

## BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2025

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### Present

Mark Wilkinson	Independent member	Acting Chair
Claire Blennerhassett	Teaching staff member	
Andrew Cooper	Independent member	
Leon Culbertson	Academic Board nominee	
Christine Donnelly	Independent member	Vice-Chair of the Board
Clive Elliott	Independent member	Chair of the Board
Ann Kennedy	Support staff member	
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
Gayle Wells	Independent member	
Mark Wilkinson	Independent member	Chair, Finance Committee
Michael Young	Ex Officio	Vice-Chancellor

### In Attendance

Ceri Davies	Chief Executive, Edge Hill Students' Union	
Alison Kerwin	Director of Marketing, Communications and Student Recruitment	
Neil Morris	Director of Digital Transformation	
Rhona Morris	Governance, Projects & Policy Manager	Secretariat
Fay Sherrington	Director of Student Services	
Michael Sprigg	Director of Finance	
George Talbot	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Dean of Arts & Sciences	

## Apologies

Lynn Hill	Chief Operating Officer
Helen Smallbone	Clerk to Governors

### **BG.25.002** Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest

### **BG.25.003** Chair's Announcements

#### *.01 Chairing arrangements*

Due to extenuating circumstances, the Chair participated remotely. To maintain comprehensive stewardship of the meeting, the Chair of the Finance Committee (who attended in person) was designated Acting Chair.

#### *.02. New Governors*

The Chair invited Members to recommend potential candidates to further strengthen the breadth and expertise of the Board. In particular, the Board would benefit from recruiting an Independent Governor with a high-level HEI academic management background (e.g. at Pro Vice-Chancellor level), and another with demonstrable experience and a skillset in HR and/or employment law.

#### **Action: Independent Governors**

#### *.03 September Strategy Day*

The Chair extended thanks from the Board to the Vice-Chancellor and all staff involved in ensuring the strategy day was valuable and productive.

### **BG.25.004** Chair's Action

#### *.01 HCPC MSI Nurse Paramedic Programme: Funding*

At the discretion of the Chair and the Chair of the Finance Committee, in September an initial cost of £353,000 was approved to fund initial action to address the HCPC issue. Subsequently, the Board was asked to approve a budget envelope of £2.7m in order to allow the University

to provide appropriate recompense to the students affected. This sum was approved by the Board via email correspondence during the week commencing 13 October.

The Board extended its thanks to all staff involved in managing complaints and the additional work undertaken to administer the process and compensation.

**.02 [Exempt from publication – commercial interests]**

**BG.25.005 Minutes of the previous meeting**

*Received: Document BG/001/25*

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

**BG.25.006 Action Log**

*Received: Document BG/002/25*

Members noted that progress had been made since the last meeting, and that all items had either been actioned or were in progress.

In response to Governors' questions, clarifications were received that:

- References to “ways of working” pertain to ongoing work by the Chair of the Board and the Governance and Nominations Committee (GNC), rather than a defined workstream.
- The ISE Board referenced in the Log refers to an institutional student experience and enhancement board that was set up in 2024/25. It has since been succeeded by the Student Experience and Enhancement Board.

The Action Log was received.

**BG.25.007 Matters arising not included elsewhere on the agenda**

There were no matters arising.

<b>SECTION A ITEMS</b>
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**BG.25.008 Vice-Chancellor's Report**

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor provided an oral report to update members on key policy issues since the last meeting.

*.01 Government post compulsory education target*

At the Labour Party Conference in September, the Prime Minister announced a new target for post compulsory education. By 2040 the Government wants two thirds of under 25s to take part in higher learning, through a mixed system of gold standard apprenticeships and university education. The Vice-Chancellor highlighted that the policy creates opportunities for universities like Edge Hill to work proactively with partners in further education and employers, to be part of a new mixed ecology of tertiary provision.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the Government's post-16 education and skills white paper is due to be published today (20 October). The white paper will set out pathways to meet the post compulsory education target and will introduce a new qualification – the V Level (Vocational Level) – to replace the BTEC. The Board will have an opportunity to reflect on the white paper when it meets on 17 November.

*.02 Means-tested maintenance grants*

The Secretary of State for Education announced at the Labour Party Conference that the government will reintroduce means-tested maintenance grants for students on "priority courses". The scheme will be fully funded by a new 6% levy on international student fees. The policy is recognition of the cost-of-living crisis among student populations.

*.03 OfS consultation on quality assurance*

The Regulator has launched a consultation on the future approach to quality. The Office for Students (OfS) is proposing a strengthened and integrated approach between regulating minimum standards and the recognition of excellence through the Teaching Excellence Framework

(TEF). The Vice-Chancellor informed the Board that the University's response to the consultation will be largely positive.

*.04 OfS regulation of franchise provision*

The OfS will soon introduce a new ongoing condition of registration to regulate franchise provision. The condition will address the very poor student outcomes achieved in this space by some private providers that have franchised provision from universities in England and Wales. The Vice-Chancellor provided assurance that the University has no exposure in this area.

*Discussed:* In discussion and in response to Governors' questions, it was noted that:

- Regarding the Government's announcement on means-tested maintenance grants, a list of "priority courses" has not been published. It is anticipated that there will be policy alignment with the UK's Industrial Strategy growth driving sectors (commonly referred to as the IS-8). If so, this will include key elements of the University's portfolio including health, life sciences, education and some business courses.

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

**BG.25.009 Student Recruitment Update**

*Received:* Document BG/003/25

*Reported:* The Director of Marketing, Communications and Student Recruitment presented the update, noting that it remained accurate and there was nothing further to report.

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

- Registration is still underway and therefore it is too early for the University to confirm whether recruitment figures are in alignment with the numbers used to forecast the 2025/26 Budget. Members noted that a complex model was used to generate the Budget. The Student Recruitment Update will be a standing item for future Board meetings, enabling Governors to remain abreast of recruitment and its associated impact on the University's finances and activities.

*.01 Strategy for recruitment and growth*

- The Board received assurance that immediate tactical measures to increase undergraduate numbers includes focus on growing high demand areas where the University currently has low market share.
- The University's recruitment and growth outlook for the medium term are key business plans which will sit under the University's new strategy. A portfolio review will form an integral part of this strategy, particularly for taught postgraduate provision where numbers have declined. Subject to progress, the University intends to present its business plans for recruitment and growth to the Board in Spring 2026.

**Action: Vice-Chancellor**

*.02 Alternative and contextual offers*

- The Board received assurance that, under the alternative offer process, the University provides early offers to enable applicants to fully consider their options within an unpressured timeframe. For example, students applying for medicine in October will be issued alternative offers before Christmas. This timeline is ahead of that provided by key competitors. Notwithstanding Edge Hill's approach, only a small number of medicine aspirant students are converted to an alternative course. This outcome aligns with evidence from across the sector, where there is an increasing trend for those who have not secured a place at a UK university go on to study medicine at institutions overseas, particularly in Eastern Europe.
- Students recruited using the new contextual course offers (under the Widening Participation fair admissions scheme) has led to improved conversion when compared to the standard offer. The profile of students enrolled via contextual course offers aligns with those who are typically attracted to and recruited by Edge Hill. The cohort will be monitored to determine whether they present any additional support needs.
- Data on alternative offers, contextual course offers and the impact on retention across the University's portfolio will be reported to the Board in autumn 2026.

**Action: Director of Marketing, Communications and Student Recruitment**

*.03 International recruitment*

- **[Exempt from publication – commercial interests]**

*Agreed:* To receive assurance from the Student Recruitment Update.

**BG.25.010 Student Report**

*Received:* Document BG/004/25

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

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

- Confirmation was received that the fit out of the new SU building had been completed to budget. Members congratulated the SU on this achievement, noting the wide benefits and positive impact that the space is already providing for the student population.
- A post-project review of the University's 2024 Central Campus capital developments (SU and Life Sciences buildings) is underway and due to report findings in the first half of 2026. The outcome, including lessons learned, will be reported as appropriate into the corporate governance framework.

**Action: Chief Operating Officer**

- Significant increases to bus operator costs were reflected in the tendering exercise for the EdgeLink bus service, which runs between Edge Hill campus and Ormskirk. To balance University funding of the service, a reduced timetable for 2025/26 was introduced. The Board sought assurance that the exercise to determine service reductions included an equality impact assessment. The Executive agreed to check the scope of the exercise and ensure any learnings are carried through to future assessments of University-funded services.

- Once appointed, the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education & Student Experience) will provide strategic leadership on a set of enhancements and improvements, including the timeliness of feedback on student work. Governors noted that while feedback timeliness is complex, it is a key measure when delivering on student satisfaction.
- The Board welcomed the SU's commitment to ensuring that the Union helps to deliver improved strategic alignment around the student experience. The SU also plans a revised approach to the management of its block grant, thus strengthening evidence of its accountability.
- Work to ensure the inclusivity of the SU's 2025/26 Freshers' Fair included a quiet hour. Following feedback, the SU is reviewing how it can further reduce noise levels during designated quiet periods for their events.

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Report.

#### **BG.25.011 Student Outcomes (B3) Results**

*Received:* Document BG/005/25

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report noting that the contents remained accurate. He highlighted that, while the University exceeds the minimum regulatory threshold metric for full-time first-degree students in graduate employment, at 70%, Edge Hill's rate falls just below the sector average of 73%. He added that under the OfS's proposed integrated approach to quality, the benchmarked value (not yet released by the OfS) will prove crucial to the University. This dataset will:

- Measure against comparable institutions.
- Be a determinant for the University's next TEF outcomes.

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

- The University is committed to unifying the experience and outcomes of students across its programmes. Whilst the University is initiating activity to improve lower graduate employment outcomes, this endeavour is enhancement focussed as current results already exceed the threshold set by the OfS. The Board

extended its full support for the University in its actions to further increase the employability of its graduates.

- The response rate to the Graduate Outcomes Survey (the Survey) was 50.6% for the University (39% nationally) and therefore the data must be reviewed with caution. There are significant unknowns, and the University is aware of graduate groups who have entered skilled employment but whose outcomes are not reflected in full e.g. nursing graduates. Governors noted that the University is working to increase graduates' engagement with the Survey.
- The Board recognises that the University's forthcoming strategic framework places considerable emphasis on expanding and strengthening the quality of management information. This will improve accountability measures where the University delivers activity correlating with high level metrics, such as those in the Survey.
- Members received assurance regarding the level of individualised support, targeted guidance, and skills development delivered to students through the personal tutoring system and by the Careers team.
- Notwithstanding the low level of engagement with the Survey, Governors expressed concern that, across the sector, high numbers of graduates are not employed in graduate level roles. Members acknowledged the complexity of the issue, which includes factors outside of the sector's control. The Board noted that the Government's forthcoming white paper on post 16 education and skills will provide some recognition of the issue that there are insufficient graduate jobs in the economy.
- Governors challenged the Executive team to set bold targets to drive enhancement in this area, noting the importance of successful employment outcomes for individuals and the difficulties currently faced by graduates trying to secure this work.
- Clarification was received that:
  - The department and school level breakdown for continuation and completion results exceed the OfS thresholds of 80% and 75% respectively.
  - The graduate outcomes data for the School of Medicine pertains to the BSc Nutrition and Health.

- The Executive were reminded to ensure that raw numbers are included alongside percentages when presented in Board reports.

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Outcomes (B3) Results

### **BG.25.012 Student Services Provision**

*Received:* Document BG/006/25

*Reported:* The Director of Student Services presented the report and confirmed that its contents remained contemporary.

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

- Edge Well 24/7 complements the University's portfolio of student support services. Take up of the phone line has been high, and the turnaround time for counselling provision is better than that which could be offered in-house. Data on the initial roll out of Edge Well 24/7 has been reviewed by the University's Health and Safety Committee. The Director offered to share the latest data with the Board.

#### **Action: Director of Student Services**

- The University has mechanisms in place to support students affected by faith-related incidents and geopolitical events. For example, supportive communications were issued to Jewish students following the terrorist attack at Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation synagogue on 2 October. Direct support is available through the University's Rabbi faith advisor. Specialist support to the wider student population is available from the University's Faith and Community Service.
- The Board received assurance that Edge Hill has a comprehensive crisis management plan in place which is ready for immediate activation should a security or terrorist incident take place on campus. The plan is regularly reviewed, and Facilities Management (FM) are leading on implementing the updates required when Martin's Law comes into force. To ensure preparedness, a specialist officer from the local police service was asked to undertake an audit of the campus. The recommendations stemming from this review have been developed into an action plan.

- UCAS data shows that the number of students declaring disabilities, including mental health problems, has increased significantly at a national level. Edge Hill's experience is in line with the sector, with the increase dominated by mental health and autism declarations. Owing to the numbers involved it is increasingly challenging to put individualised support plans in place. The Director of Student Services is in open dialogue with sector peers to explore alternative models to ensure appropriate and effective support.

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Services Provision report

**BG.25.013 Student Records System (SRS) Project: Update**

*Received:* Document BG/007/25

*Reported:* The Director of Digital Transformation presented the report and confirmed that its contents remained accurate.

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

- The Board welcomed the update which outlined the work to act on recommendations made by an external expert who, in July, conducted an independent review into Project Transform's progress and activity. The external expert's report reviewed all options available to the University and concluded that the most viable was to reset and replan the SRS project.
- Members acknowledged that the new SRS will be an enabler of business optimisation and shore up the Institution's operational viability. Because the project constitutes a once in a generation change and its full benefits may not be realised for 4-5 years, the Director of Digital Transformation sought to bring a full investment case to the Board. This investment case will include timescales, costings, staffing requirements and any additional technical costs e.g. software licenses to facilitate project delivery.
- Members tested the risks posed by the requirement to extend the lifespan of the University's extant records system. The new project board recognise that a failure of the current system would result in institutional failure. Assurances regarding the system's ongoing operation are sought at the monthly project board meeting and the

project board is confident that all appropriate mitigations are in place.

- Key to the project's success is the recruitment of specialised staff to deliver activity. This will incur financial implications due to the high-demand for candidates with the required experience and expertise. The timeline presented in the update report includes an assumption that it will take time to recruit these staff. The Board welcomed confirmation that the University's BAU staff will not be involved in delivering project activity. These staff will instead be consulted for their expertise and knowledge about their own operational areas, to help ensure that the end product meets requirements.
- Based on the outcome of the Board's consideration of the investment case, an update on the project will be communicated to staff. Thereafter, regular communications will be released. Work to ensure staff understand the approach and how the SRS will affect them will be bolstered by reinvigoration of the "change agent" ambassadorial network within each relevant department.

*Agreed:* To receive the Student Records System (SRS) Project: Update

#### **BG.25.014 Research and Knowledge Exchange: Annual Report**

*Received:* Document BG/008/25

*Reported:* The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Dean of Arts & Sciences presented the annual report.

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

- The University is developing the quality and capacity of its bidding capability to achieve success in an increasingly competitive environment. Activity to deliver this includes peer review groups, buying external training and the use of AI tools to fine tune bids. Edge Hill also seeks strategic partnerships with prestigious organisations and institutions to the benefit of both partners. A recent example is the ongoing work with the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.
- The Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme has been instrumental in helping establish the research arm of the University, and continues

to support development. By the 2029 Research Excellence Framework, the Scheme is likely to have generated a doubling in the number of PhD completions since the last round in 2021. Although the Scheme was put on hold as part of the University's measures to reduce spending, PhD recruitment has continued to be healthy and staff skills have sharpened in securing external funding. There remain cases where internal funding would be beneficial e.g. for dual awards and particular partnerships. Members also noted that some external organisations award funding only where there is match funding in place from the institution.

- The Board explored the ways in which the University seizes commercial opportunities arising from its research and knowledge exchange (KE). The latter has generated an income of almost £3 million in 2024/25. A contributor to this income has been through franchising intellectual property for delivery in the UK and abroad.

*Agreed:* i) To receive the Research and Knowledge Exchange; Annual Report.  
ii) To consider an informal session for the Board on research and knowledge exchange and/or preparations for REF 2029.

**Action: Clerk / Chair**

**BG.25.015 Board of Governors: Schedule of Business 2025/26 (including Lead Governor Scheme)**

*Received:* Document BG/009/25

*Reported:* The Governance, Projects & Policy Manager confirmed that there was no information to add to the circulated report. She asked Governors to focus their discussion on five core areas:

- Confirming the content and timing of business for 2025/26
- A proposal to reduce the number of formal meetings to accommodate deep-dive development sessions
- A proposal to expand the Remuneration Committee's remit to incorporate people and culture
- Disestablishing the Lead Governor Scheme (with the exception of a temporary retention of Lead Governor: ESG)
- A recommendation to nominate an Independent Governor to sit on the Academic Board to further cement links with academic governance.

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

- Governors welcomed the proposal to introduce deep-dive development sessions, particularly owing to the mixed expertise of Board members. It was considered that the sessions will facilitate sound decision making at formal meetings.
- No consensus was reached regarding the future remit of the Remuneration Committee. An argument was put forward to retain the Committee's distinct function and introduce a new separate committee to provide oversight of people and culture matters. This proposal was set into the context that the University is undergoing its biggest change management programme in a generation. Other members highlighted that any decision must also consider whether establishing an additional committee is appropriate when the University is following a business optimisation agenda to improve efficiency and reduce costs.
- The Board agreed that the matter should be referred to the Governance and Nominations Committee and any decision brought to the January Board meeting for ratification.

**Action: Clerk**

- The Board will receive updates regarding the Professional Services Review from the next meeting onwards.

*Agreed:*

- i) To confirm the Board's Business Plan for 2025/26**
- ii) To refer consideration of the Remuneration Committee's remit to the Governance & Nominations Committee**
- iii) To disestablish the Lead Governor Scheme, with the temporary exception of the Lead Governor: ESG**

<b>SECTION B ITEMS</b>
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**BG.25.016 Committee Chair Updates:**

*.01 Finance Committee (29 September 2025)*

*Reported:* The Chair of the Finance Committee offered to provide a written update to Governors via email.

**Action: Chair of Finance Committee**

*.02 Audit & Risk Committee (15 September and 20 October 2025)*

*Reported:* The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee provided a comprehensive summary of the meetings held on 15 September and that afternoon, particularly highlighting:

- The requirement for independent governor volunteers to participate in the audit tender review panel. Fuller information will be circulated to these governors in due course.

**Action: Clerk**

- The outcome of internal audit exercises into the capital projects discharged in 2024/25 and the process to manage staff leavers. Both were known to be areas of higher risk exposure and the internal auditors confirmed this, awarding partial assurance ratings.
- The internal auditors apply an overall assurance as part of their annual report. The outcomes of the capital projects and staff leaver process audits caused the University's overall assurance rating to drop from the highest rating by one level.
- The Committee welcomed the auditors' scrutiny and the identification of clear actions. Members noted that the many of the issues raised in the assignment reports were historical, and expressed confidence in the Executive's commitment to prevent recurrence.
- The draft Financial Statements, Going Concern Statement and External Auditor's Highlights Letter and Memorandum were reviewed from a risk perspective and will be presented to the Board in November. The technical production of the accounts was judged very good, but the accounts demonstrate the difficult year experienced by the University.

*Agreed:* To receive the Committee Chair's Update

**BG.25.017 Board Membership**

*Received:* Document BG/010/25

*Reported:* The Governance, Projects & Policy Manager confirmed that there was no additional information to add to the circulated paper.

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

- All prospective Governors are required to provide a self-assessment against the OfS fit and proper person definition, a signed commitment to the Nolan Principles of Public Life, and two satisfactory references. To confirm their fit and proper status and trustee eligibility, the Secretariat checks:
  - The Disqualified Directors Register
  - The Register of all persons who have been removed as a charity trustee
  - Individual Insolvency Register

*Agreed:* **To approve the appointment of Sequoia Chapman, Ian Cleminson and Natalie Palin to the Board of Governors from November 2025**

**BG.25.018 Academic Board Summary (July 2025)**

*Received:* Document BG/011/25

*Reported:* The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that there was nothing to add to the report.

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

- The primary lesson learned from the HCPC issue is that it was a strategic error to develop a programme which required accreditation by two independent professional and statutory bodies. The University will remain alert to these risks through its academic governance framework.

*Agreed:* To receive the Academic Board Summary (July 2025)

**BG.25.019 Interim Scheme of Delegation**

*Received:* Document BG/012/25

*Reported:* The Governance, Projects & Policy Manager introduced the Interim Scheme of Delegation, reminding Governors that it would be in place until the Executive Team was fully resourced, at which time a full review would be undertaken. Following feedback from Governors, she recommended that the Board approve the draft Scheme with two amendments:

- i. Responsibility for approval of the Financial Regulations to move from Audit & Risk to Finance Committee
- ii. The Chair's expenditure approval limit to be included

*Discussed:* Members confirmed their satisfaction with the Interim Scheme of Delegation, subject to the amendments presented.

*Agreed:* **To approve the Interim Scheme of Delegation subject to the amendments agreed.**

**BG.25.020 Board Statement of Primary Responsibilities**

*Received:* Document BG/013/25

*Reported:* The Governance, Projects & Policy Manager confirmed that the Secretariat considered that the existing Statement of Primary Responsibilities remained valid and no amendments were recommended.

*Discussed:* In discussion, the following information was noted:

- Governors confirmed their satisfaction with the Secretariat's recommendation.

*Agreed:* **To confirm the existing Statement of Primary Responsibilities for 2025/26**

**BG.25.021 Any other business**

There was no other business.

<b>SECTION C ITEMS</b>
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The following items were received for information:

**BG.25.022 Summary Report: Audit & Risk Committee (September 2025)**  
*(Document BG/014/25)*

**BG.25.023 Minutes of the Staff Consultative and Negotiation Committee**  
**dated: 27 June 2025** *(Document BG/015/25)*

**BG.25.024 Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for 17 November 2025.