

Case Study

DTP

Coventry University

Governance Support

The University has more than 27,000 students and has three campuses, including one in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, and one in London. The campus in Coventry is currently undergoing a significant redevelopment programme. The University comprises four faculties, and manages a number of commercial subsidiaries that provide business services to local and national organisations.



Objective

The University has a relatively complex operating model comprising a range of subsidiary companies delivering a diverse range of activities in support of the interests of the University. Governance oversight of the group of companies sits with the main board of governors of the University and its sub-committees.

However, Coventry University wanted to put in place a clear framework for subsidiaries to work through, which provides assurance to the main board, effective use of governance resources, clarity on delegations and accountability and an appropriate risk and control framework.

The project was focused on ensuring current arrangements are appropriate and future-proofing governance to provide for straightforward development and application to any further growth in the University's structure and activity.

How did we do it?

We undertook a desktop review of governance information to assess it against best practice requirements, including the requirements of governing bodies as set out in the HEFCE Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability, the Companies Act and the Charities Act where applicable.

We tested the documentation against five elements which encapsulate these requirements:

1. Strategic direction – did the documentation “fit” with the corporate plans and provide assurance in relation to sustainability, viability and compliance?

2. Organisational dynamics and accountability – did the documentation set out a culture of openness and accountability, how are governance standards and expectations devolved, what is the process for approval and delegations of authority and is there an appropriate communications and escalations process?
3. Financial resilience – did the financial framework provide robust oversight of financial viability, appropriate use of public funds and value for money?
4. Risk and mitigation – is there an appropriate approach to risk and controls within the subsidiaries and how is the Group assured of this?
5. Overall governance control – does the documentation comply with mandatory reporting requirements, performance, data quality and service standards?

We then held a number of workshops with subsidiary representatives to work through our recommendations for change, gain feedback on subsidiary views on the proposals, input in relation to practical application and practice and alignment in relation to a timeframe for implementation and adoption.

What did we achieve?

We provided a template for a new, coordinated and comprehensive Delegatory Framework and supported the University in the collation and implementation of the new documentation.

The University actively and positively engaged in process and has implemented the new Delegatory Framework as the one point of reference for all its companies.

DTP played a pivotal role in supporting us in our endeavour to strengthen the governance of the University Group, particularly our subsidiary companies. Their knowledge and expertise have enabled us to develop practical solutions to meet the governance challenges we faced as an organisation.

Matt Challoner, Clerk to the Board of Governors and Company Secretary