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University of Sussex - Governance Effectiveness Review

Analysis, October 2019

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Background

- 20 responses to the survey:

    - 11 External / Independent members (55%)
    - 5 Staff (including Senate / Academic Board) members (25%)
    - 1 Chair/ convenor (5%)
    - 1 Executive member (5%)
    - 1 Student member (5%)
    - 1 Prefer not to say (5%)

- Overall, a positive and supportive response was received with half of the questions (16 out of 32) scoring 100% agreement
- Furthermore, when compared against the benchmark, the majority (20 out of 32 questions) ranked 10% or more above the benchmark

Areas of strength

From 32 question areas, it is firstly worth noting that 16 questions were rated with 100% agreement. These included (*ranked in order of the greatest difference between the University and the Benchmark; highest first*):

- **Q2. The governing body regularly reviews its own performance**
- **Q3. The governing body: demonstrates a commitment to continuously improving its effectiveness**
- **Q20. The governing body actively ensures it has assurance on the standards of the institution's: Student experience**
- **Q30. Risks are well-managed (including risks from collaborative activity and partnerships) and organisational reputation is protected**
- **Q5. For the governing body to be confident in the institutional processes for maintaining the quality and standards of teaching and learning**
- **Q31. The governing body ensures there is effective organisational leadership**

Areas of strength

100% agreement - *examples continued:*

- **Q24. The need for constructive challenge by the governing body is understood and accepted by both members and the executive**

- **Q21. That governing body meetings and business are conducted and chaired in a way which encourages the active involvement of all members in discussions and decision-making**

- **Q25. Constructive challenge is undertaken appropriately**

- **Q6. To enable the governing body to be assured as to financial stability and value-for-money**

- **Q1. There is a genuine and shared understanding about and commitment by both the governing body and the executive to ensure effective governance**

Areas of strength

100% agreement - *examples continued:*

- **Q16. Reliable and up-to-date information is provided to the governing body to ensure that it is fully informed about its legal and regulatory responsibilities**

- **Q22. Working relationships between governing body members and the institution's executive are good**

- **Q12. The governing body demonstrates an understanding of and commitment to the institution's vision, ethos and culture**

- **Q28. Required standards of accountability are being achieved, as is compliance with legal, regulatory and charitable requirements**

- **Q23. A positive atmosphere exists to support effective governance**

Areas of strength - Benchmarking

When comparing against the benchmark, 20 out of the 32 questions ranked 10% or more _above_ the benchmark position. The top three included:

- **Q2) The governing body: regularly reviews its own performance [33% above the benchmark]**

- **Q10) The succession planning for governing body membership is effectively managed? [25% above the benchmark]**

- **Q3) The governing body: demonstrates a commitment to continuously improving its effectiveness [25% above the benchmark]**

- **[For the remaining 17 questions ranking 10% or more above the benchmark position see reference slides]**

Respondent group analysis

When considering the range of scores received across the question set, are there any differences between groups of respondents?

- When assessing levels of 'disagreement' by the type of governing body member, we found that there is little difference between staff and student members compared to all other responses

- 'Disagreement' is more often is cited by External / independent members

Areas for reflection?

It is useful to consider the range of scores received across the question set

- Out of the 32 questions asked in the survey, it is encouraging to note that _no_ respondents chose '_strongly disagree_' as a response. However, levels of disagreement can be seen as follows, which may be useful in forming wider discussion and debate with a view for potential improvement.

- Q8) There are processes in place to ensure recruitment of Council members addresses the requirements of equality and diversity **[2 disagree, and 1 partially disagree]**

- Q10) The contribution of all members (including the chair) is regularly reviewed using processes agreed by Council? **[2 partially disagree]**

- Q9) The recruitment of Council membership is effectively managed? **[1 disagree]**

- Q12) Receives assurance that regular performance reviews of all academic departments and professional services are undertaken?" **[1 partially disagree]**; & Where necessary receives assurance that recommendations arising from performance reviews of academic departments or professional services are implemented? **[1 partially disagree]**

- Q20) All Council members are actively involved in discussions? **[1 partially disagree]**

- Q22) Defined quality levels for the student experience, including related academic and service provision, are being achieved? **[1 partially disagree]**

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Areas for reflection?

It is useful to focus upon feedback related to EDI (Q8)

[Q8. There are processes in place to ensure recruitment of governing body members addresses the requirements of equality and diversity (in all senses of the term)?]

- Whilst the Council feel efforts are being made in this area and results are being achieved, more could still be done in terms of increasing Council diversity.

"We receive an annual update on equality and diversity and it is a priority when recruiting"

"We have pretty good diversity (gender, BAME, disability) of the current Council"

"In practice, recent recruitment of new Independent Members of Council has not delivered an appropriate level of diversity"

"Age might be an area for us to consider further"

"…the lack of diversity is prevalent in the council, particularly in BAME participation"

Areas for reflection?

It is also useful to focus upon Council suggestions for development (Q25)

[Q25: Overall, what are the main development areas in the governance arrangements in the University?]

- A broad range of themes could be observed. Slightly more responses were associated with having an awareness of sector challenges and/or having a strategic perspective, followed by the perception by some that the Council is too large.

"Ensuring we have awareness of the firestorm coming for the sector: its going to be a rough ride."

"Greater focus on widening participation, maintaining a highly strategic focus, keeping ahead of the game with emerging risks and issues"

"Too many committees and too many members of committees"

Areas to improve

When considering potential areas to improve, five questions can be seen to have achieved a score of less than 80%. In lowest order first, these included:

- **Q14) Where necessary receives assurance that recommendations arising from performance reviews of academic departments or professional services are implemented? [60%]**

- **Q11) The contribution of all members (including the chair) is regularly reviewed using processes agreed by the governing body [65%]**

- **Q13) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body: Receives assurance that regular performance reviews of all academic departments and professional services are undertaken? [70%]**

- **Q15) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body: Ensures that regular performance reviews of the head of institution are undertaken and reported by the Remuneration Committee? [70%]**

- **Q19) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body actively ensures it has assurance on the standards of the institution's: Academic awards? [75%]**

Areas to improve

However it is worth noting that when benchmarking these questions, only two fall below the benchmark

- **Q14) Where necessary receives assurance that recommendations arising from performance reviews of academic departments or professional services are implemented? [60%] [3% below the benchmark]**
- Q11) The contribution of all members (including the chair) is regularly reviewed using processes agreed by the governing body [65%]
- **Q13) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body: Receives assurance that regular performance reviews of all academic departments and professional services are undertaken? [70%] [2% below the benchmark]**
- Q15) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body: Ensures that regular performance reviews of the head of institution are undertaken and reported by the Remuneration Committee? [70%]
- Q19) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body actively ensures it has assurance on the standards of the institution's: Academic awards? [75%]

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Areas to improve

Also, one further question ranked *equivalent* to the benchmark

- **Q19) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body actively ensures it has assurance on the standards of the institution's: Academic awards?**

  [Score = 75%; Benchmark = 75%]

Conclusions

- Overall, a positive and supportive response was received with half of the questions (16 out of 32) scoring 100% agreement

- Furthermore, when compared against the benchmark, the majority (20 out of 32 questions) ranked 10% or more above the benchmark

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Breakout groups

Q: Given the results of the survey, what area (or areas) do you think the governing body should give priority to as regards further development?

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Reference slides

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Conclusions

- A number of areas of improvement were identified. These included:
  - Relatively low scores received for five question areas:
    (Q14 = 60%; Q11 = 65%; Q13 = 70%; Q15 = 70%; and Q19 = 75%)
  - Two questions position below the benchmark:
    (Q14 = -3%; Q13 = -2%)
  - One question equivalent to the benchmark:
    (Q19)

- **Therefore it can be argued that the top five priorities for improvement (in order or greatest priority first) could be considered as Q14, Q13, Q19, Q11, and Q15.**

_____

Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the contribution of all members (including the chair) is regularly reviewed using processes agreed by the governing body?

Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body: Receives assurance that regular performance reviews of all academic departments and professional services are undertaken?

Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body: Where necessary receives assurance that recommendations arising from performance reviews of academic departments or professional services are implemented?

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body: Ensures that regular performance reviews of the head of institution are undertaken and reported by the Remuneration Committee?

Q19. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the governing body actively ensures it has assurance on the standards of the institution's: Academic awards?

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Areas of strength - Benchmarking

The remaining 17 questions ranking 10% or more above the benchmark position included:

- **Q20) The governing body actively ensures it has assurance on the standards of the institution's: Student experience?** [20% above the benchmark]

- **Q30) Risks are well-managed (including risks from collaborative activity and partnerships) and organisational reputation is protected?** [19% above the benchmark]

- **Q18) The governing body reviews the extent to which its existing governance arrangements are appropriate to support the institution's long term strategic plans?** [19% above the benchmark]

- **Q9) The recruitment of governing body membership is effectively managed?** [18% above the benchmark]

- **Q5) For the governing body to be confident in the institutional processes for maintaining the quality and standards of teaching and learning?** [17% above the benchmark]

- **Q11) The contribution of all members (including the chair) is regularly reviewed using processes agreed by the governing body?** [17% above the benchmark]

- **Q17) That there is effective communication to and from the governing body with key stakeholders?** [16% above the benchmark]

- **Q31) The governing body ensures there is effective organisational leadership?** [15% above the benchmark]

Areas of strength - Benchmarking

The remaining 17 questions ranking 10% or more above the benchmark position included *(continued…)*:

- **Q24) The need for constructive challenge by the governing body is understood and accepted by both members and the executive?** [14% above the benchmark]

- **Q21) That governing body meetings and business are conducted and chaired in a way which encourages the active involvement of all members in discussions and decision-making?** [13% above the benchmark]

- **Q29) Defined quality levels for the student experience, including related academic and service provision, are being achieved?** [13% above the benchmark]

- **Q25) Constructive challenge is undertaken appropriately?** [12% above the benchmark]

- **Q32) External and internal stakeholders have a high degree of confidence in the organisation and its governance?** [12% above the benchmark]

- **Q8) To what extent do you agree or disagree that there are processes in place to ensure recruitment of governing body members addresses the requirements of equality and diversity (in all senses of the term)?** [12% above the benchmark)

- **Q6) To enable the governing body to be assured as to financial stability and value-for-money?** [11% above the benchmark]

- **Q4) There are effective arrangements in place for involving staff and students in the governing body (and its committees where relevant)?** [10% above the benchmark]

- **Q1) There is a genuine and shared understanding about and commitment by both the governing body and the executive to ensure effective governance?** [10% above the benchmark]

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