service under governance rules (nine years).
- The Board confirmed that this extension was compliant with internal regulations and external governance standards.

Agreed: **The Board unanimously supported the extension of the Chair's term as until November 2026.**

The Chair accepted the extension and expressed his appreciation for the Board's confidence.

SECTION C ITEMS

The following items were received for information:

BG.24.148 Summary Report: Audit & Risk Committee (16 June 2025) (*Document BG/109/24*)

BG.24.149 Summary Report: Governance & Nominations Committee (10 June 2025) (*Document BG/110/24*)

BG.24.110 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 2 September 2025.