

Minutes, Board meeting of 7-8 September 2020

7 September

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Riitta Pyykkö, Norman Sharp, Philip Winn, and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes). Páll Magnússon (Permanent Secretary of MESC), Una Strand Viðarsdóttir (Senior Adviser, MESC Office of Higher Education and Science), Jón Vilberg Guðnason (Director, MESC Office of Higher Education and Science) and Helgi Freyr Kristinsson (Senior Adviser, MESC Department of Finance and Administration) joined the meeting at 14:00-15:00.

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

(1) Agenda, Minutes and matters arising

The agenda of this meeting and the minutes of the previous Board meeting (29 June 2020) were adopted without modifications. All action items arising from the 29 June meeting have been closed.

(2) Update on commissioned work

Possible members of the review team for accreditation of doctoral studies in Sport and Exercise Science at RU were discussed. A list of possible team members was circulated in advance of the meeting. A draft guide for the review chair and team members was prepared and discussed the next day (see below).

(3) Meeting with MESC Permanent Secretary Páll Magnússon

The Board met via conference call with MESC Permanent Secretary Páll Magnússon, as well as three MESC staff members. MESC provided an update on the Icelandic higher education sector. The Board provided an update on recent QEF2 developments.

- a. Board meetings in May, June and September were held online, and annual meetings with the universities were conducted online in June.
- b. During the development of QEF2, the universities asked for research to be covered in the new framework. This led to the creation of REAC, which is discussing the evaluation of research and research management in the universities, as well as how they evaluate the social impact of their research. This work is dovetailing well with the roll-out of PURE in Iceland.

- c. HU held an online seminar on the outcomes of its QEF2 IWR. Many contributors praised HU for its quality and enhancement work in the wake of its review in the first cycle, as the QEF2 review report included strong commendations on the progress achieved so far. The seminar discussion demonstrated a maturity and understanding of quality assurance issues in Iceland. It is encouraging to see these positive effects of an enhancement model.
 - d. The Board is already preparing the development of QEF3. MESC and other stakeholders will be involved in this work, and public service and public engagement will likely be part of the new framework. That may be reflected, for instance, in an emphasis on dissemination of science to the public and the extent to which the universities are responding to societal challenges.
 - e. The IWR of UI has been postponed until spring 2021 at the request of the University, as it is the University's wish to conduct an on-site review (that review has been postponed twice already in 2020). BU's IWR will be conducted online in October. The accreditation review of doctoral studies in Sport and Exercise Science at RU will be conducted in the spring of 2021. The impact assessment of the Icelandic Research Fund will likely commence in November. The universities are exploring how they can engage international experts in their SLRs via online meetings, while at the same time meeting the requirements of that process as stipulated in the QEF2 Handbook.
 - f. The Board is an affiliate member of The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and has been preparing an application for full membership to ENQA since 2019. The Board has decided to postpone this process until the operations of the Board have a firmer basis in relevant laws and regulations, and the Board is better resourced.
- ii. A Memorandum of Understanding between Board and MESC (hereinafter, MoU) was drafted by the Board and shared with MESC in advance of the meeting. The MoU addresses the Board status in the short term, and would help bolster the Board's application for full ENQA membership. MESC and Board agreed that the content of the MoU is appropriate as a document to provide a firm basis for the short-term operations of the Board. MESC agreed that such a statement is appropriate but the eventual agreement may not be termed MoU. MESC will provide more detailed feedback on the MoU to the Board at later time.
 - iii. The Board drafted a document, titled "Board Trajectory", that it will share with MESC and the sector once it is finalised. The Board Trajectory document details how the operations of the Board can be better rooted in Iceland. The two main developments proposed are an Advisory Council to the Board, comprised of a variety of Icelandic stakeholders, and added responsibilities, which would justify increasing the Secretariat's staffing.

(4) QEF2 Update

If the IWR of UNAK and UI are online, SOS will accompany the team but not serve as secretary. The Board discussed the UNAK IWR team composition.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00.

8 September

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Riitta Pyykkö, Norman Sharp, Philip Winn, Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir as observer, Áslaug Helgadóttir as observer (until 13:50), and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

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

(5) Icelandic update

- i. Due to COVID-19, the limit on public gatherings in Iceland is presently at 200 and social distancing is recommended at 1 meter. Anyone travelling to Iceland from abroad must be screened at entry to the country and then enter quarantine. A second screening is then conducted after 5 days. Only after a second negative screen is an arriving passenger allowed to leave quarantine.
- ii. Due to the economic impact of COVID-19, the government has opened up the universities to people receiving unemployment benefits. Those students would keep their benefits during the duration of their studies. LÍS noted that these arrangements should be made available to unemployed students, as many Icelandic students work alongside their studies. There is also uncertainty surrounding the arrangements for the newly established Education Fund (*í Menntasjóður*) and LÍS has attempted to seek clarity from the government on issues ranging from interest rates on loans awarded through this fund, as well as how new loans from the Education Fund will interact with loans from the older system (e. *LÍN*).
- iii. The Science and Technology Policy Council published its strategic and action plan for 2020-2030. The new plan highlights 10 areas of emphasis. Of particular relevance to the Board and REAC are Actions 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8:

Action 1 - Strengthen competitive funds for research and innovation

Action 3 - Increase the quality of university activities and strengthen university funding

Action 5 - Strengthen skills in the labour market

Action 6 - Open access to data

Action 7 - Innovation Dashboard

Action 8 - Promote the dissemination of science

The highlights of the Strategic and Action Plan, as they relate to Board operations, are as follows:

- a. The Icelandic Research Fund, the Technology Development Fund and the Infrastructure Fund will be strengthened temporarily with a special initiative for three years by increasing funding by approximately 50% compared to the budget for the year 2020.
 - b. There is a goal to make university funding comparable to other Nordic countries by 2025 and to increase the quality and efficiency of university activities.
 - c. A framework and plan will be developed for public access to evidence-based information to ensure the dissemination of scientific methods and science in Iceland in the long term.
 - d. The government will develop a skills forecast and competency policy for the Icelandic labour market. An assessment of the state of the continuous education/lifelong learning system in Iceland will be carried out, as well as a revision of the law on continuous education/lifelong learning.
 - e. The government will facilitate open access to public data from universities, research institutes and data generated through publicly-funded competitive grants in the field of research and innovation.
 - f. The government will develop an innovation dashboard for Iceland.
- iv. The QC chair presented a document on key statistics. MESC called for 2018 and 2019 Key Statistics from the Universities in June 2020. QC has been developing draft definitions of key statistics and quality indicators that could be collected systematically across the seven Icelandic universities and reported annually to the Board, in line with rules 1368/2018. These, or very similar, data are already being collected in most of the universities to differing degrees. Four of the seven universities have provided feedback on a draft that was circulated in the summer, and the LÍS representatives in QC will gather more feedback from their constituents.
- a. The feedback received so far involved concerns about standardisation resulting in reduced flexibility of universities to determine their own key indicators in line with their mission; whether a high proportion of sessional teachers is good or bad; whether universities have any control over students taking a long time to graduate; and whether all the statistics should be termed “key statistics” and quality/performance connotations left out of all descriptions; and how to measure student support and disability. The draft definitions of key statistics for internationalisation, as well as for the intersection of teaching and research, will also need to be developed further. Gender will be taken into account in the analyses.
 - b. The Board praised QC for progressing this initiative, and wished to be kept updates as more feedback is received and this work progresses. Moving forward, it will be important to consider how the Board and the universities should use these data. From the Board’s perspective, it is most important that the data help visiting review teams orient to the Icelandic HE sector; help Board members prepare for annual meetings, for example by

- detecting trends over time; and examine the universities' use of the data for enhancement purposes.
- c. This work will be further discussed during the Board's meeting with QC in November on the basis of a new draft provided in mid-October.
 - v. HU hosted an online conference on August 28 on the outcomes of its QEF2 IWR. Contributors included BB as the Board representative to HU and Crichton Lang as the Chair of the IWR team. HU staff and stakeholders presented as well, and the conference concluded with a panel discussion. Approximately 70 attendees connected to the conference.
 - a. Overall, the conference was deemed to be a success. It included an overview of the mission and operations of the Board; the process of IWR; and the outcomes of the HU IWR. A number of speakers and panellists highlighted how HU has strengthened its structures and processes to ensure quality and standards since the QEF1 review.
 - b. At the request of the Board, ÁH repeated her observations from the conference's panel discussions. 1) QEF2 needs to be an integral part of university decision-making processes, which is difficult in larger universities. 2) Universities need to develop regularly updated dashboards to gauge progress in internal quality assurance. 3) Universities need to ensure that internal quality assurance procedures have built-in, formal follow-up procedures. 4) The student voice needs to be captured in all quality assurance operations. As before, training of IWR teams will include considerations of these points, including ownership of quality assurance by academic and support staff.

(6) Guidelines for accreditation of doctoral studies

- i. A draft guidelines for chair and members of doctoral accreditation review teams was discussed. The guidelines borrow heavily from the existing *Guidelines for Chairs and Team Members for Institution-Wide Reviews* and were developed in line with Rules 37/2007 pertaining to doctoral studies at higher education institutions, as well as the 10 Salzburg Principles on doctoral education from 2005. The guidelines for discussion were specifically developed for the accreditation of doctoral studies in Sport and Exercise studies at RU but will be adapted to future doctoral accreditation reviews as needed. Frank Quinault provided feedback on the document in advance of the meeting.
- ii. A new generic version of the guidelines will be developed and posted on the Board website in the form of a guidance note to aid universities interested in applying for accreditation of doctoral studies to prepare their reflective analysis. The guide will also be sent to MESC for information, after which it will be shared with RU and QC.

(7) Board trajectory

A revised draft of a document on the Board's future trajectory was discussed. The Board Trajectory document will be finalised in line with Board discussions and sent to MESC, LÍS, QC and the Rectors' Conference for consultation. The covering note will be important to frame expectations.

(8) REAC Updates

- i. A new remit and proposal for membership for REAC was approved in the June meeting of the Board. The aim was for the new membership of REAC to meet on 9 September 2020, but not all nominations from REAC stakeholders were received before the nomination deadline. As a result, REAC will meet on 9 September 2020 with the original membership as described in the QEF2 Handbook.
- ii. The proposal for a new remit and membership did not include a provision for the position of REAC Vice-Chair. This position used to rotate between the two QC representatives but there is only one QC member among the new membership. The position of Vice Chair will be offered to one member once REAC is stabilised.

(9) Updates to Board documents

- i. An updated version of the Board Constitution was circulated in advance of the meeting and will be posted on the website. The main changes are the inclusion of the new remit and membership of REAC, the email and address of the Secretariat have been updated and links to key online documents have been updated as appropriate.
- ii. An updated version of the Board Handbook was circulated in advance of the meeting and will be posted on the website. The main changes are a provision that Board meetings may be called as needed outside the regular meeting schedule of the Board, and that Board meetings may be conducted online. The new remit and membership of REAC are now reflected in the Handbook. The email and address of the Secretariat have been updated and links to key online documents have been updated, as appropriate. Finally, an outline of notes arising from annual meetings between university and Board representative has been added.

(10) Board website

- i. The format of the website section titled "Publications and Resources" was discussed. The Secretariat will consult with the web developer on how best to organise this information and inquire whether a search function can be added to the website. A site map link and a system for tagging website content and pages may also help in organising information for visitors. The content of this section will be further discussed at the November meeting of the Board.
- ii. The Secretariat will analyse website traffic using google analytics. A subject description will also be added to the titles of Guidance Notes posted on the website.

(11) Budget

- i. The 2020 budget was discussed, and spending to date is in line with budget projections. Most of the funding for the IRF impact assessment, as well as the IWRs of BU and UI will be carried over to 2021.
- ii. The 2021 budget proposal was discussed. It is estimated that MESCS's base funding of the Board will increase from 41 million ISK in 2020 to 43 million ISK in 2021. Estimates of fees and expenses that are highly influenced by fluctuations in exchange rate have been modified to reflect that the ISK has lost 12-18% of its value in exchange with major foreign currencies since COVID-19.

(11) AOB

- i. The 2020 annual conference of the Board, originally scheduled for May, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A new proposal for a conference will be discussed at the November meeting of the Board. A likely topic for that conference will be assuring the quality of online teaching.
- ii. The Board Chair will send a letter to Rectors providing updates on the Board operations, offering support where possible and soliciting from them any suggestions and questions they may have.
- iii. The next scheduled meeting of the Board will be online on 9-10 November 2020. The Board will meet with QC and LÍS during that meeting.
- iv. The Secretariat will send availability polls to Board members to schedule the 2021 Board meetings.

Meeting adjourned at 15:15.