

Minutes, Board meeting of 2-3 March 2020

March 2

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Oisín Hassan by videoconference (until 10.30) Ellen Hazelkorn, Riitta Pyykkö, Philip Winn and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson from 10.30 (Minutes).

The meeting was held at Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and convened at 9:00.

(1) Key Statistics on university operations and dealing with at-risk institutions

- i. Board has discussed from time to time the possibility of having standardised data available for IWRs. The regulation from December 2018 empowers the Board to call for key data from the universities. BB presented a simplified data form based on the forms used by the New England Commission on Higher Education. The use of Icelandic key data could help in identifying at-risk institutions and sector-wide themes/concerns, as well as allow universities to monitor their key institutional statistics.
- ii. Two sets of key questions were posed: 1) What data are to be asked for in RAs in QEF3 IWRs? 2) What can be done in the case of at-risk institutions, and when and how would the Board intervene?
- iii. For the first question, the Board agreed to consult QC on the data form developed by BB to start discussions about possible key statistics. These discussions could lead to a possible seminar on institutional research.
- iv. For the second question, the Board agreed that it should avoid at all costs becoming a "police", and that any approach adopted in QEF3 would be "light-touch." For now, the Board can use the annual meetings to communicate possible concerns and discuss progress with the institutions.
- v. Board agreed to develop a three-year plan toward the year of self-reflection and QEF3. This would include a series of seminars with the sector on issues that have been identified in QEF2 and which could be incorporated in the future QEF3 Handbook. Examples of seminars include institutional research, benchmarking, governance and IQA.

(2) Hólar University's IWR Report

- i. Board agreed that it would be useful to edit the report before the institutions' fact checking. This would be minor editing (in tracked changes) that would go back to the Team Chair. Frank Quinault, former Board member, will be asked if he would be willing to take this on for a small fee.
- ii. Hólar University's Rector, Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, joined the Board meeting at 13:15 for a discussion of the recently-completed IWR, based on the following agenda:

- A. What are the main take-aways for the University?
 - B. Addressing the recommendations received (e.g. initial thoughts on the recommendations, perceived obstacles, etc.)
 - C. Feedback on the process
 - D. Any reaction to the composition or effectiveness of the expert panel?
 - E. Any other issues
- iii. Hólar is planning a post-review conference mid-April at Hólar. Crichton Lang, the Chair of the review team and Barbara Brittingham, the member of the Quality Board who has annual meetings with Hólar University, will join via a conference call. The students who contributed most to the RA will be invited to contribute to the conference in person.
- iv. Meeting adjourned at 14:20.

(3) Meeting with Rectors' Conference at University of Iceland

- i. The Board met with the Rectors' Conference at 15:30. All seven rectors were present at the meeting: Jón Atli Benediktsson, UI Rector and Chair of the Rectors' Conference; Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU; Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, Rector of HU; Eyjólfur Guðmundsson, Rector of UNAK; Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir, Rector of IUA; Ragnheiður Inga Þórarinsdóttir, Rector of IAU; and Vilhjálmur Egilsson, Rector of BU. Also present was Friðrika Harðardóttir, the Secretary of the Rectors' Conference.
- ii. The rectors were asked about the consultation phase initiated by MESC on the funding of universities. The plan is to revise the current funding model and introduce performance-based funding. A committee has been formed with representatives from the universities and students to look into different funding models around the world. The next meeting of that committee is scheduled for 13 March 2020. A performance-based funding model will have to be sensitive to the fact that the institutions are different and be underpinned by good databases from the universities and MESC.
- iii. If performance-based funding is introduced, the role of the Quality Board should be carefully considered. The Board noted that different countries tackle this division of labour differently, and that there are varied experiences with the different approaches.
- iv. The Board provided an update on three developments:
 - a. The current cycle is almost half-way through QEF2 and the Board is already looking ahead to QEF3. Research will remain as part of the framework in some fashion. Other issues that need to be addressed include common data sets and the capacity for MESC and the universities to collect the data. The Board will plan seminars with the Rectors' Conference, the Quality Council and other stakeholders to prepare for QEF3, which should be ready in 2024.

- b. The Board has decided not to go forward with its ENQA application because of the uncertainty with respect to its host institution. The Board needs at least a year of stability before it can apply. The Board Secretariat has been without an office since January 1 of this year. The Rectors suggested public agencies and institutions that may have available office space to rent out.
- c. The Board informed of its interest in translating the conclusions of the IWR reports into Icelandic to be posted on the web in order to provide accountability to the general public. The conference of rectors agreed with that proposal.

Meeting adjourned at 16:40

March 3

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Barbara Brittingham (until 13:30), Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir (from 10:30), Oisín Hassan (by videoconference), Ellen Hazelkorn, Áslaug Helgadóttir (from 10:30), Riitta Pyykkö, Philip Winn, and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

The meeting was held at Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and convened at 9:00.

(4) Minutes of November 2019 Board meeting and January 2020 conference call, agenda for present meeting, and updates

- i. Agenda approved with modifications.
- ii. The Board informed ENQA that it is postponing its review until further notice.
- iii. The Board will look into joining the ENQA sub-group on institutional audits, provided it does not involve significant resources.

(5) SLR and IWR Update

- i. Board was updated on the status of the SLRs.
- ii. Board discussed what could be possible actions to poorly executed SLRs, a hitherto hypothetical situation. The best venue for feedback would be the annual meetings, and the feedback should be enhancement-oriented. This topic can also be discussed with the QC and addressed in a future seminar in the lead-up to QEF3.
- iii. Discussion about a team for the IWR of Bifröst University. AMG and ÁH join meeting at 10:30.

(6) Discussion about agenda and presence of Icelandic representatives at Board meetings

The Chair emphasised that Icelandic observers are asked to withdraw from Board meetings when specific institutions are discussed. In the past, Icelandic observers have left meetings intermittently. That did not work well, so now the agenda is structured to ensure that these private discussions start in the morning.

(7) Discussion about REAC: current and future role.

- i. PW led discussion of a paper about the future role of REAC. Some questions to consider included: Should research quality be assessed in the future? How could or should a pilot evaluation of the Extended Model of research evaluation be done? Will the work of REAC link up to possible performance-based funding in the wake of the publication of Green Book? Would analyses be done at subject-level or across whole institutions? Who do you measure: all researchers or some? Would assessment be based on metrics or peer review? What resources are needed for these assessments? Would the Board be comfortable taking on this task? Would a different agency with different teams be needed? Can this be enhancement-based? Would an overemphasis on evaluating research downgrade teaching?
- ii. At the moment, SLRs focus on five topics related to management of research at subject-level or institution-level. The Board and REAC have published guidelines on reporting on management of research, and that is reflected in SLRs and IWRs so far in QEF2. Assessing research quality is something that has been done in the UK for a while. It has raised numerous questions, and it is controversial. Reliability, validity and trust are key components of any evaluations of research quality.
- iii. Board members agreed that it would be important to engage the universities and MESC in discussions about the future role of REAC and evaluation of research in Iceland. REAC should be seen as a facilitator of this discussion, as a committee that can contribute to the next steps by identifying critical issues (such as the need to have a national strategy, which would ensure that national targets are grounded in a national vision), and making sure that IWR take into account doctoral education. Furthermore, piloting the “Extended Model” would be premature at the moment. The Board should emphasise an enhancement-approach to the extent possible. One challenge is the evaluation system of the public universities, which is linked with salaries and focuses exclusively on individual contribution. ÁH urged caution in this respect, as the sector is just getting used to evaluation of management of research.

(8) Structure of Mid-Term Progress Reports

- i. Mid-Term Progress reports will be standardised in format. They will have the following structure: 1) Introduction (standard text for all reports), 2) Main findings (follow-up to the review, forward look, and any observations on special topics), and 3) Conclusion.

- ii. Reports should normally be 1500-2000 words. In follow up to QEF1 reviews, the Board member attending annual meetings would write these reports. In follow up to QEF2 reviews, IWR Chairs would write these reports. This work needs to be budgeted for.

(9) IWR-related publications in Icelandic

- i. Ideally, the Board should publish summaries of IWR reports in Icelandic. As the RU report is already published, these publications cannot consist of much new text. Board agrees to translate and publish concluding sections of reports, along with a short and standardised description of the process and team composition. Rectors voiced support for that idea in the meeting referenced in (3) above. Reports in Icelandic should normally be 1500-2000 words.

(10) Board annual conference on May 6

- i. The topic of the conference is “Enhancing Quality of Master’s Studies: Icelandic and International Perspectives”. Keynotes will be delivered by Professor Margaret Topping, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor & Dean of the Graduate School, Queen's University Belfast; Steinunn Gestsdóttir, Pro-Rector of Academic Affairs and Development, UI; and RP.
- ii. Keynotes will be followed by panel discussions with representation from students (AMG), universities and working-life stakeholders. PW and OH will Chair the two sessions and BB will wrap up the conference with a US perspective. All speakers have been confirmed.

(11) Checklist for Secretariat in editing IWR Reports, Board internal QA manual, 2019 Board Annual Report and process for distributing and reviewing Board documents

- i. A checklist of items was introduced that Secretariat will use to ensure consistency in language and coverage in IWR reports. The checklist was developed based on observations and reactions to the IWR reports of Reykjavík University and Hólar University. The checklist will be used for the remaining IWR reports in QEF2. A glossary will be added to the IWR reports.
- ii. AS introduced some changes to the Board's internal QA manual. Board agreed that changes to existing Board documents, if any, are to be discussed at one meeting per year.
- iii. The Permanent Secretary of MESC will receive a copy of the Board annual report, following further minor corrections, with a cover letter, in advance of a meeting to be requested in May.

(12) News from the Icelandic Higher Education Sector.

- i. UI is proposing an increase in registration fees to cover government funding shortfalls. Students worry that this is going to be a hidden tuition fee.

- ii. A new Rector has been selected for Bifröst University, Margrét Jónsdóttir Njarðvík, to start on June 1. She holds a doctorate in Spanish and literature from Princeton University and an MBA from the University of Reykjavik. She has previously worked at both the University of Iceland as a lecturer in Spanish and at the University of Reykjavik as an Associate Professor at the Department of Business and as Head of International Affairs.

(13) Discussion of papers circulated prior to the meeting on the future of QA in Europe.

- i. Some agencies feel that the ESGs requirements are too basic for mature QA sectors and that the ESGs should be revised. An informal group of ENQA members will probably make a proposal but it is too late to be put on the next Bologna summit agenda and the E4 Group has not taken this on board (April 2020).
- ii. ENQA has recently been reviewed by a third-party independent organization in Norway (NIFU). The Board is not going to apply for ENQA membership until its resource and administrative issues are resolved.

(14) NOQA Conference on September 10-11.

- i. The topic of this year's NOQA conference will be enhancement in QA. NOQA is looking for speakers who can speak to engagement with the universities throughout the duration of quality cycles. One keynote speaker would likely come from ENQA, and another keynote address would be co-presented by a representative of an Icelandic university and the Board member assigned to that university for annual meetings. Two workshops would also be offered. The Baltic nations, as well as Greenland and the Faroe Islands will be invited to send representatives to the conference.
- ii. A NOQA Leadership Summit may be convened on September 9 to discuss issues that are shared at the management level of the Nordic QA agencies.

(15) Web development

A discussion led to a range of specifications in annex, which will be sent to the web developer.

Meeting is adjourned at 16:10.