



*(Trading name of Oakswood Group Ltd)*

## **BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

### **Meeting Minutes**

#### **Meeting Details:**

**Date:** Wednesday, 18 March 2026

**Time:** 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM BST

**Location:** Tricorn House, 7th Floor, 51–53 Hagley Road, Birmingham B16 8TP

**Online:** Microsoft Teams

**Chair:** Chair of the Board of Governors

**Minute Taker:** Head of QA & IS

#### **1. Attendance**

##### **Board Members Present:**

- Dr Richard Majors - Chair of the Board
- Dr Richard Johnson - Board Member 1
- Graham Arnold - Board Member 2
- Asher Qureshi - Board Member 3

##### **Senior Management Team (SMT) Present:**

- Muhammad Khalil Ur Rehman – CEO / Executive Lead
- Rafia Rehman – Head of QA & IS
- Waqas Mehmood – Head of Academic Affairs

##### **External Attendees:**

- Heather Newton – External Advisor / Consultant (Illuminare Education)

### **Apologies:**

- None

### **2. Opening & Welcome**

2.1 The Chair welcomed all members and confirmed quorum.

2.2 The Chair noted no apologies were received and all members were present.

2.3 Introductions were made, and the agenda was confirmed.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

- Board members were reminded to declare any conflicts of interest.
- The Board noted that the Chair had formally stepped down from a previous CIC research role to mitigate any potential conflict of interest. This was recorded and accepted by the Board.
- No new conflicts of interest were declared.

It was agreed that the Chair should lead this item in future meetings to facilitate transparency.

### **4. Approval of Previous Minutes and Actions**

- The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved as an accurate record.
- SMT provided updates on actions from the previous meeting.
- All actions from the previous meeting were reviewed. Updates on progress were noted.
- Matters arising from the previous meeting were noted as completed or in progress.

### **5. New Governor Appointment and Welcome**

- The Board formally approved the appointment of Asher Qureshi as External Governor (Finance and Resources) following completion of internal due diligence, CV review, and an external governance skills matrix assessment undertaken as part of Board composition strengthening for OfS readiness. No objections were raised and the appointment was unanimously supported.
- The Board formally welcomed a newly appointed Governor.
- It was noted that appointment documentation would be completed in line with governance requirements.

## **Institutional and Strategic Updates**

### **6. Academic & Regulatory Updates**

- Head of Academic Affairs provided a summary of academic matters and highlighted key regulatory considerations, including:
  - Ongoing academic partnership delivery with Buckinghamshire New University across three planned intakes.
  - Academic Board consideration and same-day sign-off of proposed new course developments, including Health and Social Science, Social Work, and Business and Management Top-Up provision, ahead of partner submission deadlines.
  - Operational readiness planning for the proposed launch of ISM Education diploma pathways through both on-campus and online delivery models, including progression routes into higher education.
  - Consideration of the regulatory implications of introducing new awarding organisation provision alongside existing validating partner arrangements, particularly in relation to student protection, complaints handling, academic appeals, and policy applicability.
  - Review of international partnership opportunities, noting that the Bahrain proposal had been withdrawn following investment review, while the Saudi Arabia proposal remained under consideration pending further external feedback.
  - Alignment of academic delivery planning with OfS registration documentation, business planning assumptions, and future Access and Participation commitments.
- The Board engaged with questions demonstrating due diligence regarding the proposed operational delivery partnership with ISM Education as an awarding organisation, including pathway progression arrangements and regulatory implications.

### **7. Update on Collaborative Partnerships**

The Board received an update on partnerships with:

- Buckinghamshire New University (BNU)
- ATHE

For the benefit of the full membership of the Board in recognition of this being the first meeting of its new member, the Board noted that current delivery is limited to BNU and ATHE programmes.

## 8. Policy Approvals

- The Board noted that an extensive list of policies requiring its approval was provided in the agenda, with the relevant compliance requirements clearly articulated.
- All policies shared through Board papers were reviewed and approved, except one to be amended (Prevent & Safeguarding Policy; see details further on in these minutes).
- Head of QA & IS presented key points and ensured all issues were clearly drawn to the Board's attention.
- The Board agreed that the approval process was proportionate and appropriate.
- The Board also noted accessibility arrangements for governors requiring hard-copy documentation, and it was agreed that paper copies of policies and board papers would be posted on request to ensure equitable participation in governance.
- Head of QA & IS confirmed that revisions will be circulated, and the Board will have an opportunity to review the updated documentation before submission.

### RESOLVED:

The Board approved all policies listed in the meeting papers (Items G-001 to H-007), subject to:

- Minor amendments were identified
- Final review circulation prior to submission

### Update on Institutional Registration (OfS)

The Board received an update on progress toward registration with the Office for Students. The Board noted that approximately 115 documents have been prepared for the OfS submission, with a small number outstanding.

### RESOLVED:

- **OFSG-002 – Provider Assessment B8 → Approved for submission**
- **OFSG-003 – Business Plan (5 Years) → Approved**

The Board noted that submission timelines are tight and significant progress has been made. The Board confirmed readiness for submission of the OfS application, subject to final document checks and external review.

### RESOLVED:

The Board delegated authority to SMT, working with Illuminare Education, the Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee, and relevant governors as required, to revise the OfS submission timeline and associated documentary framework where necessary to secure a complete and viable registration submission.

### **Secretary's Post-Meeting Governance Note:**

Following further auditing and checks by Illuminare Education in preparation for the registration application submission to ensure a full and viable submission, it was identified through further external audit and documentary assurance review that further clarification was needed regarding the articulation of Oakwood College's academic provision and delivery (with potential knock-on impacts on financial planning and projections, and the Access & Participation Statement, as well as the documentary submission), and that subject to such clarification being received, there was a possible need for a longer timeline before an application would be complete and viable.

Further meetings were therefore promptly organised by the College with Illuminare Education and involving members of the Board (AQ). Clarification was obtained by EOP on Wednesday, 25 March 2026. The clarifications resulted in a necessary revision to the planned for submission date of 30 March 2026. In summary, substantial additional policy work was now required (both in the production of additional policies and revisions to previously prepared documents). It is noted that an application must be made in any case by 30 June 2026, though it is projected that, to allow for logical and fulsome presentation of audited management accounts, a complete and viable submission in mid-May is both feasible and likely. This revised timeline was enacted under the delegated authority granted by the Board at Minute 8 (Update on Institutional Registration – OfS).

### **Governance and Institutional Framework**

#### **Governance Framework and Institutional Structure**

The Board reviewed governance documentation.

#### **RESOLVED:**

The following were **approved**:

- Committee Structure and Terms of Reference
- Management and Governance Policy
- Organisational Structure
- Policy Approval Procedures
- Governors Recruitment Procedure

#### **NOTED:**

- Governor Appointment Letter (Agreement)

#### **Additional Governance Update:**

- A Governor was confirmed as **Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee**

### **Institutional Risk and Compliance**

The Board reviewed risk and compliance frameworks.

#### **RESOLVED:**

The following were **approved**:

- Risk Management Policy
- Institutional Risk Register
- Reportable Events Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Resources Policy

### **Governance, Legal and Compliance Policies**

#### **RESOLVED:**

The Board **approved** all listed governance policies, including:

- Anti-Bribery, Fraud and Corruption
- Conflicts of Interest
- Data Protection and Privacy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Ethics and Values
- Fit and Proper Persons
- Sexual Misconduct and Harassment
- Freedom of Speech Code and Complaints Procedure

### **Student Protection, Welfare and Safeguarding**

#### **RESOLVED (Subject to Amendments):**

- Prevent and Safeguarding Policy → **Approved subject to revision**

#### **Key Amendment Required:**

The version of 'extremism' contained within the Policy was from the UK Government's Prevent Strategy. The Board had reservations about the wording of this definition.

The external consultant stated the most recent UK Government definition of extremism:



*“Extremism is the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred, or intolerance that aims to negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others, or undermine, overturn, or replace the UK system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights, or intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve these outcomes.”*

The Board also discussed the approach of combining the Prevent Policy with the Safeguarding Policy, noting this was not uncommon in higher education. The External Consultant explained that this approach supported a ‘Safeguarding first’ approach to managing the Prevent Duty and prevented staff from being unclear about which policy and procedures should be followed. The Board agreed to retain the joined-up approach to this Policy.

The Board agreed to adopt the most recent UK Government definition of extremism in all relevant policies. The CEO confirmed that the policy will be updated accordingly and circulated for approval prior to submission to the Office for Students (OfS). The revised version will be circulated for confirmation.

**RESOLVED:**

The following were **approved**:

- Prevent Risk Assessment
- Retention of Assessed Work Policy
- Personal Relationships Policy
- Emergency Student Exclusion Policy
- Suicide Prevention and Response Policy

**Institutional and Financial Policies**

**RESOLVED:**

The Board **approved**:

- Financial Support and Hardship Fund Policy
- Financial Sustainability Policy
- Partnerships and Collaborations Policy
- Value for Money Statement

**Student Experience**

The Board noted that the Student Complaints Policy aligns with:

- Office for Students (OfS) requirements

- Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) framework
- Consumer protection expectations (CMA guidance)

The student complaints procedure, and its alignment with the OIA Good Practice Framework and wider sector good practice, was explained to the Board. The Board specifically challenged how students would be assured that complaint outcomes were fair, evidence-based, and accompanied by a clear rationale where complaints were not upheld.

SMT and the External Consultant confirmed that the three-stage process includes an independent third-stage review through awarding or validating partners, before escalation to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The Board was satisfied that this provides an appropriate independent appeal route consistent with sector expectations.

**RESOLVED:**

- Student Complaints Policy and Procedure → **Approved**

### **9. Use of BNU Policies**

Head of QA & IS explained that Oakwood College is currently adopting some policies from Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) to meet regulatory and compliance requirements. These policies are fully aligned with BNU requirements but will eventually be adapted to reflect Oakwood College-specific procedures.

The Board **noted** this approach and confirmed understanding that:

- Some policies, such as the student contract and academic appeals procedure, will continue to follow BNU standards.
- Oakwood College is creating accompanying statements/procedures to clarify internal implementation procedures.
- ATHE and other partner programmes require the development of independent Oakwood College policies.

### **10. Website Audit and Publication of Policies**

External Consultant and Head of QA & IS reported:

- A full audit and overhaul of the Oakwood College website is underway to meet OfS expectations.
- Mandatory fields, policy documents, and governance information will be made publicly available.
- Board members' names and brief profiles will be published. Members are requested to provide short biographies and photos for the website.

Head of QA &IS Informed:

- Board minutes will be **published publicly** in compliance with regulatory expectations
- Meeting minutes will be published, with references to roles rather than personal names, in line with regulatory requirements.

### **11. Committee Updates**

- Board Member 3 was formally noted as **Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee**, overseeing financial governance and reporting.

### **12. Any Other Business**

- The Board noted the importance of publishing governance information and approved minutes on the College website in line with OfS transparency expectations and good governance practice.

### **13. Closing Remarks**

13.1 The External Consultant advised the Board on her highly positive experience of working with SMT, noting the demonstrable rigour, care and attention being shown and excellent collaborative approach.

13.2 The Board:

- Acknowledged the **significant progress** made toward OfS registration, thanking Illuminare Education for their support
- Commended the team for:
  - High-quality work
  - Strong collaboration
  - Commitment to compliance and standards

13.3 The meeting was formally closed.

### **Secretary's Note:**

#### **Summary remarks:**

- The Board meeting was well-structured with active engagement from members.
- SMT demonstrated strong compliance knowledge and supported smooth execution.
- Chair and SMT relationship was collaborative, and the meeting concluded successfully.

**Requested external feedback on the Board meeting for quality assurance included:**

**Board Composition & Diversity**

- Noted that the current Board is small and does not include female members.
- Recommended to consider Board diversity and inclusion in future recruitment to ensure plurality of voices, consistent with HE Codes of Governance.
- Noted that a Board member is a trained mediator, and the College is encouraged to make use of internal mediation expertise where relevant (e.g. in complex student or staff complaints).

**Chair & Governance Support**

- Observations noted that the Chair required some additional support during the meeting.
- Consultant recommended that Board and Chair training opportunities be explored.
- Consideration suggested to:
  - Review the Illuminare Education Board audit outcomes and recommendations.
  - to consider in particular the skills matrix and demonstrable independence of members; and
  - to consider appointing an alternative Chair to allow the current Chair's research activities to continue without compromising the required independence of
  - the Chair.

**14. Date of Next Meeting**

The next Board of Governors meeting was agreed upon for:

**Date:** 24th June 2026

**Meeting Closed at:** 1:28 pm BST

**15. Action Log**



Action	Responsible	Deadline
Update Prevent Policy with extremism definition, and clarify the 'Safeguarding first' approach	Head of QA & IS	Immediate
Circulate the revised Safeguarding policy for confirmation	Head of QA & IS	Within 1 week
Circulate draft Access and Participation Statement to Board for review	Head of QA & IS	Before next submission review
Align FE strategy with Business Plan	SMT	Before submission
Review Board diversity	Chair & SMT	Next BoG Meeting
Publish policies and minutes on the website	SMT	Before OfS review
Explore Board and Chair training opportunities	SMT / IE Support	Ongoing
Implement page-by-page minutes confirmation	Chair & Minute Taker	Next Meeting
Submit OfS application for external review	SMT	When ready (complete and viable)
Circulate the remaining documents for approval	Head of QA & IS	Immediate
Upload all documents to the OfS portal	SMT	Before submission
Share Access & Participation Statement	SMT	When ready
Submit course proposals to the partner	CEO	6 April 2026
Report revised OfS submission timeline and resulting documentary changes to the next Board meeting	SMT / Head of QA & IS	Next BoG Meeting
Return Fit & Proper declarations	Board	As soon as possible

### Status & Confirmation

<b>Status:</b>	Draft
<b>Date Confirmed:</b>	