

Minutes, Board meeting of 21-22 February 2022

21 February

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Crichton Lang, Riitta Pyykkö, Philip Winn, Áslaug Helgadóttir (from 13:30) and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

Apologies received: Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir

The meeting was held via video conference call and convened at 10:00, Icelandic time.

(1) Agenda, Minutes and matters arising

The agenda of the meeting was adopted. Crichton Lang will abstain when the Board discusses Hólar University's Year-on Report because he was the IWR team chair.

The minutes of the previous Board meeting (8-9 November 2021) were adopted pending confirmation that the Conference of Rectors, LIS, QC and the Ministry validate the draft summaries concerning them.

(2) Update on new Ministry of Universities, Industry and Innovation

A new ministry structure for the Icelandic Government became effective on 1 February 2022. The Quality Board is now under the auspices of a new Ministry of Universities, Industry and Innovation (the Ministry). The new Minister of Universities, Industries and Innovation is Áslaug Arna Sigurbjörnsdóttir, former Minister of Justice. The Board will write to the new Minister asking for a meeting to coincide with the May Board meeting, with an accompanying briefing note about the Board and its role.

(3) QEF2 Update

- i. UNAK held its IWR visit online on 22-26 November 2021, with a report ready to go to UNAK for fact-checking at the beginning of March.
- ii. AUI IWR: Maria Knutson Wedel agreed to serve as team chair. She is the Rector of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (AUI peer/aspirational peer institute) and she was on the RU IWR team for QEF2. SOS will propose the three remaining members based on a shortlist presented in the meeting. The Board will not recruit any more team members from the University of the Highlands and Islands, as there is now a former staff member of that institution on the Quality Board.
- iii. SOS is following up on the publication of all SLR summaries. One university has not published two reports that were supposed to be available online by now, and SOS has been assured that these summaries will be published in the very near future.

(4) Update on annual meeting with UI

- i. The annual meeting between Board representative (PW) to UI took place on 15 December 2021. The annual meeting centred on UI's response to the QEF IWR report, strategic developments, housing developments, student engagement, SLRs, UI's vision for the use of PURE and the planned enhancement of post-graduate degrees referred in the University's new strategic plan (UI26).

(5) Discussion of HU Year-on Report

- i. HU submitted its QEF2 Year-on Report in February 2022. The report was delayed because of COVID. The Year-on Report notes progress made on recommendations put forth in the IWR report. The most notable change is that HU reorganised key administrative job roles to better support the implementation of its strategic plan, which in turn was informed by the QEF2 IWR report. The Year-on Report will be discussed further in May during the 2022 annual meeting. A new Rector will be appointed to start on 1 July 2022.
- ii. The Board discussed the Year-on-report.

(6) Discussion of meetings to introduce new Board representatives to BU and RU

- i. Crichton Lang was introduced as a new Board representative to BU in a meeting on 14 January 2022. Ellen Hazelkorn was introduced as a new Board representative to RU in a meeting on 7 February 2022. The conversations were constructive in nature and focused mostly on underpinning the upcoming annual meetings with these universities in May.

(7) Update on commissioned work

- i. A first draft of the impact assessment report on the Icelandic Research Fund was submitted on 28 January 2022 to PW and SOS who provided feedback. A revised version was delivered later. A meeting of the Board may be called to approve the report if the Ministry wants the report submitted as soon as possible. The report can be published before Easter 2022 if needed.
- ii. Procedures and timing of possible alleviation of limited confidence judgments on Police Studies at UNAK were discussed.
- iii. The Board organised five webinars to Greenlandic higher education institutions in Autumn 2021. Following the success of those webinars, a small planning group with representatives of the Board, the Greenlandic higher education institutions and the Greenlandic Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Church met on 24 January 2022 to discuss next steps. A proposal was developed for a series of activities running until the end of academic year 2025-2026 to support Greenlandic institutions in building mechanisms for annual monitoring, and possibly for SLR and IWR at later points. The fact sheet on programme reviews being written for the Board may support these activities.

- iv. The review of strategic management at the Árni Magnússon Institute will take place on 4-8 April 2022. The Board approved the revised Guidelines. The reflective analysis will be submitted on 25 February 2022. The review team is comprised of the following members:
- Boyd Robertson (Chair). Former Principal, National Centre of Excellence for Gaelic Language and Culture.
 - Antal van den Bosch. Director, the Meertens Institute (peer institute).
 - Tove Bull. Former Rector of University of Tromsø and former Quality Board member.
 - Karen Willis (Team Secretary). Higher Education Consultant.
 - Student member (TBD).
- v. A draft proposal for review of online provision in Iceland, to be commissioned by the Ministry, was discussed.

Áslaug Helgadóttir joined the meeting at 13:00.

(8) Icelandic and European Updates

- i. At present, the limit on public gatherings is 200. Social distancing is recommended at 1 meter, with mask use recommended if 1-meter social distancing cannot be arranged. Rates of infections have been very high and averaging well over 1000 in the past week (7-11 February). All travellers – regardless of origin – are welcome to visit Iceland if they can show either a certificate of full vaccination against COVID, or a certificate of previous COVID infection. Most passengers must show a negative test (PCR or rapid antigen) before boarding an aircraft to Iceland, taken within 72 hours of departure.
- ii. A recent study in Gender Studies from UI shows that career progression in academia is slower for women in Iceland, but the proportion of female staff has increased in private universities. Men continue to make up the majority of senior academic posts and women retire at a younger age.
- iii. The European Commission has launched a new higher education package including the European Strategy for Universities and a proposal to member states on how to foster transnational collaboration. The four priority areas of the strategy are to strengthen the European dimension in higher education and research; support universities as “lighthouses of the European way of life”, promoting values and contributing to skills development; empower universities as actors of change in the green and digital transitions; and reinforce universities as drivers of the EU’s global role and leadership. The European Commission has published a foreign interference toolkit for universities. It was also noted that France has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

(9) REAC update

- i. Minutes of the meeting on 10 November 2022 were discussed. The Icelandic PURE system is being rolled out. Icelandic translation of PURE is ongoing. The National Library is part of the Ministry of Education and Culture, whereas the universities are part of the Ministry of Universities, Industry and Innovation.
- ii. REAC continues to unpack the outcomes of its two webinars on research evaluation, which took place in September and October 2021. Early thinking about future webinars is that these could focus on research culture (societal impact and engagement) or issues related to the roll-out of PURE.
- iii. PW noted that REAC is awaiting developments in two areas before it can decide on how best to proceed to support research evaluation in Iceland. The first area concerns the work of a ministerial committee charged with revising the funding model of the Icelandic universities. This committee has concluded its work but there have been no reports of its conclusions. The second area is the revision of the Evaluation System of the Public Universities. A new system took effect on 1 January 2022. The changes to the system and their impact will be discussed at future REAC meetings.
- iv. Replicability and reproducibility of research will be discussed in the upcoming meeting of REAC on 23 February 2022, as these are emerging concerns in a number of fields.

(10) Planning the QEF 2 Year of Reflection

- i. As part of the Year of Reflection, two independent external experts will contribute to the process. The first expert will oversee data gathering and prepare a report of findings, whereas the second expert will review the findings from the reflective process and provide commentary from an international perspective. The search for the first post is ongoing and may include an international expert. Achim Hopbach (independent consultant on European Higher Education, former Director of the *Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria* and former ENQA President) is retained for the second post.
- ii. CL presented a draft consultation note developed on the basis of one that was used for the evaluation of QEF1. Various aspects of the draft note were discussed, including what additional groups should be considered. The Board agreed that it would be most important to capture from within the universities the views of those who have been part of SLRs and IWR (including administrative/support staff), as well as the views of international experts involved in SLR. Possible external stakeholders from Iceland include representatives of secondary education, external members of governing Boards and externals involved in SLR and IWR. RANNÍS and the Science and Technology Policy Council could be surveyed in relation to the work of REAC. Professional staff developers could be gathered as a focus group. A clearer distinction must be made between student engagement in ongoing internal QA vs. student engagement in reviews.

- iii. The consultation note will create space for the discussion of which aspects of QEF2 should be retained, which aspects should be dropped and what aspects could be added. Possible additions include societal engagement and impact; diversity and inclusion (in addition to equality); optional review targets and international benchmarking exercises (similar to the Finnish model); and embedding of QA into governance. The consultation note must also provide space for comments on the two judgments and their possible interrelatedness, as well as the structure of IWR reports.
- iv. The consultation note should go out before the summer of 2022 in an electronic format and be as short as possible. The Steering Committee for the evaluation of QEF2 will discuss the next draft of the consultation note and the Board will be consulted electronically. The expert hired for data gathering and analysis will be tasked with increasing the probability of respondents completing the consultation note.
- v. Guidance notes that were issued to supplement the QEF2 Handbook will be incorporated into the QEF3 Handbook.
- vi. The Board was asked its views on the strengths/weaknesses of QEF2. The following ideas were put forth:
 - a. Reconsider the report structure and have one narrative that concludes with the two judgments rather than the current structure that leads to repetition. The two judgments are linked, and the report structure should demonstrate that. This would also serve to avoid the current disconnect between the two judgments and would reduce the length of the reports
 - b. New aspects or aspects that should be emphasised:
 - i. Governance and the embeddedness of QA in governance.
 - ii. Societal engagement (should we consider using external stakeholders on panels?)
 - iii. Internationalisation, equality, diversity, and inclusion.
 - iv. The changing funding model in Iceland and whether QEF3 will need to look at research in this new context?
 - v. Opportunity for universities to select one issue for probing. This could be built on the case study and find inspiration in the Finish approach.

It will be important to ensure that the scope of QEF3 does not become too burdensome on the universities.

(11) 2022 Annual Conference programme

- i. The programme of the Board 2022 annual conference on quality enhancement of Masters degrees was discussed. The majority of speakers and panel discussants has been confirmed but a panellist representing working life has not been identified. Possible candidates include a working lawyer, an engineer or a health care professional working in a hospital who can give input around the question of what Masters degrees are for and what a high-quality Masters degree looks like. ÁH will submit suggestions for panellists to SOS.
- ii. Speakers will be asked to share their PowerPoints in advance and the two international speakers, who come from the same university, will be given background information and asked to contextualise their presentations beyond their institution.
- iii. The introduction to the conference should be reviewed in the context of the proposed study of masters.

(12) 2021 Annual Report

The 2021 Annual Report was approved with minor modifications. The formatting is identical to previous Annual Reports, but the format will be revised next year to make the report visually more appealing. There may also be an opportunity to create a 1-2 page shorter version/fact sheet to share with Ministers and high-level stakeholders.

(13) Update on applicants for Senior Adviser position

Eight applications were received for the position of Senior Adviser before the deadline. An evaluation panel (AS, CL and SOS) will select a group of applicants to interview using a standardised form in the first week of March. The panel will report the results of interviews back to the Board and consult with the Board before an offer is made to a candidate.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00.

22 February

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Crichton Lang, Riitta Pyykkö, Philip Winn, and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

The meeting was held via video conference call and convened at 10:00, Icelandic time.

(15) Discussion of QEF2 IUA IWR report

- i. The review report concluded with confidence judgements on management of standards of degrees and awards, as well as on the quality of the student learning experience. The Board accepted the report's judgments.
- ii. Rector Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir joined the meeting at 11:00. Discussions about the QEF2 IUA IRW report.

- iii. Rector Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir left the meeting at 12:20.

(16) Proposal for a review on Masters provision in Iceland

- i. A proposal for review of Masters provision in Iceland, to be commissioned by the Ministry, was discussed. The Ministry requested that the review be a mapping exercise of provision of degrees at cycle 2.2 in the Icelandic Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The proposal outlined the following focus areas: range of provision, learning outcomes approach, QA of Masters degrees, level-alignment of curriculum and independence/common coverage across similar degrees. The review would be primarily based on desk research and a survey of academic leadership and administrative/support staff, as well as follow-up interviews of key members of staff.
- ii. Board members noted that the purpose of the study as outlined in the proposal should better reflect the request from the Ministry; that links to practice and employability could be explored; that students and graduates could be surveyed and/or interviewed; that data on student profile should be included to the extent that they are available; and that language of instruction should be queried, as well as whether degrees are offered jointly or in English.
- iii. SOS will revise the proposal in line with Board feedback and following further dialogue with the Ministry. The Board will not review the next version of the proposal.

(17) Budget update

- i. The financial accounting for calendar year 2021 has been closed. Total Board revenue was ISK 52.2 million and expenses totalled ISK 51.9 million. The unspent core budget would have been more had the Board not absorbed into the core budget the cost of the RU accreditation of Sport Science and the IRF Impact assessment.
- ii. A draft budget for calendar year 2022 was discussed. The budget is divided in two parts on the request of the Ministry: a core budget for QEF activities and a budget for special projects. SOS will combine the two budgets for the next Board meeting in a separate spreadsheet.
- iii. The core budget for 2022 totals ISK 58.2 million. The budget is based on a 600 GBP daily honorarium for members, four Board meetings in Iceland, eight months of salaries for a Senior Adviser, and PW, AS and CL attending REAC meetings in person. There is allocation in the budget for the AUI QEF2 IWR and the review of QEF2.
- iv. The special projects budget includes the review of strategic management at the Árni Magnússon Institute and two reviews that may be conducted in 2022 for purposes of alleviating limited confidence, as well as the reviews of Masters and online provision. The budgets of the reviews of Masters and online provision have not been negotiated with the Ministry, but the total budget for both cannot exceed ISK 25 Million. The special projects budget also includes funding for the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education

(NOQA) 2022 conference and meeting, to be held in Iceland in September, to which three board members will be invited.

(18) AOB

The priority for the May meeting of the Board is to meet with Icelandic partners. If there is not enough time to conduct other business, an additional online Board meeting will be scheduled around mid-May.

Meeting adjourned at 15:15