

Minutes, Board meeting of 8-9 November 2021

8 November

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

Apologies received: Philip Winn

The meeting convened at 9:00, Icelandic time.

(1) Agenda, Minutes and matters arising

The agenda of this meeting and the minutes of the previous Board meeting (13-14 September, 2021) were adopted with modifications.

(2) QEF2 Update

- i. UNAK will have its IWR visit on 22-26 November, 2021. It will likely be on-site. The review team will be as follows:
 - Kimberly Bogle Jubinville (Chair). Chief Academic Officer and Senior Vice President of Academic Quality, Accreditation and Support, Southern New Hampshire University, USA. Jubinville served on QEF2 RU IWR Team.
 - Oliver Vettori. Dean, Accreditation and Quality Management and Director, Programme Management & Teaching and Learning Support, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria. Vettori served on QEF2 BU IWR Team.
 - Alan Davidson. International higher education quality assurance consultant. Former Dean of the Department for Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Robert Gordon University, Scotland. Davidson served on QEF2 RU IWR Team.
 - Taina Pihlajaniemi. Vice Rector/Vice President (Research), University of Oulu, Finland (peer institution).
 - Student member: Sandra Kristín Jónasdóttir. BA Anthropology from University of Iceland and currently enrolled in a Masters of Public Health Programme at University of Iceland.
- ii. The IWR of AUI will take place in Autumn 2022. AUI listed the following as peer or aspirational peer institutions: Norwegian University of Life Sciences; Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences; University of the Highlands and Islands; and Estonian University of Life Sciences. A shortlist of possible chairs and members of the review team was discussed. CL, BB (for a US name) and RP will suggest additional names and SOS will develop a revised rank-ordered list once their suggestions have been received.

(3) Update on annual meeting with AUI

The annual meeting between Board representative (EH) to AUI took place 29 September 2021. The annual meeting centred on the University's submission of Subject-Level Reviews for its three faculties and their follow-up; updates on AUI strategic developments; updates from students; and preparing for institutional review in Autumn 2022. A draft note on the meeting was discussed.

(4) Annual meetings

- i. A general discussion on annual meetings confirmed that their purpose is to ensure a two-way communication channel between the universities and the Quality Board; that is, to get to know the institutions and to ensure that the institutions know about the Quality Board' activities. The annual meetings have always been seen as a communication device and not a consulting opportunity. This is particularly important when a limited confidence judgment is issued. In this case, the annual meeting should continue to be firmly framed as a follow-up to reviews rather than a consultancy. Any intervention in this context should be done on behalf of the full Board rather than the Board representative.
- ii. It was agreed that Board member assignments to universities should be rotated every three years unless other events necessitate a change, for example a new Board member joining or a review with a limited confidence judgment. It is important for the Board to maintain dialogue through annual meetings but it must be clear that this dialogue can never become consultation. For QEF3, it may also be considered to have more than one annual meeting in the wake of a review with a limited confidence judgment and to define more clearly whom to meet with (for example, directors of central administration units) and under what arrangements (for example, with students alone). One possibility to explore for QEF3 is to hold a two-part meeting: one with the rector alone to discuss big items and one with the wider team to discuss progress.
- iii. Changes in assignment of Board representatives to universities were made in response to BB's pending retirement and CL joining the Board. It was decided that EH will become Board representative to RU and stay as Board representative to AUI. RP will become Board representative to HU and CL become Board representative to BU. SOS will send a note to the Rectors of these universities announcing the new assignments.
- iv. The Board will need to develop guidelines for the Mid-term Progress reports.

(5) Update on commissioned work

- i. The Quality Board has hosted four webinars for representatives of Greenlandic and Faroese universities on quality enhancement. Engagement of participants has increased steadily over the course of the project. CL will travel to Greenland, along with two Icelandic Quality managers (Áslaug Helgadóttir and Skúli Skúlason), to offer a half-day workshop on monitoring of

programmes culminating in SLR and to meet separately with representatives from individual Greenlandic institutions. Before the visit, the Greenlandic institutions will be asked to reply to a brief survey to provide a high-level overview of how they plan to organise their quality assurance. As part of the visit, CL will schedule a meeting with Carl Egede Bøgild of the Greenlandic Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Church to discuss legal frameworks and other arrangements for higher education in Greenland.

- ii. The Board discussed a number of actions to support all universities in Iceland in developing quality enhancement processes in light of lessons learned from the commissioned work in Greenland. These include developing fact sheets and/or video training modules on key quality processes, such as use of learning outcomes and programme monitoring and review. As a first step, Alan Davidson will be commissioned to write a fact sheet of no more than five pages on periodic programme monitoring and review.
- iii. The project manager for the IRF review, Katrín Frímannsdóttir, updates PW and SOS on progress in bi-weekly online meetings. A survey was sent to approximately 230 applicants to the IRF and Katrín has conducted one-on-one interviews with applicants. Bibliometric analyses will start in December. Based on progress so far, Katrín is confident that she will be able to capture the considerable impact of the Fund on the Icelandic research ecosystem, the science in respective fields and on society. When the report is published (before Summer 2022), it may be appropriate to have a launch event. This would need to be discussed with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (the Ministry).
- iv. Tove Bull has developed a handbook for the review of strategic management at the Árni Magnússon Institute. The handbook was sent to the Institute in September and work has already begun on developing a self-assessment in line with the handbook. The handbook will serve, with some minor additions, as a handbook for the review team.
- v. NS reported on a meeting with UNAK in October to discuss progress on an action plan submitted in response to judgments of limited confidence in Police Studies.

(6) Budget update

Expenses to date are well below projected 2021 expenses, mostly because two IWR teams will receive fees later in the year and because travel and associated costs (for Board, REAC, review teams and Secretariat) are very low due to COVID-19.

(7) AOB

The 2022 annual conference will be on masters degrees. The conference programme will be based on a programme agreed to in 2019 for a conference that was cancelled due to COVID-19. SOS will re-circulate the 2019 programme to Board members for comments and recruit speakers once the programme has been approved.

Meeting adjourned at 17:00

9 November

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir (until 11:00), Oisín Hassan by videoconference, Ellen Hazelkorn by videoconference, Áslaug Helgadóttir (until 11:00), Crichton Lang, Riitta Pyykkö, Philip Winn (until 10:00) by videoconference) and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

In attendance from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (11:00-12:00): Helgi Freyr Kristinsson, Jón Vilberg Guðjónsson, Sigríður Geirsdóttir and Una Strand Viðarsdóttir.

In attendance by videoconference from the Rectors' Conference (13:30-14:30): Jón Atli Benediktsson (Chair), Eyjólfur Guðmundsson Friðrika Harðardóttir, Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir, Margrét Jónsdóttir Njarðvík, Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, and Ragnheiður Þórarinsdóttir.

In attendance from the Quality Council (14:30-16:00): Áslaug Helgadóttir (Chair), Derek Allen, Sóley Björt Guðmundsdóttir by videoconference, Stefán Kalmansson by videoconference, Vaka Óttarsdóttir by videoconference, Skúli Skúlason, Guðmunda Smáradóttir by videoconference, Ása Björk Stefánsdóttir by videoconference.

In attendance from LÍS: Derek Allen (16:00-17:00) and Kolbrún Lára Kjartansdóttir (16:45-17:00).

The meeting convened at 9:00, Icelandic time.

(8) REAC Update

- i. The impact assessment of the Icelandic Research Fund is ongoing, and PW is optimistic that the resulting report will generate discussion and have an impact locally.
- ii. REAC hosted a webinar on September 10 and a follow-up on-site conference on October 1 that was streamed simultaneously online. Both events were well attended and successful in PW's opinion. PW believes that the webinar format works well for REAC events, as it can reach everybody without them having to travel. PW and REAC have discussed annual REAC events of a similar nature, provided that resources are available to host such events. Topics would be subject to REAC and Board discussions.
- iii. The definition of impact was discussed during the webinar and conference, as well as what principles should underpin the evaluation of societal impact. PW is of the opinion that impact is best assessed at department level, perhaps as a case study, and that SLR is likely a good vehicle for such evaluation. Ideally, impact would be evaluated in a holistic process, whether it be at department or university level. Any evaluation would also need to be consistent across the universities and there must be a clear distinction between Board evaluation and what the universities are doing in their own space.

- iv. It was noted that REAC's work towards QEF3 must be in step with the rest of the Board's work towards QEF3. It would be best to look at engagement first and postpone any impact analysis. Possible research-related topics to explore in QEF3 include ethics, openness (of outputs, data, etc.), the role of students, and responsibility/public trust.
- v. Importantly, QEF3 will need to be very clear about the focus of SLR vs IWR in relation to research.

PW left meeting at 10:00.

(9) Planning the period of reflection

The Board discussed the open-ended questionnaire and recommended cutting down on the questions.

(10) Icelandic and European updates

- i. A new government has not been announced in Iceland following the 25 September election as complaints of voting irregularities are still being investigated.
- ii. At present, the limit on public gatherings is 500 but can be unlimited if rapid tests are used upon entry. Social distancing is recommended at 1 meter, with mask use mandated if 1-meter social distancing cannot be arranged. Rates of infections have been increasing in the past week. 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.
- iii. Rektor Eyjólfur Guðmundsson at UNAK has called publicly for a government policy on distance education and UI is preparing a policy on distance education. LIS is monitoring these discussions.

(11) Meeting with staff of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

- i. There is provision for increased Board Secretariat staffing in the Parliamentary bill for the 2022 state budget, which will be debated in December. It will not be known whether the funding will be available for increased staffing until the bill has passed.
- ii. SOS will prepare a job advertisement based on the job description for a Deputy Director in the document titled "Board Structure and Trajectory", previously shared with the Ministry and have it ready for publication in early January if funding will be available. This would make it possible to advertise in January and have interviews with participation of Board member(s) online and/or in person in late January or early February.
- iii. The Board discussed its plans for activities to support capacity building for internal quality assurance in the Icelandic universities. These would consist of, for example, online modules and fact sheets on basics of quality assurance and benchmarking exercises. These activities

could be done by a Deputy Director, or alternatively through *ad hoc* funding. A Deputy Director, if hired, could also support LÍS in developing support activities and materials for students participating in quality assurance, whether internal or external.

- iv. The 2021 budget was discussed in light of expenditures to date.
- v. For 2022, the Ministry plans to commission the Board to conduct two special reviews: one on Masters-level provision in Iceland and one on online provision in Iceland. These should dovetail well with the development of QEF3 and the planned 2022 annual Board conference (see #7, above). If the Board applies for full ENQA membership in 2022, the application and review will be funded *ad hoc* by the Ministry. The 2022 NOQA meeting, if held in Iceland, would be supported by *ad hoc* funding from the Ministry.

(12) Meeting by videoconference with Rectors' Conference

Jón Atli Benediktsson, Eyjólfur Guðmundsson, Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir, Margrét Jónsdóttir Njarðvík, Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, Ragnheiður Þórarinsdóttir and Friðrika Harðardóttir joined the meeting at 13:30 and departed at 14:30.

- i. Rectors reported that government contributions to higher education increased in line with the increased influx of students resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not clear whether this increased funding will continue.
- ii. The plan for the evaluation of QEF3 was presented. QEF at present captures education and research, but there also needs to be a focus on university profiles and strategic planning and management. One possibility being considered at present is whether to ask the universities to pick one review target as part of their IWR for purposes of receiving feedback with no associated confidence judgment. The leeway for universities to decide themselves on the unit of analysis in SLR (department or school level, for example) may be increased in QEF3. There may be increased requirements for common data sets to underpin IWRs. Rectors were in general supportive of these suggestions.
- iii. How the Board communicates results of its reviews to the press and the public, whether they be conducted in the course of the QEF or as commissioned reviews, will be discussed in the development of QEF3, with a special consideration for translation of key concepts into Icelandic.
- iv. The Board presented plans to support capacity building for internal quality assurance through brief online modules and fact sheets on basics in quality assurance. This will likely help incoming Quality Managers in particular.

(13) Meeting with Quality Council.

Áslaug Helgadóttir, Derek Allen and Skúli Skúlason joined the meeting. Sóley Björt Guðmundsdóttir, Stefán Kalmansson, Vaka Óttarsdóttir, Guðmunda Smáradóttir and Ása Björk Stefánsdóttir joined by videoconference, for a meeting that lasted from 14:30 to 16:00.

- i. It was noted that the meeting between QC, AS and NS in October was very helpful. The Board is continuing to develop methods of evaluating QEF2 to inform the development of QEF3. A steering group with representation from the Board, QC and LÍS will lead the evaluation. Feedback will mostly be collected through an open-ended questionnaire and focus groups. It was emphasised that QC is free to organise its independent data collection as part of this evaluation and that any additional data would be welcomed. QC members noted a general need for standard data sets, including on student learning experience and research activities, as well as a need for toolkits for developing and implementing quality policies and enhancements through clear structures and processes.
- ii. When QEF3 is ready, the Board will host a launch conference and subsequently offer orientations and workshops for the sector. ÁH noted that the universities would at the same time need to start thinking about their own QA systems and how quality needs to be embedded in their everyday work. External consultation or other forms of support to the universities would be helpful in this regard and QC could possibly use its own resources to fund that work.
- iii. The Board has asked the Ministry for more resources for the Secretariat to secure its operation and to support the excellent work of QC and LÍS. The Board feels otherwise very well supported by the sector.
- iv. The QC is developing a formal collaboration agreement with a working group of teaching developers in the seven universities. The agreement will specify roles and responsibilities of both parties as they collaborate to support enhancement of teaching. QC is also encouraging universities to implement the common data agreed in QC.
- v. QC will host a webinar in Icelandic in November on the student voice in QA, focusing on feedback students receive on their feedback. The webinar will seek to empower students to be active participants in the feedback process. The webinar will have five breakout sessions, each focused on a different question.
- vi. In general, QC members have been happy with QEF2 annual meetings. In particular, QC members noted the helpfulness of the informal dialogue focusing on development and on discussions about the universities' preparations for IWRs. Annual meetings are a means to maintain contact between Board and the universities, discuss future plans, share information and get feedback on SLRs, to name a few. It was emphasised that annual meetings are not an evaluation and cannot be a consultancy. Board members need to walk a fine line between learning about the universities and engaging in a dialogue about their needs. To learn more about the universities and the sector, it is also helpful to periodically rotate members across the universities. Possible changes to annual meetings in QEF3 include more explicit follow up of recommendations from previous IWR and

involving more stakeholder groups from the universities (for example, heads of administrative departments) and meeting some groups alone (for example, students).

- vii. Some key terms of QEF do not translate well into Icelandic, in particular “confidence”, “standards” and “judgments”. The Board will continue to work with the sector to convey these concepts better in Icelandic for QEF3 and explore whether the English concepts need changing or if better translations are needed. For example, “limited confidence” could be replaced by “conditional confidence”, which would translate better in Icelandic. Some QA agencies make a distinction between *requirements* and *recommendations*, for example, and this distinction could be possible in QEF3. The Board needs to consider its aims and methods for communicating with the public in parallel.

(14) Meeting with LÍS.

- i. LÍS wants to make sure students can access their education and finish their courses without risking their health during the ongoing COVID wave. At the same time, measures to protect students should ensure quality is preserved. Most students have laptops if lockdowns are instituted. LÍS is meeting with the unions of the universities every three weeks and the next meeting will be devoted to developing a statement on the universities’ response to COVID.
- ii. LÍS developed a statement on quality in higher education that subsequently served in part as a basis for a similar ESU statement. LÍS conducts annual workshops on student involvement in quality assurance and would welcome more Board support for additional activities to support student engagement. LÍS would in particular welcome an approach that avoided jargon as much as possible. It was suggested that the Board consult with a linguist, anthropologist and an expert in translational studies (for example, Gauti Kristmannsson) as it develops its QEF3 language and communications strategy.

Kolbrún Lára Kjartansdóttir joined the meeting at 16:45.

- iii. LÍS does not have a position on whether judgments are necessary in the QEF. Topics for thematic reviews that LÍS would welcome include status of students with non-typical/non-Icelandic backgrounds and students with disabilities. In other words, LÍS would support a commissioned review by the Board on diversity.

Derek Allen and Kolbrún Lára Kjartansdóttir left the meeting at 17:00

(15) Debriefing of stakeholder meetings.

- i. Board members expressed satisfaction with the very productive meetings with stakeholders. Annual meetings may have to be longer to have more time with students and heads of administrative units, as well as to give space to discuss academic governance in more detail. Overall, a focus in QEF3 on societal impact would be welcomed by the sector.

Meeting adjourned at 17:15