

### **Minutes, Board meeting of 29 June 2020**

**In attendance:** Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Riitta Pyykkö, Norman Sharp, Philip Winn, Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir from 14:55 as observer and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes). Una Strand Viðarsdóttir, Senior Adviser, Office of Higher Education and Science, MESC, joined the meeting at 14:00 for about 30 minutes.

**Apologies received:** Áslaug Helgadóttir.

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

#### **(1) Agenda, Minutes and matters arising**

The agenda and the minutes were adopted without modifications.

#### **(2) Icelandic and European updates**

- i. Update on meeting with MESC officials on 15 May:
  - a. AS, NS and SÓS represented the Board and Una Strand Viðarsdóttir (Senior Adviser, Office of Higher Education and Science), Jón Vilberg Guðnason (Director, Office of Higher Education and Science) and Helgi Freyr Kristinsson (Senior Adviser, Department of Finance and Administration) represented the Ministry. Ministry officials confirmed that the Board can roll over budget surplus across years if projects are already underway in the prior year. Other surplus will not roll over across years. MESC officials were also alerted to the fact that the rent charged by the National Library for housing the Secretariat represented a structural deficit of 550.000 ISK in the Board budget. In 2020, this will be covered by savings on various items, but this structural deficit will need to be met in the future budgets.
  - b. MESC representatives discussed plans for the Board to undertake additional reviews in the future. MESC will share with the Secretariat a list of proposed projects along with approximate timelines to aid in the Board's budgetary work for 2021 and 2022.
- ii. COVID-19 has resulted in a projected 8.5% reduction in Iceland's GDP in 2020 compared to 2019. Tourism has been particularly affected, with almost no tourists coming since late March. Iceland opened up to a number of countries on 15 June, under certain conditions. Since then, approximately 1,000 passengers have come to Iceland per day, with 1-4 passengers testing positive for COVID-19 per day at the border. New infections were almost non-existent in the days leading up to 15 June but have increased since then. Medical authorities do not foresee relaxations of these procedures in the near future.
- iii. Summer courses at the Icelandic universities have been popular and registrations have exceeded projections. It appears that students register for a variety of reasons, including mature students seeking continuing education, current students catching up on classes they missed in earlier semesters and international students learning Icelandic.

- iv. Some European QA agencies have conducted online reviews of universities in the spring. ENQA conducted a webinar on online reviews, which is now online and Board members have received a link to the video. It was noted that online reviews require more time commitment from review team members and agencies accordingly pay them more than they would for on-site reviews. Some agencies conducting online reviews also empower review teams to stop a review at any time if they feel that the review is not robust enough.

### **(3) Update on annual meetings and meeting with LÍS**

Annual meetings: Prior to the Board meeting, headline outcomes from each annual meeting were circulated to Board members. Board members discussed a number of issues related to these meetings.

Board members generally agreed that conducting annual meetings online was acceptable and met the goals set for those meetings. However, annual meetings should be in-person as a general practice and be held online only in emergency situations.

***National Union of Icelandic Students*** (LÍS). Because students were present in only two of the annual meetings for various legitimate reasons, the Secretariat met for one hour with the current and former Presidents of LÍS to get a student perspective on the sector's response to the pandemic, as well as future opportunities and challenges. The two LÍS representatives felt that the universities did well overall in responding to the pandemic but there was more emphasis on online transfer of class content to the online space rather than making full use of opportunities to develop online pedagogy. LÍS is well-represented in various government committees working under MESOC, including committees on student loan funds and responses to the pandemic. The main focus of LÍS this academic year has been to improve student loan mechanisms and student access to the universities' mental health services. Priorities for the immediate future include developing sustainability and wellbeing policies, as well as addressing the high level of student unemployment.

### **(4) QEF2 Update**

- i. Discussion about IWR surveys for RU and HU.
  - a) Responses were overall positive, with at most one or two critical comments received for some questions. Suggestions for improvement included having a smaller number of students in meetings dedicated to students; having a stronger focus on research and research environment; and review teams spending more time on site for interviews. One comment received from a management-level respondent noted the heavy workload associated with the IWR process, and one IWR team Member expressed low satisfaction with the Secretariat's handling of travel arrangements.
  - b) The number of responses was fairly low for most groups of respondents, which makes interpretation of responses difficult. The low number of responses makes it difficult to decide if any changes are warranted in response to suggestions for changes or critical comments. The Board will consider revising the IWR surveys. Alternative data displays

should also be considered if Likert-type questions are retained, because bar graphs based on a small number of respondents are somewhat unreliable.

- ii. Discussion of the impact of COVID-19 on the IWRs of UI and BU, both of which are scheduled in October 2020 and might be affected by travel restrictions. AS, NS and SÓS held two separate meetings with the UI and BU rectors and discussed three options: postponing the visit to such time as when a face-to-face visit would be possible, holding an online visit, or holding a hybrid visit with some team members face-to-face and others joining online. It was noted that an online (and hybrid) version would be much longer than the face-to-face version to avoid excessive fatigue of team members joining remotely. Consequently, the Board formed the view that the hybrid option was unrealistic because it would imply asking members who were able to come to Iceland to stay from a much longer period than planned. Therefore, although the three options were discussed with the two universities, they will be informed that the hybrid option is no longer available.

In addition, the universities will be informed that the appointed team members might be changed, if they are unavailable or unwilling to hold an online visit, and that the selection of new members will proceed according to the usual process. If held online, an external secretary would be appointed to free up the work of the QB secretariat who would be asked to support the online visit logistically and provide local context to the teams. The QB Secretariat will monitor the progress of the review and keep Board informed.

- iii. Acceptance of new experts into the IWR team expert pool. Pierre de Maret, Achim Hopbach, Sokratis Katsikas and Jacques Lanares were approved as experts for IWR teams in QEF2.

- (5) Una Strand Viðarsdóttir joined the meeting for a brief sector update. Presentation of a 2020 budget with projected and actual spending year-to-date.

- i. The surplus generated by moving the May Board meeting online will be offset partially by fee payments to Board members for the additional June meeting and the annual meetings that were added to the Board members' schedule. Otherwise the budget situation is healthy, but uncertainty surrounds the commissioned reviews because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. The Secretariat will develop a budget overview that shows spending to-date in relation to both the total budget and sub-sections of the budget, for the September meeting of the Board.
- iii. The 2021 budget should be ready for the September meeting of the Board.

- (6) Commissioned work:

- i. UNAK police study. The visit is scheduled for November. A meeting is scheduled on 30 June to discuss with Rector the possible options for this review, given the Covid-related travel restrictions. The rector will be informed that the final decision of possible postponement will revert to MESC given the commissioned nature of this evaluation.
- ii. Discussion of a new commissioned project.

Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir joined the meeting at 14.55. She noted that government actions to support students this summer included government-sponsored jobs and summer courses appear to have been successful. Students are taking advantage of these schemes at a high rate.

**(7) New remit for REAC and proposal for membership**

- i. A proposal for the future trajectory of REAC was circulated and electronically approved by all members before the meeting.
- ii. A meeting of REAC is planned for September 2020, and a seminar is planned on the future of REAC later in autumn 2020. These two events may be conducted online, depending on travel restrictions.

**(8) MoU between Board and MESC**

- i. A revised draft of an MoU between Board and MESC was discussed. The revised draft stated clearly that IWR outcomes are the final decision of the Board and included a clear specification of the respective roles of Board and MESC in managing the Board's Human Resources. The revised draft also incorporated a clearer link between the commitments of the two parties and the future trajectory of the Board.
- ii. The Board agreed on the following text in the MoU related to Board overhead charges on commissioned work: Charges will be levied on commissioned projects depending on the nature of the exercise, with a 25% minimum (subject to periodic review).
- iii. The MoU will be revised and sent to MESC for comments.

**(9) Board trajectory**

A revised draft of a document on the Board's future trajectory was discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00.