

Minutes, Board meeting of 9-10 November 2020

9 November

In attendance: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice-Chair), Barbara Brittingham, Oisín Hassan, Ellen Hazelkorn (from 12:30), Riitta Pyykkö, Philip Winn, Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir as observer (from 14:30), Áslaug Helgadóttir as observer (from 14:30), and Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson (Minutes).

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 (7-8 September 2020) were adopted. It was agreed that minutes from a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (hereinafter, Ministry) be moved to an annex to the September Minutes.

(2) QEF2 Update

- i. Discussion of members of review team for the IWR of IUA, to be conducted in September 2021. As per QEF2 procedure, IUA has been offered to name peer institutions. Members will be selected taking (into account geographical location and gender) once IUA has submitted a list of peer institutions. The gender of team chairs should be considered to ensure that there is balance across all seven teams.
- ii. Update on recently completed reviews.
 - a. The BU IWR team conducted a virtual visit on 26-30 October. BU created an online university showcase, using a drone video and including interviews to try to give a real feel for the university. A confidential Headlines Letter with provisional judgments and headline outcomes will be sent to the Rector of BU no later than 13 November.
 - b. A commissioned review of Police Studies at UNAK was conducted virtually on 2-6 November. The review team will send a confidential Headlines Letter with provisional judgments and headline outcomes to the Rector of UNAK no later than 20 November.
 - c. Board and Ministry will receive a copy of the Headlines Letters in confidence for both reviews once they have been sent to the respective Rectors.
 - d. Once the review reports have been fact-checked by the universities and finalised by the respective review teams, the Quality Board will convene to discuss the reports.
 - e. Both review teams had a designated review secretary and Board Secretariat provided logistical support to both teams. Simultaneous interpretation was used to good effect in

two meetings in the BU review using the interpretation function of the Zoom online conferencing software. Two interpreters from ASETUR provided interpretations from Icelandic to English, and *vice versa*.

- f. Both teams received an online training that they found very helpful. There were no significant technological challenges experienced during the virtual visits for the BU and UNAK reviews. The review teams felt that the ability to gather information in online meetings was comparable to on-site review meetings. The Review Teams prepared very well for each meeting using a scripted list of questions. Attendees from the university communities also received generic guidelines for online meetings and a flyer containing key information about each meeting.
- iii. A revised IQA Manual was approved electronically in advance of the meeting.
- iv. Secretariat will draft new guidelines for review chairs and team members of online IWRs based on a similar existing guide for on-site IWRs.

(3) Update on commissioned work

- i. The impact assessment of the Icelandic Research Fund has been delayed. A job advertisement for a project manager was sent to REAC, QC, research managers of the universities and heads of social science research bodies in Iceland. The position will be advertised on the government's job website and the Ministry will be alerted that this project is delayed.
- ii. RU has been given an opportunity to submit additional materials for its application for accreditation of doctoral studies in light of the recently published *Guidelines for Chair and Team Members for doctoral accreditation reviews*¹. A list of potential reviewers was approved in the September Board meeting. Once RU responds to the suggestion of submitting additional material, a date for the review will be set and experts recruited for the review team. If necessary, this review may be conducted online.

(4) Planning ahead

- i. A plan was discussed for evaluating the success of QEF2. The process for evaluating QEF1 went well. The evaluation of QEF2 could be done in a shorter time and the "Year of reflection" should be called "period of reflection". Positive aspects that could be retained from that first experience include: getting a private company to analyse the survey results and involving the sector in the development of QEF3. The Board agreed that the survey would include closed questions and the process leading up to QEF3 would be based on focus groups and workshops.
- ii. A more detailed proposal will be developed before the March 2021 meeting of the Board. That proposal will contain a timeline of 1-2 years and specify the allocation of responsibilities, as well as a plan for collecting data from stakeholders (from surveys, focus groups or both) and

¹ <https://qef.is/assets/PDFs/Others/Guidelines-for-doctoral-accreditation-Final-for-website.pdf>

engaging them in the development of the new framework. Stakeholders to be engaged include LÍS, Quality Council, REAC, Rectors' Conference and the Ministry.

- iii. The evaluation of the success of QEF2 will be considered in the development of QEF3. The Board will look towards what worked well in the evaluation of QEF1, and what did not. It is the Ministry's wish that the same Board Chair oversees a cycle in its entirety. It may hence be beneficial for the next Board Chair to also oversee, or at the very least participate in, the development of QEF3.
- iv. A list of possible themes for Board-led conferences and seminars was circulated in advance of the meeting with suggested dates. A REAC seminar and a conference on online Teaching and Learning are planned for March 2021. Other seminars and conferences are to remain tentatively scheduled. (The NOQA conference will be hosted by the Board in May 2021.)
- v. Succession planning of Board members was discussed.
- vi. The identification and induction of the next Board Chair was discussed.
- vii. CVs of possible new Board members were circulated in advance of the meeting. The process for suggesting names for new Board members was discussed. It was agreed that a formal process for generating names for a list of candidates would be developed before the next Board meeting. Until then, Board members can send suggestions for additional candidates to the Secretariat. It may also be advantageous to allow interested experts to self-nominate via an announcement on the Board website.
- viii. The succession planning for the Chair of REAC needs to go hand-in-hand with the succession planning for the Board because the REAC Chair is a member of the Board. The remit and the process of identifying a Vice-Chair for REAC needs to be clarified.

Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir (LÍS) and Áslaug Helgadóttir (QC) joined the meeting.

(5) Icelandic and European update

- i. Iceland has a limit of 10 people gathering publicly and passengers arriving in Iceland can choose to go into quarantine for 14 days or take two COVID tests five days apart. Universities are operating almost exclusively online but some hands-on and laboratory classes are taking place on campus with proper precautionary measures.
- ii. The public universities have established a Teaching Academy, based on a Nordic model, with the main goal of encouraging dialogue about good teaching practices and teaching development. A very small number of staff are inducted each year and admission is based on an evaluation of teaching, including student-centred learning, evidence-base of teaching approach and evidence of continuous development of teaching. Admission into the academy results in a monthly salary bonus of 50 000 ISK for the remainder of the inductee's career. The

Board welcomed this initiative and expressed the hope that the private universities would be offered to participate in this scheme in some fashion.

- iii. Brief summaries of various European QA and higher education developments were circulated in advance of the meeting with links to relevant information. It was agreed that these summaries were very helpful and should be disseminated. For now, they will be shared with the QC and posted under the *News* section of the Board website.

(6) Discussion of the future trajectory of the Board

A revised draft document on the Board's future trajectory was discussed. In response to feedback received in the September Board meeting, it was made clearer that the Advisory Board serves QEF rather than QB. The composition, nomination process and term lengths of Advisory Council members were clarified. Roles and responsibilities of the various bodies were further clarified (including an updated organisational chart) and it was noted that the Board will continue to meet with individual stakeholders after the establishment of an Advisory Board. While the option of online Board meetings is retained in the most recent draft, the expectation is that Board meetings take place four times annually in Iceland. Secretariat job descriptions now include references to communication policies and social media skills, as well as specifications of flexible work hours for the position of administrative assistant. IT and database skills may also be added to one or more of the job descriptions. Once the budget is developed, a revised draft will be sent to Board members for approval before the document is circulated to stakeholders for comments.

(7) REAC updates

- i. The first meeting of REAC with a new remit and new membership will be on 11 November. Nominations for one male and one female member with ordering in terms of preference were received from all nominating bodies. By accepting the "first choice" nominee of each body, the gender representation in the committee is in accordance with Icelandic law.
- ii. The agenda of the 11 November meeting will include updates on the roll-out of PURE in Iceland; discussions of a new Strategy and Action Plan published by the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council; an update on the impact assessment of the Icelandic Research Fund; and planning of a REAC seminar on research assessment.

(8) Annual Board Conference 2021

A draft conference programme on *Online Teaching and Learning*, developed in consultation with LÍS and the Directors of the UI and UNAK Centres for Teaching and Learning, was discussed. The conference will focus on opportunities and lessons learned from going online in the wake of the COVID pandemic. The possibilities of sharing of resources and infrastructure across the sector will also be discussed.

(9) Budget update

The Board budget, including expenses to date, was discussed. Total expenses are well within projected budget, mostly as a result of delayed institutional reviews and reduced travel expenses. The Secretariat will consult with the Ministry to ensure that budgets for work started in 2020 will carry over to 2021. It may also be possible to pay review teams before their review report is published.

(10) Board website update

A website traffic update was presented for a 30-day period leading up to the current meeting. Most visitors to the page go straight to the homepage rather than sub-pages. The overwhelming majority of visits have no referral. That is, visitors are going to the site by typing in the URL, rather than coming through search engine referrals. However, out of a total of 146 visits, 25 and 21 visits came via google.com and baidu.com, respectively. Future reports will also look at from the visitors' country of origin.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00.

10 November

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

In attendance:

QB: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice-Chair), Barbara Brittingham (until 14:30), Ellen Hazelkorn, Oisin Hassan, Rita Pyykkö, and Philip Winn.

QC: Áslaug Helgadóttir (University of Iceland), Chair, Ása Björk Stefánsdóttir (Reykjavík University), Eygló María Björnsdóttir (LÍS), Jóhanna Ásgeirsdóttir (LÍS), Skúli Skúlason (Hólar University), Sóley Björt Guðmundsdóttir (Icelandic University of the Arts), Stefán Kalmannsson (Bifröst University), Vaka Óttarsdóttir (UNAK). Apologies received: Guðmunda Smáradóttir (Agricultural University of Iceland).

Board updates to Quality Council

- i. The Board has postponed its immediate plans for an ENQA review although great strides had been made on a reflective analysis. The Board has prepared a draft Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry that defines the roles and responsibilities of both parties.
- ii. Discussion of the impact of COVID on the Board's operations, including conducting the BU IWR and review of Police Studies at UNAK online and conducting annual meetings online. The Board will publish a guide for online IWRs. The Board applauded HU for its online conference on the results of its QEF2 IWR, which was held in August 2020.

- iii. The Board has launched its own website, www.gef.is. It contains information on the main bodies involved in QEF2, all review reports and other publications, as well as links to various resources. IWR summaries in Icelandic are available on the Board website for the IWRs of RU and HU, and will continue to be published along with full review reports in English.
- iv. The Board is planning the evaluation of QEF2, as well as the development of QEF3. As part of that work, the Board has drafted an overview document on the future trajectory of the Board. This document will be shared with stakeholders, including the QC, in the coming months. This work will also be underpinned by seminars and other activities.
- v. The QC was alerted that it would receive a summary of European updates (see 5.iii, above). The new REAC remit and membership were introduced, as well as the agenda of the 11 November meeting of REAC (see 7, above).

Quality Council updates to Board

- i. ÁH presented updates on the work of the QC in 2020. The QC annual conference in 2020 centred on the reception of international students in Iceland. The conference involved lively dialogue, notably with immigrant and refugee students during panel discussions. International students are encountering multiple barriers, especially if they are planning to reside in Iceland. Refugees and immigrants also have limited options for entry to higher education if they do not speak Icelandic at a high academic level. LÍS is working with student associations at the secondary level to improve this.
- ii. A planned collaboration on quality enhancement with Greenland and Faroe Islands was put on hold in the wake of the COVID pandemic. The QC will explore whether representatives of these countries are interested in meeting virtually.
- iii. The QC has made an Icelandic glossary with translations of English QA terms available online and commissioned a logo design. The logo is already included on the QC section of the Board website.
- iv. The planning for the QC annual conference, set for January 2021, is currently underway. The topic is *Internationalisation of HE as a driver for Quality*. Themes to be explored include the definition of internationalisation post-COVID, co-operation across borders (including the European Universities initiative), internationalisation at home, and international benchmarking. The conference will conclude with a panel discussion on teaching development through internationalisation. QB was asked to provide names for an international speaker.
- v. Some universities have been able to engage international experts online in their SLRs (UI, UNAK and IUA), and the experience has been positive, although the involvement of external experts has extended over a longer time period than usual. HU and RU postponed their SLRs in the wake of COVID, and may engage internal experts online. BU had finished its QEF2 SLRs prior to COVID. LÍS does not receive requests for guidance from students involved in SLRs but

is confident that those students are receiving the LÍS *Quality Guide* for students involved in IWRs and SLRs. LÍS has been in touch with students who have sat on IWR Teams and has received positive feedback on those experiences.

Seminar on indicators and progress on identification of University Key Statistics

- i. A paper by EH on indicators in HE was circulated in advance of the meeting, as well as a draft proposal from the QC for collection of key statistics in the universities. The draft proposal included proposed key statistics in the areas of students, human resources, and research.
- ii. EH presented on the topic of indicators, including international trends and good practice. EH emphasised that indicators may not always measure what we think they are measuring, that the choice of indicator should be linked to institutional/unit strategic objectives, and that indicators are a proxy for quality. In addition, caution should be exercised to overemphasise quality indicators, as they may come to be the main drivers of behaviour. It should also be considered whether the key statistics are collected to evaluate goal attainment, or to observe trends. EH also gave specific feedback on the QC's draft definitions of key statistics.
- iii. QC members agreed on the importance of linking indicators to institutional missions, but pointed out that the evaluation system of the public universities is a very powerful driver of individual staff behaviour. Universities are already aware of the many challenges associated with identifying meaningful indicators. A ministerial committee is now working on recommendations for a new funding model for the universities and is looking at indicators to possibly include in that model. It was also noted that in the absence of a national policy on HE, it is difficult to gauge what the government thinks is important.
- iv. The importance of QC being a voice in this arena was emphasised, as it is very important that any selection of indicators align well with strategic planning in the universities, as well as external quality assurance.

Meeting adjourned at 14:30.

Meeting with LÍS

QB: Andrée Sursock (Chair), Norman Sharp (Vice-Chair), Barbara Brittingham (until 14:30), Ellen Hazelkorn, Oisín Hassan, Rita Pyykkö, and Philip Winn.

LÍS: Derek T. Allen, Indía Bríet Böðvarsdóttir Terry, and Jóhanna Ásgeirsdóttir.

- i. LÍS is developing a Quality Course for students participating in internal and external QA reviews. The plan is to form a group of students with experience to share their experience and knowledge. This course would be held annually, and is likely to be funded by the QC. LÍS may ask to use materials from the Board training programme for IWR teams. Oisín Hassan has been consulted in this work.

- ii. LÍS is updating its quality policy to be more inclusive, in particular towards immigrants and refugees. It will also cover more explicitly all forms of education, including arts education. The upcoming LÍS General Assembly will mainly focus on developing a welfare policy.
- iii. During the COVID crisis, LÍS has advocated for maintaining equal access to HE. The impact of COVID on quality of education is difficult to gauge, as the universities are so diverse and finding the right level to focus on is challenging. LÍS worries that pedagogical strategies are not translating well into the online space in many cases, although many staff are trying to develop their pedagogy. LÍS is also concerned about the welfare of students in isolation, and surveys indicate that students in general are experiencing high levels of stress. Some universities argue that they should not be providing mental health services because Iceland has public health care. Nationally, access is being widened to mental health services but access to services more academic in nature is lacking according to LÍS, especially in the smaller universities.
- iv. Students are in some cases going to be required to attend final exams in person at the end of the current semester. LÍS has issued a statement to the effect that universities should respect the wishes of students who are vulnerable and ask to change assessments for those students. There is resistance to that idea, especially in health-related disciplines.
- v. LÍS is continuing its development of a *Student Partnership Policy*. Originally, this was supposed to be signed by university authorities and individual student unions in the seven Icelandic universities. As the student unions have different priorities, it was agreed that the policy should focus on the nature of the relationship between university and student union, rather than signed contracts between those two parties. LÍS is conducting surveys for both students and staff about student committee work in the universities.
- vi. LÍS is working on a project called *Student Refugees in Iceland*. Many refugees do not fulfil the requirements to enter universities in Iceland. In almost all cases, these students need at least one year in addition to their secondary education to enter university. There are no university gateway programmes for international students (although BU is developing one) and no grants. If they start receiving student loans, they in turn will lose their benefits.
- vii. The Icelandic Student Loan Fund has been changed so that there is a 30% reduction in the principal if a student finishes the degree within a certain time frame. Maintenance of children is now in the form of a grant rather than a loan. Loans are now paid out monthly to students, which reduces reliance on overdraft. The loan amount is still pretty low and students usually need to work to supplement their income. However, if one works too much the loan amount is reduced.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00.