

GOVERNING GOVERNANCE

Troubled by scandals at FIFA and across the business world, one University of Reading supporter turned to experts at Henley Business School to go beyond the call of philanthropy and form a partnership whose impact is challenging existing notions of governance.

Hoping to mitigate the effect of such scandals on the general public, and to explore how good governance can benefit society, supporter Gerry Brown reached out to like-minded academic, Professor Andrew Kakabadse.

The pair joined forces to begin a major piece of work exploring the role of the independent director in society – and the partnership has already yielded the publication of a related piece of work.

Released in March this year, the Kakabadse Report – which was generously funded by Gerry – is the largest study of its kind since the 1854 Northcote-Trevelyan Report, which led to the formation of the Civil Service.

It resulted in a dozen recommendations on how to improve the relationship between ministers and officials and has already prompted central government to begin adopting changes ranging from the induction process for ministers to the role of special advisers.

Now focusing on the larger-scale project on independent directors, Professor Kakabadse and his team have highlighted how it is not only the generosity of the businessman and author of the definitive book *The Independent Director* that is noteworthy, but also his willingness to share his intellectual wealth.

Professor Kakabadse told *Giving Matters* that Gerry's initial financial support of the

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Kakabadse Report, which asked whether the Government is fit for purpose, sowed the seeds of a “dream relationship.”

He said: “It is a wonderful thing in anybody's career to have the support of someone who is so keen and who wants to contribute.

“Gerry has provided the funding and space for the work and it has always been clear that he wants a functional output; he wants to effect that change. He is willing to get involved.”

The research into the role of the independent director came about through Gerry's desire to explore how improved governance in sectors such as sport, health, education and charities could benefit society. With the 2018 World Cup making headlines for reasons both good and bad in recent years, it

was the scandal within football's governing body FIFA which prompted him to seek out Professor Kakabadse.


“The interest I have in the wider societal aspect was crystallised by what happened at FIFA,” he told us. “You have this wonderful game that millions of people support and spend their money on, and yet it is mismanaged and run by people looking after their own interests.

“Likewise with business, there are scandals everywhere you look – there's hardly a sector not affected by this and I wanted to draw everyone's attention to what is going on because it's the person on the street that pays the price.”

The importance of the pair's exploration of the role and contribution of the independent director is certainly matched by its scale. The project is seeking input from almost 20,000 organisations across the different sectors, making it the largest ever study of social establishments in the UK.

And while the project is in its relative infancy, the desire to see real-world results is already coming to fruition. UK Sport has requested to consult with the Henley team to improve its governance and Gerry said that every one of the more than 40 opinion leaders interviewed to date has confirmed the work's value.

The researchers plan to release a book alongside their report and Professor Kakabadse hopes that the light the outcomes will shine on the need for good governance and how it benefits society – as well as helping to position Henley Business School as a global centre for expertise on board practice.

 For more information about research in business at Reading and Henley Business School, visit www.reading.ac.uk/imagine