

Board meeting

Date	May 26, 2020
Time	3½ hour (8:30-12:00)
Place	Sjóvinnuhúsið, room 514 and participation via video link
Participating	<p>Ólavur Ellefsen, Chair of the Board Anders Bjarklev, Board member Sára Joensen, Board Member Svein-Ole Mikalsen, Board Member Magnus Steinsson við Streym, Student Board Member</p> <p>Chik Collins, Rector Johan Hansen, University Director</p> <p><u>Participating in the first part of the meeting:</u> Hugin Skaalum, Head of Finance</p> <p><u>Participating in the second part of the meeting:</u> Bergur Djurhuus Hansen, Pro-Rector for Education Quality Magni Mohr, Pro-Rector for Research and Enterprise Brynhild Thomsen, Information Officer Katrín Poulsen, Human Resources Coordinator</p> <p><u>Board Members unable to attend:</u> Marita Rasmussen, Vice-Chair of the Board Guðrún Nordal, Board Member</p>
Keeper of the minutes	Súsanna Jógvansdóttir Golan



Agenda

Part one: Regular meeting agenda

1. *Chair's welcome*
2. *Approval of Agenda (paper 2)*
3. *Approval of minutes from 9 March 2020 (paper 3)*
4. *Finance Report – including final report on 2019 (papers 4a and 4b)*
5. *Rector's Report – including Covid-19 emergency measures and experiences (papers 5a and 5b and folders 5c (Magna Charta Universitatum) and 5d (with 2 draft proposals for research entities))*
6. *Discussion*

Part 2: Taking the University forward towards implementing the Strategic Plan in the post-Covid situation.

7. *Positioning the University for the post-Covid recovery: Seeking views from the Board*
8. *Progress and plans from Pro-Rector for Education Quality*
9. *Progress and plans from Pro-Rector for Research and Enterprise*
10. *Progress and plans from Director on Strategic Plan Implementation*

Concluding comments from the Chair.

*papers are available upon request

Purpose of the meeting: *To report to the Board on recent developments, including the University's handling of the Covid-19 emergency, and to discuss ongoing implementation of the updated Strategic Plan, 2020-2024.*



Part one: Regular meeting agenda

1. *Chair's welcome*

The Chair of the Board welcomed members to the meeting and notified about apologies received from Marita Rasmussen and Guðrún Nordal.

2. *Approval of Agenda (paper 2)*

The agenda for the meeting was approved by members.

3. *Approval of minutes from 9 March 2020 (paper 3)*

The minutes from the previous meeting on 9th of March were approved with a comment from one member that they regretted not having expressed more of a reservation about aspects of the revised strategic plan at the meeting. It was agreed that this could not justify a change to the minutes of 9th March but would be noted for the record today.

4. *Finance Report – including final report on 2019 (papers 4a and 4b)*

The Head of Finance presented the status for the first quarter of 2020 and subsequently the final status for 2019. Detailed reports had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting.

So far for 2020 the budget is on track. The balance is currently a bit higher than projected but that is expected to even out in the coming period.

A current main focus is to understand the amounts that are expected to be spent on external teachers. More efforts will be made to follow up on faculty budgets allocated for that in relation to actual spending. This year there will be more frequent regular follow-up to make sure that the projection is reliable. The Head of Finance is meeting with deans regularly to get a report on how much is spent on salaries. The Chair of the Board suggested including the original budget along with the forecast in the financial report.

A discussion on whether to allocate costs for cleaning, rent, purchases and other spending to faculties compared to keeping it central at the administration took place. Members weighed pros and cons. One risk by keeping these costs central to the administration might be that investments in departments are not as carefully considered.

Members further asked how Covid-19 has affected the current numbers. For the University, the main additional costs are on license to the Zoom technology purchased through DeiC. The University adapted to online work quickly where Zoom made online teaching and meetings possible. In addition to the Zoom license purchase, two computer-cameras were bought for individual staff to enable remote work. It was concluded that Covid-19 has therefore not had significant extra costs for the University. On the contrary, travel costs and costs for Ph.D. defences have been lower. We do not know the long-term financial effects from Covid-19 yet.

It was asked whether we can expect delays in income of research and what effects that could have. One scenario could be if there would be a decision to prolong PhDs, which would impede the current budget.



The Head of Finance concluded that we are on track with respect to the budget for this year and the Board will be receiving the most recent numbers by the next Board meeting.

At the last Board meeting (9th of March 2020) the surplus for 2019 was reported. It was then agreed that a more detailed presentation should be given at this Board meeting. It was concluded that the main reason for surplus on all faculties was due to underspending against projected salary costs. Positions were not rehired immediately as expected in the budget and not all positions were hired to a year-long position as had been previously calculated. One department also had higher income than expected from paying courses while spending less on purchasing. Less was spent on external teachers than originally budgeted for and one Dean having a reduced contract for four months resulted in a slight surplus for that department. Furthermore, changes in management and a new hiring of a rector had its impact.

The administration however had a deficit, which had been expected as more of the common costs had been shifted from the faculties to the administration. The overall surplus of 1.329 million DKK would have been slightly higher – of the order of 2.5 million DKK – but we were able to make a series of necessary and permitted purchases within the financial year to reduce this by some 1.2 million DKK. These purchases included investment in staff development, IT upgrades, improvements to the working environment in the Sjóvinnuhúsið and some other things. The remaining surplus was used to pay an inherited debt that followed when Granskingardepilin (Research Centre for Rural Development) became part of the University. The University does not feel that this debt is debt that truly belongs to the University and the Head of Finance is addressing that with the Ministry.

It was concluded that 2019 has taught us to keep a closer cooperation between Deans and the Head of Finance meaning that this year more frequent follow-up throughout the year will be arranged so that we are able more accurately to project potential deficits or surplus before the year is over.

Following this a discussion took place on general finance literacy amongst staff. One Board member representing the University staff indicated their personal perception that cuts were made at the start of the year. It was further elaborated on perceptions staff have about finance within the university compared to the actual figures which shows that cuts have not been made for this year. It resulted in the Rector advising the Head of Finance to initiate further efforts to work with Deans to improve understanding amongst staff of the actual finances of the University.

The Rector also expressed misgivings about the Board seeming to become involved in discussions about the detailed financial aspects of particular faculties and programmes within the University, especially when these coincide with the interests of Board members. The Rector stressed that these are operational matters which are not part of the remit of the Board and can appropriately be raised and addressed through the operational structures and processes of the University.



5. Rector's Report – including Covid-19 emergency measures and experiences (papers 5a and 5b and folders 5c (Magna Charta Universitatum) and 5d (with 2 draft proposals for research entities))

The Rector (paper 5a) updated the Board on how Covid-19 affected university routines since lockdown in March (a few days after the last Board meeting). From mid-March the University was operating almost entirely online using Zoom for online teaching and meetings. The government restrictions have now been eased and we are now gradually returning to more regular business. The overall impression is that staff and students have coped well with the situation although it has been challenging for them in many ways. Extra support was offered to students through the Student Counselling Team and to students and staff through online sessions with an external psychologist. The Rector highlighted that we do however not know what potential long term effects there may be. The University will be looking to continue to monitor the situation and to offer support for those who need it.

Although things are starting to become more normal, Covid-19 is still affecting the University traditions as graduation will not take place in its standard form this year but will be arranged on faculty level with smaller gatherings of people. The Rector noted that the situation has been handled well in the Faroe Islands, but we are ready to adjust if it becomes serious again.

It was further updated on the consultation process of the strategic plan which has now led to the final version of the strategic plan (paper 5b).

Work is undergoing on increasing annual intake of the nursing program and the pedagogue program. The proposal for the nurse intake is ready to go to the Ministry soon.

The Rector continued to update about collaboration with NUSCT (Network of Universities of Small Countries and Territories) that we have recently become part of. Linked to that collaboration, we are now completing the application to become signatories of the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU). We have received letters of support to become signatories of the MCU from the universities of Malta and Andorra – both Network members – and also from the University of Bologna. To complete the application, support of the Board is also needed. **The Rector asked the Board for comments and the members of the Board indicated their wholehearted support for becoming signatories of the Magna Charta Universitatum.** The Magna Charta Universitatum will consequently be translated to Faroese and hopefully will be made available on the Bologna website, making it the 50th translation available.

Another result of joining NUSCT is that we are now working towards entering U-Multirank – an independent university ranking prepared with seed funding from the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme and now funded by the European Commission and others.

Further updating on the most recent activity for the campus plan the Rector has received a letter of nomination from the Ministry to become Chair of the campus group.

Although Covid-19 has had effects on the way the University has operated the last few weeks work has not been standing still. The University is



currently establishing centres for research in two areas with external partners also involved (the Geospatial Centre of the Faroe Islands and the Kári á Rógvi Institute for Law and Legal Research). The Rector is happy to see academics motivated to start these initiatives within and outside of the University encouraged to collaborate with the University. The Rector envisions research and funding opportunities with these.

Motives for the University establishing such centres was questioned by one Board member. Another Board member said that such entities are common in modern universities and that their presence increases the scale of his University by at least 25%. He also indicated that the Rector was progressing with these initiatives professionally and appropriately, to his mind. It was further clarified that these entities will be part of the University and subject to all of the usual governance and financial regulations of the University, with some special provisions where appropriate. Another member highlighted that external research units are known for attracting experts, creating better funding applications resulting in higher chances of external funding. Points of views with pros and cons had been put forward and most members subsequently expressed excitement and support to see this happening.

6. Discussion

There was no further discussion at this point and the meeting paused for a break.

Part 2: Taking the University forward towards implementing the Strategic Plan in the post-Covid situation.

In Part 2 of the meeting, the Chair of the Board handed over to the Rector to introduce the main themes and the presenters and to lead the discussion.

7. Positioning the University for the post-Covid recovery: seeking views from the Board

The Rector deliberated on post Covid-19 society and the possible implications for the University as well as the contribution the University can make in supporting recovery and development.

The Communication Coordinator then gave a presentation on University's active role to the outside in these last few weeks and what opportunities it has created or may create for the coming time. The University has been visible in the media during the lockdown. Nursing students have been working in the hospitals and the elderly homes to assist with Covid-19 related work. This has created great coverage in the media. Academics from different faculties at the University have also been active in the media debate on various Covid-19 issues, including based on their own research. She further elaborated on using this to create further opportunities to offer our expertise in days to come and how we could actively be part of planning for a potential second wave relating this back to our duty of public service. Unemployment is expected to rise due to corona. The University is planning extra intake in the nursing program and perhaps also the pedagogue programme. The public institution of statistics in the Faroe Islands (Hagstovan) has offered collaboration with the University.



The strategic plan will be sent to parliament members giving them an opportunity to comment on ideas and visions for the University. It was also discussed to perhaps have our ideas presented in a newspaper article series.

Concluding on the results and opportunities ahead it was further elaborated on establishing firmer practices regarding the outside interests of staff. One board member outlined the importance of this, both in terms of staff not having activities which compromise their ability to conduct their work for the University fully and well, but also because of potential conflicts of interest. *The Board asked that the University administration should conduct a review of outside commitments of University staff and take appropriate measures to ensure that everything is in order.*

The Rector also highlighted that for some time the University does not seem to have had a functioning ethics committee and he indicated that this needs to be included in wider discussion and action in relation to University governance.

8. Progress and plans from Pro-Rector for Education Quality

The Pro-Rector for Education Quality provided an update on the work of the Quality Unit. All workshops on creating profiles and programme descriptions arranged by the Quality Unit were moved online in the period since the last Board meeting. It has been a challenge for staff to keep deadlines for submitting profiles because assistance has been needed and it has been necessary to explain to staff why the work is important. With an effort of communicating importance of getting profiles produced and changing perceptions on importance of international status progress is happening now. The Pro-Rector further shared thoughts on future plans between now and the autumn.

9. Progress and plans from Pro-Rector for Research and Enterprise

The Pro-Rector for Research and Enterprise provided an update on the work of the Research and Enterprise Unit. The last few weeks have revolved around gathering data on research outputs of University staff from 2014-2019 and categorizing it. A challenge has been in establishing what counts as scientific research within the University. The Pro-Rector presented various slides with the current data showed in different variations displaying publications based on faculties, type of publications differentiating between peer reviewed articles, debated peer reviewed articles, books, conference papers etc.

Concluding that there is a positive rise of publications, especially since 2017, he stated the vulnerability of the results depending on a few individuals and suggested engaging support from the University's professors to encourage staff publications.

The meeting shared thoughts on research outputs and mentioned that it is important to acknowledge that research is different from field to field and being aware of that categorizing by set definitions across fields may not be helpful in all cases as for example conference papers are very important in some areas rendering it difficult to compare areas. The Rector concluded that it is great that we now have the data and the discussion around it, because previously we have not had that sufficiently.



10. Progress and plans from the University Director on strategic plan implementation

The University Director informed the Board that the first phase of the updated executive orders (splitting the current executive order into four separate orders) is with the Ministry and that three of the four executive orders are expected to go into effect by June 19th. The second phase will commence in the fall with one focus being the fourth executive order (relating to special needs students). The reason for the fourth order taking longer than the other three is that it is dependant on extra funding from the Ministry, but the University is hopeful that the necessary funds will be allocated.

The working group tasked with making a proposal for a new library law (which includes a section on establishing a university library) has recently met and the next meeting will be in June. The University Director has been appointed member of that working group. The National Library is interested in taking on the role of university library. Given the current physical constraints of the National Library, this important work is also linked to plans for a university campus.

The project of establishing a shared student administration system has now advanced to stage 2. The current systems do not - among other issues - live up to the GDPR legislation and a new solution is needed. The discussion now is whether to adopt a standard system (with adjustments) or whether to develop a new system.

The building of NÁÐ (Faculty of Education) has been shared with Skúlin á Fløtum (primary/secondary school). The school is now moving out and discussions are in process with the municipality about the future of the building.

The line manager system is still in process as well as the annual review process – this has been delayed, unavoidably, because of the pandemic, but some progress has been made in other respects.

There was a significant increase in quota 2 applications for bachelor programs this year. Following this a discussion of Covid-19 effects on the need for education took place. One suggestion was to offer shorter programs for people in the labour market who may be unemployed for a shorter time now as alternatives to bachelor and master programmes which are lengthier.

The Chair of the Board asked to prioritize reviewing the portfolio of programmes so that the results can be in place by next year. The Rector confirmed that the strategic plan indicates that this review will be initiated within the current calendar year.

Concluding comments from the Chair

There was a discussion on the strategic plan with one member expressing reservations about the commitments and priorities indicated and the capacity to meet those given teaching demands. The Rector indicated that not every member of staff is expected to contribute in the same way and at the same level to all priorities and commitments. More generally, as discussed and agreed at the previous meeting, it is acknowledged that we may not meet all aspirations to the same degree, but the aim is to work together in a positive and ambitious spirit, and staff have clearly indicated during the consultation process a willingness to do that. The Rector also stressed the extent of the consultation process that had taken place, the volume of feedback received, and the extent of the changes made to the plan to reflect that feedback.



The Rector finally emphasized the importance of recognizing all the hard work of students and staff for the last few weeks in lockdown and the Board acknowledged that wholeheartedly.

In his concluding comment, the Chair of the Board indicated the appreciation of the Board for the continuing good progress which has been made in taking the University forward, especially in the recent very challenging circumstances.