

Case Study

Institution

Royal Holloway University of London

Project title

Governance Effectiveness Review

Background/Context

Governance was in transition at the Royal Holloway University of London, reflecting the evolving nature and pace of the landscape in which it operates, and this prompted a review of the effectiveness of its governance. This found that the performance of the University had been positive overall but elements of governance which could be improved considerably in some areas were identified.

The review followed new and specific expectations from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Students (OfS) in recent years, with increased responsibilities on governing bodies to understand management issues and activities.

Solution

The review comprised an analysis of documentation, an anonymous online survey of Council members, face-to-face interviews, focus groups and meeting observations. It was overseen by a steering group with whom draft recommendations were discussed before it was finalised.

Outcomes

A lack of a shared view between the Council and the Executive was established, with evidence showing that the Council had been too remote from matters of strategic importance facing the University and identifying the need for an improved understanding between governance and management matters.

It was recommended that the Executive should find improved ways of engaging the Council in agreeing matters of strategic priority, with agreed performance indicators and improved communication and transparency to promote a better understanding of key decisions.

The review led to 22 recommendations across seven areas, along with the suggestion that a short external exercise within 12 months to provide additional assurance to Council that improvements to governance had begun to take effect.

“It’s a tough report but I hope it will give us the basis for moving forward in a positive way so that we achieve real improvements in our governance that will benefit the institution.”

Dame Margaret Hodge, Chair of the Board