

## Minutes, Board meeting of 4-5 May 2020

### May 4

**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 14:00, Áslaug Helgadóttir from 14:00 as observers; and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

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

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

- i. The agenda and the minutes were adopted without modifications.
- ii. One matter arising: a meeting that should have been held with the Permanent Secretary of MESG in May was postponed because of travel restrictions. The Board agreed to send the 2019 Annual Report to the Permanent Secretary and let him know that the Board would like to meet with him as soon as international travel restrictions are lifted.

#### (2) Update on QEF2: Schedule of IWRs, SLRs and Mid-Term Progress

- i. Overview and further update:
  - a. The UI Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Law submitted their SLRs recently.
  - b. UI submitted a revised plan for SLRs. The Board approved UI's proposal.
  - c. UNAK submitted a revised plan for QEF2 SLRs prior to the meeting. The Board approved UNAK's proposal.
- ii. The Board discussed the possibility of asking universities to publish summaries of SLRs in Icelandic. Agreement was reached that this should be voluntary for the remainder of QEF2, and that dissemination of information from SLRs in Icelandic should be discussed with stakeholders, in particular the Rectors' Conference, in the development of QEF3.
- iii. The Board approved recruiting two experts for the UI IWR and the BU IWR teams, respectively. A third expert is being recruited as a back-up for UI. His CV will be sent to the Board shortly.

#### (3) Update on special reviews

- i. As a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, the review of Police Studies at University of Akureyri has been rescheduled for 2-6 November 2020. A student member has been nominated by LÍS. This is a first year Master student in Early Childhood Education at the University of Iceland and has extensive work-place experience.
- ii. Preparations for the Impact Assessment of the Icelandic Research Fund are underway. The project will require recruiting 1.5 FTEs and job description will need to be developed. Any database developed for this project should be aligned with PURE so that data can be imported into PURE; the PURE roll-out team will be consulted in the development of the IRF database.

The Board was informed that once the project is ready to be launched, the impact of the sanitary crisis on the capacity to carry out face-to-face interviews will be considered and MESC informed if delays are in order. MESC will be updated on this discussion shortly.

- iii. The Board received an application for accreditation of doctoral studies in Sports Science at Reykjavík University. A proposal for an accreditation review, including a budget, was sent to MESC on 14 April 2020. The secretary for this accreditation will be an external person.
- iv. The Secretariat will prepare manuals (5-6 pages at most) for each special review with guidelines for review team members, starting with the review of Police Studies at UNAK. A manual on accrediting doctoral programmes will be developed as well. Team members will be asked to read these guidelines in combination with the *Guidelines for IWR Teams*. These manuals will be circulated to the Board for feedback and approval.

#### **(4) Impact of COVID-19 on IWR schedule and annual meetings**

- i. Discussion about the possibility of conducting IWR reviews online.
  - a) The Board had a preliminary discussion about the Autumn IWR visits and whether shifting to an online format would be appropriate. While going online seemed inevitable given the current sanitary crisis, the Board was informed about an early Scandinavian example that revealed challenges associated with the online review format. These included the review team failing to gel and meetings having little flow, especially when they included a large number of participants. Participants were fatigued more quickly, suggesting that fewer meetings per day are necessary. Finally, bandwidth issues can be an issue.
  - b) However, these obstacles could be surmounted by holding more meetings, with smaller groups of participants, engaging the whole expert team in the planning of the visit, building some slack into the final timetable to allow for technical difficulties, and ensuring that every member of an expert team is interested in this format, which requires a great deal of flexibility and adaptability and more work.
  - c) Given the limited evidence, the Quality Board agreed that, in the short-term, online IWR would not be planned unless a university requests that a review take place before a specific time. The Board noted that the ensuing delay may cause the RA reports to become outdated by the time travel restrictions are lifted. Universities would be asked to provide an update rather than a re-write.
  - d) In the long-term, the Board agreed to explore having a hybrid format in QEF3: some information would be provided online, which would shorten the length of the teams' stay in Iceland.
- ii. None of the 2020 annual meetings have taken place in 2020 yet. Therefore, the Board agreed to schedule them online and engage the universities in their planning. This would maintain the dialogue with the universities. The meetings would retain the elements of a typical annual meeting as appropriate to each university and focus also on the response to COVID-19. A list of possible strategic questions to ask the universities will be circulated to Board members

before the meetings. Annual meetings should be conducted as soon as possible, and in a concentrated timeframe (within two weeks), to enable the Board to discuss what has been learned. A letter to the rectors will be sent to present the Board's proposal.

ÁH and AMG joined the conference call at 14:00

#### **(5) 2020 budget and rental of facilities**

i. Hosting the secretariat: The Board discussed the two options available at the National Library and agreed to rent the smaller space for seven months, despite the fact that rental cost is higher than expected. No other options are available at the moment and the rent is in line with current government pricing guidelines for renting space to public agencies. This expense creates a structural deficit. For its neutral impact on fiscal year 2020, please see below.

ii. Budget overview:

- a. Changes in exchange rates between ISK and foreign currencies have meant that the ENQA affiliate membership fee and payments to HU review team were higher than anticipated. When contacting experts, the fees will be expressed in the Icelandic currency.
- b. Office rent for the Secretariat at the National Library is higher than the anticipated amount in the provisional budget.
- c. The other expenditures to date are in line with the proposed budget.
- d. A saving of approximately 1,500,000 ISK was accrued as a result of holding the May meeting online and those savings exceed the extra costs incurred by the higher exchange rate and the office rent.

The Board agreed to organise a conference call with MESC, AS and NS to confirm that expenses can be moved across line items in the budget, and that delayed expenditures can be deferred to 2021. It will also bring up the topic of the rent.

Meeting adjourned at 15:00.

#### **May 5**

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

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

#### **(6) Discussion of draft proposal about the future trajectory of the QB**

- i. The Board agreed that the "Trajectory" document needs to clarify several aspects: the distinction between QEF and QB, the justification for requesting additional HR by specifying how QB plans to expand its role, and a discussion about the likely growing role of REAC. It was suggested to go back to the QEF1 review to see what recommendations can be drawn from it.

- ii. Although the Secretariat will continue to be a small office, reliance on a single staff is unsustainable. There will need to be some specialisation of staff functions, as well as reporting lines within the Secretariat to avoid that the Board Chair remains the de-facto Executive Chair and the Board an executive body. Nevertheless, this would be a small staff and it will be important not to create silos but to promote teamwork. Furthermore, ad-hoc staff could be an option. Icelandic labour regulation provides the possibility of hiring temporary staff (i) for no longer than two continuous years or (ii) without restriction in case of short, discontinuous periods.

SOS joined the conference call at 14:00

**(7) Sector update in the wake of COVID-19**

- i. In mid-April, SOS conducted phone interviews with all the Quality Managers (QM) about the universities' COVID-19 responses. All the universities were forced to go online almost overnight, but some of them had considerable online provision before the crisis. For the others, the move to online teaching seems to have gone reasonably well, although formal information gathering on that (e.g., surveys) has not happened yet. Many QMs feel that the crisis will encourage staff to explore how technology can be used in a more integrated fashion in their teaching. The sector came together quickly. MESC served as the coordinator to ensure dialogue and information sharing across the sector. The universities increased support for IT functions and, in some cases, increased resources for developing online pedagogy.
- ii. LÍS posted on its website information about resources for students in both English and Icelandic and promoted the notions that students need more psychological support and temporary employment benefits. A large proportion of students will be unemployed in the summer, which is very worrying because student loans are normally not available for the summer. Surveys indicate that students would prefer to work than take summer classes and receive student loans, as it is not clear to what extent classes taken in the summer will count towards a degree.
- iii. MESC is anticipating a large influx of mature students to the universities in the autumn but some university staff doubt this prediction because many mature students who had wished to upskill through further university education did so already in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

**(8) MoU with MESC, specifying their respective responsibilities in QEF2:**

The Board agreed that the MoU should clarify that the Board has final say in all of its judgments in the IWRs, that secretariat staff is appointed by MESC upon nomination of QB, and that QC and REAC should be more explicitly cited in the MoU to build support for the proposal. The distinction between QEF and QB should be further clarified. The MoU is addressing the current situation and should not be forward looking.

**(9) REAC update and proposal for membership**

- i. A proposal for the future trajectory of REAC was developed in response to developments in the evaluation of research in Iceland which might tie funding of universities to research performance. In order to facilitate a wider discussion about that topic, REAC would need representation from all universities in Iceland, which REAC does not currently have. A new composition for REAC was discussed. REAC will propose membership to the Quality Board, which remains the approving body.
- ii. A seminar is planned on the future of REAC in autumn 2020.
- iii. The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Leiden Manifesto will be discussed at the next REAC meeting and the universities encouraged to sign up to these declarations. It was noted, however, that the Evaluation System of the Public Universities was still in effect, in spite of longstanding plans to revise it. It favours quantitative metrics, incentivises certain types of staff behaviour and is a determinant of many important HR decisions in the public universities. Therefore, any new plan for the evaluations research output and impact needs to take that system into account.

#### **(10) Board website update**

- i. The Board website is ready in beta version. Board members sent comments on the website in advance of the meeting. The website will be launched in the first or second week of May, after the suggested changes have been incorporated.
- ii. Regarding the section of the website titled 'Useful Resources', a balance should be struck between ensuring that the website is a valuable resource for information in the sector and maintaining a reasonable and manageable number of links in this section. Criteria should be developed for selecting the documents to be included in this section and to ensure that the section is properly curated. These criteria will be discussed at the next Board meeting. The Board proposed that new resources are advertised in the 'news update' and included on a specified page that would be better structured than is the case at the moment.

#### **(11) QEF1 Review report**

The paper on QEF1 IWRs could be submitted for publication or published in its current form on the Board's website. Possible international outlets include *Quality in Higher Education*, *International Higher Education* and *University World News*. Decision on publication will be taken after reviewing submission guidelines for these outlets. MESC asked to have access to the report, which will be given in confidence to the committee working on the new funding model.

#### **(12) ENQA developments**

The Board was informed that ENQA held its General Assembly recently and adopted a new strategic plan that would change the relationship between ENQA and EQAR. With respect to the ENQA membership process, ESG compliance will continue to be the basis for ENQA membership. Evidence of compliance could be through EQAR.

- If an agency is accepted into EQAR, then ENQA would also accept it.
- If an agency does not want to go through EQAR, then it would send its review report straight to ENQA.
- If an agency is turned down by EQAR, it cannot be immediately admitted to ENQA.

This is meant to simplify the process and to ensure that ENQA is more focused on the professional development of its members. New statutes will be voted in the ENQA Members' Forum this autumn.

**(13) Extraordinary Board meeting**

The Board agrees to conduct a follow-up meeting via a videoconference call in June to discuss primarily the next drafts of the MoU, the "Trajectory document" and the annual meetings.

Meeting adjourned at 15:00.