

Case Study

Institution

Sheffield Hallam University

Project title

Board of Governors Effectiveness Review

Background/Context

Sheffield Hallam University commissioned external support to examine the effectiveness of its governance.

With an ambition to be globally outstanding, the University wishes to achieve outstanding outcomes for its students and the city, with a mission to shape students' futures and find practical solutions to real world challenges.

The review was carried out during the continued disruption from Covid-19, with fieldwork transitioning to online and virtual meetings.

Solution

The review sought to stimulate an informed deliberation of existing practices, structures, processes, behaviours and opportunities for improvement. Thorough examination of these factors highlighted key strengths and weaknesses of the University's governance.

A steering group drawn from the Board oversaw the review which comprised a number of methods, including a selective review of key documentation; an e-survey of all Board and committee members; and interviews with all Board members, the Vice-Chancellor, Chair of the Board of Governors, Chairs of key committees and other senior and executive staff.

Observations of the Board, Academic Board and key committees allowed the review to observe how information was received, discussed and acted upon as well as gain insights into decision making and overall governance culture.

A workshop with the Board was held to clarify and feed back on emerging findings from the review.

Outcomes

The review found evidence of effective governance at Sheffield Hallam University, with high standards in some areas and opportunities for development and areas for further consideration by the Board. There was a clear commitment to ongoing development.

A series of recommendations were categorised into high, medium and low priority, with high priorities including strengthening governor review and appraisal, additional focus on Board diversity in recruitment, and further strengthening the link between academic and corporate governance.

“From the outset, it was clear that Advance HE understood Sheffield Hallam’s mission to transform lives and that our mission and strategy informed their approach to engagement with Board Members to conduct the review. The Board welcomed the opportunity to review its performance and, in particular, to benchmark its survey results against other institutions; this was particularly helpful in providing insight and assurance as to what ‘good’ governance looks like. The Board recognise that it is operating in a very different regulatory environment to previous governance reviews and received significant assurance through the review, in terms of the Board’s oversight of the requirements and ongoing conditions of registration of the Office for Students Regulatory Framework relating to governance and management, including the Public Interest Governance Principles.

“We were pleased that the outcome recognised the institutional efforts to ensure there are sound structures, policies and practices in place to support Board effectiveness. The Board welcomes the areas identified as part of the review to further develop the performance of the Board and look forward to continuing to enhance our governance in practices in line with those recommendations to move from good to excellent.” **Lord Kerslake, Chair of Sheffield Hallam University Board of Governors.**