

Minutes, REAC meeting of 04 March 2020, 09:30-12:30

In attendance: Andrée Sursock, Hulda Stefánsdóttir, Kristján Kristjánsson, Philip Winn (Chair: PW), Sæmundur Rögnvaldsson, Skúli Skúlason, Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes: SOS), Tove Bull.

Apologies received: Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir; Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson left the meeting at 12.00.

The meeting was held at Reykjavik University, arranged by Kristján Kristjánsson.

(1) The agenda was accepted with no modifications

(2) MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

- i. The minutes of the meeting on 20 November 2019 were accepted without modification.
- ii. Matter arising: The Quality Board is developing its website independent of Rannís, and the minutes of REAC meetings would ideally be posted on that new website. It was agreed that this discussion would continue at the next meeting and any decision should take into account the recent laws on public availability of information from government entities.
- iii. Please note a change of email address for Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson: secretariat@qef.is
- iv. Discussion concerning style of the minutes: all agreed that the minutes should summarise the discussion and conclusions succinctly for each item without specifying who said what. Each section of the minutes should normally end with action items.

ACTION: SOS to put Quality Board / REAC Website information on May agenda.

(3) UPDATE ON PURE

- i. **PURE is on track to launch in December.** For now, the focus is on the University of Iceland's HR data, with the University Hospital included. The first input of research-related data into PURE is scheduled for May. There will be training sessions in May by Elsevier staff to build a group of Icelandic super-users from the first 10 institutions to be included, as well as other institutions like Rannís. It was noted that the University of Iceland has also bought SciVAL, a product from Elsevier that enhances the user's ability to analyse research performance, and promises to give the user the opportunity to *"visualize research performance, benchmark relative to peers, develop strategic partnerships, identify and analyse new, emerging research trends, and create uniquely tailored reports"* (from SciVAL's website).
- ii. **Discussion of the value of data definitions prepared by REAC and shared with the PURE roll-out team earlier.** The data definitions document is being used by the PURE roll-out team and is being compared to the specifications in the bid for tenders, as well as the specifications for various types of entries into PURE. There was agreement that the data definitions document was essential to capture outputs and impact that are not embedded into the international databases that PURE sources automatically. Outputs in the arts, law

and other disciplines that have national significance do not routinely appear in international databases need to be captured by PURE. It now looks like the data definitions will be used to develop a framework for capturing and verifying these locally developed research outputs in PURE.

ACTION: SOS to continue attending meetings of the PURE roll-out team.

(4) THE FUTURE REMIT OF REAC

- i. **Following publication of a Green Book on performance-related funding of universities** and discussion by the Quality Board, it is appropriate to put on hold plans to develop further and pilot the extended model of research evaluation described in the QEF2 Handbook.
- ii. **The Green book raises questions about transparency of funding allocations, performance related funding and the social impact of research.** Despite the known benefits to individuals, as PURE would be a key means for collecting data it could lead to people resisting it because of an inherent link to the funding arrangements. REAC should seek information from all the universities on their reactions to research quality assessment, as implied by the Green Book; *see below, item 4*. If performance-related funding were to be introduced, it would take a few years to be developed. REAC should be part of the discussion that helps frame the assessment of research.
- iii. **Discussion about a guide for Subject-Level Reviews from one of the Icelandic universities that was shared in the Quality Council.** The document was an in-house document from a specific university and not a Quality Board document. In the future, it may be helpful to add a disclaimer for documents that are shared by members of the Council to limit the possibility of miscommunication around their status.
- iv. **Discussion about capturing both research outputs and the impact of research in an evaluation of research activities – that is, both the creation of new knowledge and use of existing knowledge.** If there is to be evaluation of these, then there is a related and wider need for key data collection (including *inter alia* grants, doctoral programmes, numbers of research students) and a general need for standard data definitions in Icelandic Higher Education. If research outputs and research impact are to be evaluated, it can be done either quantitatively or qualitatively. Quantitative evaluations are less costly but qualitative evaluations will be more comprehensive and less reductive. Other considerations include whether research impact needs to be linked to specific publications; how to account for impact that may happen long after research is concluded and/or published; and how to collect evidence of impact – with statements from end-users one possible way.
- v. **Discussion about the relationship of potential institutional research quality assessment and the Evaluation System for the Public Universities in Iceland.** Some felt that the guidance note from the Quality Board on the reporting of management of research in SLRs was well aligned with the Evaluation System for the Public Universities, but less aligned

with evaluations that aim to capture output at a level beyond the individual researcher. Moreover, it is important to note that research assessment is not just about publications. Finally, it cannot be a requirement that all academics need to have research impact and there has to be an appreciation that impact can be a team effort.

- vi. **Discussion about the role and remit of REAC and its membership.** It is important to think about the pedagogical potential of REAC and how it provides information to the sector. Resources are being circulated within REAC but these could be shared more widely. How does REAC communicate with the outside world? The Quality Board has already started to think about changes to be introduced in QEF3 and is planning a series of seminars in advance of the year of reflection at the end of QEF2 (2023-2024). At some point, it may be helpful to divide REAC into smaller groups to do teamwork on a theme/themes of interest to REAC and engage people outside in that work, such as Vice-Rectors for research. The first step would be to get feedback from the sector on how the universities see the Green Book, and how they look at research and impact evaluation.

ACTION: SOS to send translations of Green Book Sections to Tove Bull

ACTION: SOS to circulate the EUA report on performance-based funding

(5) PROPOSAL FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- i. **It was agreed that there is a role for REAC in discussing research quality assessment and impact.** This is an appropriate time to do this, given what the Green Book has raised and the need to review current performance assessment frameworks in Iceland.
- ii. **Because this is important for all Icelandic HEIs, REAC needs to discuss research quality assessment and impact as widely as it can.** The current membership of REAC is effective but not all HEIs are directly represented.
- iii. **We will adopt a seminar structure for the next meeting (06 May 2020) using the current membership and inviting delegates from those HEIs not currently represented.** This seminar will present international and local material that will help inform and frame questions about research quality assessment, both research outputs and impact of research. It will also help the Quality Board and REAC shape the QEF3.
- iv. **The Chair will write to all HEI Rectors,** outlining REAC's role in the enhancement-led review of research management as described in QEF2 and inviting delegates to a REAC facilitated seminar on research quality assessment. The intention is to have one representative from each HEI that should be privy to this conversation. Rectors may also wish to attend in addition to their delegates.

ACTION: PW to draft letter of invitation to all Rectors regarding the May seminar, and ask for nominations of delegates from Bifröst, AUI, and UNAK.

ACTION: SOS to book location; AV required

(6) Any other business

- i. REAC discussed holding meetings in Universities, in the first instance rotating around the Universities in Reykjavik.

ACTION: SOS to identify the next host.

(7) Meeting concluded at 12:30.

(8) Dates for Future Meetings (provisional – AM unless specified)

Wednesday 06 May 2020

Wednesday 09 September 2020

Wednesday 11 November 2020