

Minutes, Board meeting of 2-3 March 2021

2 March

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice-Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Riitta Pyykkö, Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir as observer (from 14:00), Áslaug Helgadóttir as observer (from 14:00), and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

Apologies received: Philip Winn.

The meeting was held via video conference call and convened at 12:00 noon, Icelandic time.

(1) Agenda, Minutes and matters arising

The agenda of this meeting and the minutes of the previous Board meetings (9-10 November 2020, 8 February 2021 and 17 February 2021) were adopted.

(2) QEF2 Update

- i. The UI IWR will be conducted online 3-7 May 2021. The team members that have been confirmed are Susan Hunter (Chair), Bjarki Grönfeldt (student), Philip Nolan, Sijbolt Noorda, and Dorte Salskov-Iversen. A member from a peer institution will be nominated soon. Names of possible Team Secretaries were discussed.
- ii. The IUA IWR will be conducted in September. Two team members have been confirmed. Names of additional team members were discussed. A member from a peer institution will be identified soon. After a member from a peer institution has been identified, the last remaining member will be appointed. The Secretariat will request nominations from LÍS for a student member of the team.
- iii. The UNAK IWR will be conducted in November 2021. The Board discussed candidates for the role of chair and peer member. Once a chair and team member from a peer institution have been identified, two additional international experts will be appointed to the team. The Secretariat will request nominations from LÍS for a student member of the team.
- iv. Approval of new expert for the pool of potential reviewers.
- v. Approval of candidates for Stage 2 Appeals Panel.

(3) Update on commissioned work

- i. An update was provided on the hiring of a project manager for the impact assessment of the Icelandic Research Fund. Phil, Riitta and Siggí interviewed three potential candidates for the position. The top candidate has accepted the position and will start working in mid-March. The position is half-time for 12 months.

- ii. An update was provided on the accreditation review of doctoral studies in Sport and Exercise Science at RU. The team chair is Frank Quinault (University of St Andrews) and the other team members are Håkan Larson (Swedish School of Sport and Health Science), Fiona Crozier (independent consultant), and Ólöf Gerður Skúladóttir (doctoral student of Museum Studies at UI). Team training is scheduled for March 17. The review will be conducted online on March 22-24.

(4) Planning ahead

- i. A document outlining a plan for evaluating the success of QEF2 and the development of QEF3 was circulated in advance of the meeting. The Board agreed that the evaluation should be relatively straightforward, with the overarching question being “is QEF2 working for enhancement” with a focus on the principles and values of the QEF. That is, is Icelandic higher education better off, collectively and at individual institutions, because of the QEF? The universities could be urged to give examples of how the QEF has worked to benefit them.
- ii. The evaluation should incorporate an assessment of how well the various bodies and components of QEF2 are working, in particular the Board and the QC. For example, are these bodies communicating well with stakeholders and operating in the most effective way? Are the number and types of meetings appropriate?
- iii. The evaluation of QEF2 will be organised by a steering committee that will set milestones for the project. The chair of the committee will be a member of the Board. Other members will be recruited from the Board, QC and LÍS. The steering group will then report to the entire Board.
- iv. To ensure externality, the Board will prepare a shortlist with names of three international experts, and ask the Quality Council to rank them in order of preference. The international expert would come to Iceland to interview all stakeholders and observe a Board meeting, and possibly annual meetings and an Annual Conference as well. As part of his/her report, the international expert would be asked to comment on the use of the ESG (Parts 2 & 3) in QEF2.
- v. Guidance notes will not be included in the QEF2 evaluation themes. The same applies to appeals and complaints if there are none in the course of QEF2.
- vi. Before the May 2021 meeting of the Board, the planning document will be re-written in two parts: the past (evaluation of QEF2) and looking to the future (developing QEF3) with a clear methodology for each part. Conferences and seminars will be used to address known issues that have arisen in the course of QEF2 and to develop themes to be included in QEF3.
- vii. A list of possible themes for Board-led conferences and seminars was circulated in advance of the meeting with suggested dates. Board members ranked their top-5 topics. The following seminar topics were identified through this ranking:
 - a. What type of common data should be used?

- b. How to integrate internal QA into high-level university governance and ensure follow-through of QA action plans?
- c. Are governing boards optimised for their functions?
- d. Doctoral education
- e. How to showcase the universities' role in society?
- f. How to strengthen cooperation across Iceland through the national network of universities? Might interinstitutional cooperation bolster such aspects as the provision of distance learning, the management of research, interdisciplinarity, and the second and third cycles?

SOS will produce a firm proposal of seminars for the next Board meeting in May 2021. It may be possible to combine some topics or even run parallel sessions with two or more themes.

Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir and Áslaug Helgadóttir join the meeting.

(5) Icelandic and European update

- i. At present, the limit on public gatherings is 50 and social distancing is recommended at two meters. Artistic events and religious services are allowed with a 200-person maximum as long as two meters separate attendees and they wear masks. The maximum number of people allowed inside bars, restaurants and shops follows the same rules. Anyone travelling to Iceland from abroad must show a recent COVID-negative test to enter the country. Many hotels remain closed. The vaccination rollout in Iceland is fairly slow.
- ii. Universities are operating almost exclusively online, although practical training classes continue in some cases. In some cases, Autumn final exams were conducted in classrooms with 2-metre social distancing and mandatory wearing of masks. Student councils voiced their opposition to this arrangement. Universities can have 150 students in a given space with 1-meter social distancing. Registered students are not eligible for unemployment benefits, even though they have been working and paying into common unemployment funds. LÍS and/or the student unions may challenge these arrangements in court.
- iii. SOS developed in collaboration with Carl Bögild from the Greenland Ministry of Education, Culture and Church a proposal for a series of online seminars on internal quality assurance to be delivered to representatives with responsibilities in internal quality assurance at Greenlandic higher education institutions. The proposal has been accepted by the Greenlandic ministry with a budget of approximately 18,000 EUR/ 16,000 GBP. Terms of reference for this work will be drafted and shared with the Board for comments. The names of presenters are yet to be determined. These could include members of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education, the Quality Council, or other Icelandic or international experts in internal quality assurance.

- iv. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is preparing a change to the law and associated rules in such a way as to change the conditions for admission to a university for students who wish to start a first university degree. At present, the admission requirements are a "matriculation examination". If the amendment is approved, a "final examination at the third aptitude level" would allow automatic entry to university. This change is intended to provide equal access opportunities for students who have completed art, technical and vocational education at the third level of competence and those who have completed a matriculation examination to enter university. This change may, however, lead to more formalisation of intake requirements and remove flexibility to admit. Consequently, QEF3 should look at how this translates in the admission process and outcome.
- v. Discussion of a recent report¹ on the social dimension of student life in the European Higher Education Area in 2019, which is based on data collected as part of the Eurostudent survey. Of particular interest to the Board are the following findings:
 - a. Iceland has a very high proportion of students (20%) that enter university via an "alternative access route"
 - b. Over 20% of Icelandic students self-identify as having a "disability, impairment, long-standing health problem, or functional limitation which limits or severely limits them in their studies"
 - c. Icelandic students are more likely to work, and to work longer hours, than other students in Europe
 - d. Iceland is at the top of the list of nations where working students agree with the question "I could not be in university without a job" (72%).
 - e. About 50% of Icelandic students who work more than 20 hours a week say that work negatively impacts their studies.
 - f. Over 30% of Icelandic students say they have some or great financial difficulties.

Discussion followed on whether women are possibly disproportionately affected by these conditions than men. AMG and ÁH noted that Iceland has good child care availability, especially for students with very young children. However, students do not have parental leave salary like people on the job market. It is likely that women are still disproportionately affected by having children; managing family and home; and caring for the older generation. The Board decided to include the most recent Eurostudent data in the experts' training.

(6) Feedback received on document on the future structure and trajectory of the Board

A draft document on the Board's future trajectory was circulated to stakeholders, and a summary of stakeholder feedback on the document was discussed. The document contained four recommendations.

¹ https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/Eurostudent_brochure_WEB.pdf

Recommendation 1 – Quality enhancement in Icelandic higher education will be further promoted through a range of additional activities with the sector and internationally.

Recommendation 2 – An Advisory Council will be established to provide advice and feedback to enhance the effectiveness of QEF and the Icelandic quality framework.

Recommendation 3 – Four Board meetings will be held in Iceland to maintain contact with the sector and hold other meetings will be held via videoconferences.

Recommendation 4 – The Board Secretariat will expand to two fulltime posts (Executive Director, Deputy Director) and a part-time Administrative Assistant.

All stakeholders who responded were supportive of recommendations 1, 3 and 4, but one stakeholder group raised concerns with recommendation 2. This group noted that one more advisory body would possibly make the running of the QEF overly complicated, and that the subcommittees of the Science and Technology Policy Council could serve the same purpose as an Advisory Council. A meeting will be set up with representatives of this stakeholder group and the Board Chair and Vice-Chair to further discuss the nature of these reservations.

(7) Annual report 2020

The 2020 annual report was approved with minor changes.

(8) REAC update

The minutes of the November 2020 REAC meeting and the agenda of the upcoming March 2021 REAC meeting were discussed. REAC will discuss a programme for a seminar on research assessment in its March meeting. REAC could take advantage of existing webinars that are publicly available on this topic so more time can be devoted to discussions in the seminar.

(9) Budget update

The Board budget, including expenses to date, was discussed. Total expenses so far in 2021 are minimal and within projected budget. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has not been able to confirm whether budget for work started in 2020 will carry over to 2021.

(10) Preparation for annual conference

On March 3, the Board will host a webinar titled *Teaching and Learning Post-Covid: What Lies Ahead?*² In the second half of the webinar, a parallel session will be held for the Rectors of the Icelandic universities. This session will be led by Prof. Crichton Lang, and will focus on enhancing the institutional environment for online education. The conference theme was positively received and 126 participants have registered, including three Swedish participants.

² <https://qef.is/events/board-webinar-2021/>

Meeting adjourned at 16:00.

3 March

The meeting was held via video conference call and convened at 12:00 noon.

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice-Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Riitta Pyykkö, Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir as observer (from 14:00), Áslaug Helgadóttir as observer (from 14:00), and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

Apologies received: Philip Winn.

(11) Succession planning

- i. A document on succession planning for Board chair and members was circulated in advance of the meeting. A revised version of this document will be prepared for the May 2021 meeting of the Board that will emphasise that Board members should have minimal ties to Iceland, for example being international and not a current or recent resident of Iceland.
- ii. The Board chair should, as far as is practicable, have served as member or vice-chair before assuming the position of chair. The term of Board chair is to be set at six years. If the Chair is a regular member of the Board before becoming Chair, the years of service as a member would not be counted towards the six years to be served as chair. It is also desirable that the same person be chair for an entire cycle. The term of Board members is to be three years, renewable once.
- iii. The succession plan will need to incorporate how a new REAC chair is to be identified and prepared for the role, as well as when the transition period should ideally begin. A new REAC chair could come from the present Board membership, or be a future member. The incoming chair could begin involvement in REAC as an observer and/or vice-chair.
- iv. The Board will have a documented process for nominating new members for appointment by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The Board will send one name to the Ministry for each vacancy on the Board.
- v. Board members should be professionally active, or be recently retired, at the time of appointment.
- vi. The geographical balance within the Board should be ensured by normally including at least one member from Scandinavia, one member from the UK, one member from the US and one member from Europe that is not from UK or Scandinavia.
- vii. The Board website will have an open advert for persons interested in contributing to the QEF as a Board member or reviewer.

Meeting adjourned at 12:45.