

Minutes, Board meeting, 16-17 Sep 2019

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In attendance: Andrée Sursock (AS), chair, Barbara Brittingham (BB), Oisín Hassan (OH), Norman Sharp (NS), Frank Quinault (FQ), Ellen Hazelkorn (EH), Philip Winn (PW), Erna Sigurðardóttir (ES), Áslaug Helgadóttir (ÁH) (joined at 12:00, Points 13-14), Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (SÓS) for the minutes.

1. The agenda was adopted without modification.
2. The Minutes from the last meeting were approved without modification.
3. Annual meetings: EH, and PW/OH gave an update on the annual meetings held at Bifröst University (BU) and University of Iceland (UI), respectively.
4. PW updated the Board on the most recent REAC meeting. There was very positive discussion about PURE, which is the CRIS system that will be procured for Iceland. REAC is a very thoughtful committee but there is a need for national coordination in implementing PURE. Particularly, there is a need to engage the National Library more formally; SÓS will engage with the Head Librarian before the next REAC meeting. REAC will continue to develop its data definition document so that it can go to the sector and MESC for information. Before that, the document will go through the IUA research committee. REAC will analyse research management in the SLRs to identify common challenges. The issue of research cooperation (perhaps through a single national graduate school) was also discussed. Finally, PW noted that the ENQA SAR should include a SWOT analysis related to teaching-research linkages and REAC. That would give further support for having research management in the QEF.
5. SÓS presented an overview of progress on SLRs and IWRs in QEF2. All institutions are on track to submit their SLRs, although a small number of requests for a deadline extension have been granted.
6. Discussion about the commissioned review of Police Studies. The Board agreed to the team composition, albeit the student member who has not been identified yet. Ideally, the student member would be a woman from a vocational education that includes internship (for example nursing education, teacher education or psychology). The visit should take place in early May. The Board is waiting for a contract signed by MESC. SÓS will not serve as secretary but will accompany the team to ensure consistency with the QEF2 approach and the terms of reference for this review.
7. Discussion about the Hólar team. The team was approved. OH noted that LIS may want to train a group of students that can take part in reviews, rather than recruiting people ad hoc for these positions. This will be a discussion point with the LIS leadership in November.

8. Discussion of the UI IWR. The team was approved. NS and Crichton Lang will get together with Ian Pirie for a chair training session in Scotland in November if at all possible. RU's QEF2 IWR will be shared with Pirie beforehand.
9. IRF study has been placed on the back burner due to work overload. SÓS needs to work out a more precise budget and discuss with MESC.
10. Rector Ari Kristinn Jónsson (AKJ) joined the meeting to discuss the RU IWR process. The Board took the opportunity to thank him for hosting the Board's annual conference on August 31 and for presenting there as well.

The discussion was based on the following formal agenda:

1. What are the main take-aways for the University?
2. Addressing the recommendations received (e.g. initial thoughts on the recommendations, perceived obstacles, etc.)
3. Feedback on the process:
 - Was the IWR report sufficiently contextual and taking into account the university's strategy?
 - Did the RA process and the IWR report assist RU in identifying strengths and weaknesses?
 - Were the efforts linked to the IWR process and going through the visit proportionate to the benefits that RU derived?
 - Any reaction to the inclusion of the research management in IWR?
4. Any reaction to the composition or effectiveness of the expert panel?
5. Any other issues

By and large, the University found the process very positive and useful.

The Board informed AKJ that it is not planning to host a post-IWR conference as it did in QEF1, but that universities may want to host one of their own. Board would collaborate with the universities in the planning of that conference if requested. AKJ agreed that the post-IWR conference should be left to the university to decide. RU plans to organise an internal meeting and will discuss its IWR with the other rectors.

Board and AKJ agreed to have an annual meeting on 18 November 2019. NS, OH and Riitta Pyykkö will attend from the Board.

AKJ left the meeting at 11:10.

11. Lessons learned from the RU's IWR process:

- Link of QEF2 to the ESG: the text box at the end of main sections of the report worked well, but the link to ESG could have been made more explicit in the main text of the report, while avoiding that this becomes a tick-box exercise. With the exception of the main chapter headings, the table of contents provided in an annex to the Handbook, should be seen as a template. Specifically, if there is no evidence gathered for a given subheading, it is better to leave it out.
- In future IWR reports, there should be no references to standings in international university rankings because they are not measuring the same aspects as QEF2. They should not be endorsed by the IWR reports and should not be used as affirmation of impact. However, reports can make reference to universities using such rankings as benchmarks.
- SÓS will ensure that future RAs include a focus on doctoral education.
- The Board noted that ethics was not brought up in the discussion of research management.

Looking to the future, the topics that could be highlighted in the QEF3 handbook include:

- What is important in terms of graduate/doctoral programmes and equality;
- quality of research environment;
- impact/engagement; placements and internships;
- online and collaborative provision.

Many of these refer to transversal issues that could be discussed in the March 2020 meeting with the RC.

The Board also noted that the schedule of the visit is too dense, and that bulleting was not done systematically after each meeting. Future schedules should take this into account.

12. AS provided an update on her visit with SÓS to AUI, BU, HU and UNAK on 2-3 September 2019. AS met with the leadership teams in all those universities and was given campus tours. This was a very welcome step which provided an opportunity to discuss in general terms the current priorities of each university and their thoughts about QEF. All four were positive concerning the latter.

Common issues that emerged from those visits:

- How to use the masters' degrees as a way of positioning the university
- How to strengthen research
- How to strengthen cooperation across Iceland through the national network of universities
- Autonomy is limited with respect to human resources (the unions negotiate with the government without the universities' involvement) and generating income.
- All four institutions are offering distance education.

ÁH joined the meeting at 13:30

13. The Board adopted the updated Board Constitution.

14. SÓS provided an update on sector matters since the last meeting:
- Iceland has a high rate of early leavers from education at secondary and tertiary level, and males are the majority. ÁH noted that UI is concerned about demographic trends and dropout rates. It was agreed that this should also be included in the section on cross-cutting issues in the Annual Report.
 - A recent report on the resource efficiency of Nordic universities found that the three universities from Iceland that met criteria for inclusion in the analysis (UI, RU, UNAK) were excluded as they represented extreme values of efficiency.
 - U-Multirank data for UI were highlighted in the Icelandic media, as UI was in the top-25 on 2 of the dimensions captured in these rankings. Discussion turned whether the Board should contribute to the public's understanding of rankings. The two suggestions that were retained are: to see if REAC might pick up this issue and if it could be included in the 2020 Nordic Quality Assurance Agencies (NOQA) conference, which will be hosted by Iceland.
15. AS and SÓS provided an update of the annual conference of NOQA that they attended in the first week of September in Stockholm. A leadership forum was part of the conference, and focused mostly on the identification of Nordic values in Quality Assurance.
16. NS provided an update on the Self-Assessment Report for the planned ENQA review of the Board's operations. NS hopes to have a final version ready for Board approval before the November meeting of the Board. It could then go to stakeholders for consultation. It was agreed that MESC and RANIS would receive the final version.
17. Board discussed a draft of a Guidance Note on Paragraph 25 of the Handbook. SÓS will take the current draft of the Guidance Note to the Quality Council to ask if they feel it is needed or if it is redundant.

Meeting adjourned at 17:00