

## MINUTES 162<sup>ND</sup> FC MEETING – 6 NOVEMBER 2014

### Attendees

FC Members	Guests	Executive Board	Official Secretary
Gabi Helfert	Erik van Rein	Frank van der Kruk	Joy Kearney
Jan Sirks	Robbert Brouwer	Abe de Jong	Liz Derks
Jelle de Vries	Thea den Hartog		
Frederieke Dijkhuizen	Carla Dirks		
Andrea Petrini	Peter Elsing		
Lance Cosaert	Samer Abdelnour		
	Lesa Sawahata		
	Nadine Kooiker		
	Joey Johannsen		

### 1. Opening

Gabi opens the 162<sup>nd</sup> meeting at 12.30 pm.

### 2. Agenda

The agenda of today's meeting revolves around three main topics, being the hardship clause and handling of exceptional cases, the communication between the students and the examination board and the reorganization plan. In addition to those, there are a few smaller subjects to be discussed.

### 3. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting are approved without further remarks or amendments.

### 4. Announcements

Abe makes four announcements on behalf of the Executive Board (EB):

1. A task force has been appointed to prepare a proposal to the RSM EB on (gender) diversity policies for faculty. The task force consists of people that have been involved in the subject for a while now and have approached Abe in a proactive manner. The confirmed members of this task force are now Gail Whiteman, Marta Szymanowska, Merieke Stevens, Peter Elsing and Abe de Jong. The committee will start their activities in January 2015 and expects to report in the spring of 2015.
2. The appointment of three confidential integrity counsellors (as recommended by PWC) has been communicated to the school.
3. As part of the earning capacity initiatives, the EB has agreed with (1) the development of a part-time PhD program and (2) a further investigation of a partnership with a German school in order to launch a joint EMBA program in Germany.
4. The RSM management team now meets jointly with the directors of RSM BV under the name RSM Executive Board (EB).

Gabi makes three announcements on behalf of the FC:

1. Since the last meeting, the FC has approved the budget for 2015. A letter of advice was sent out which highlighted a number of concerns of the FC, but approved the overall budget.
2. The FC has finally been successful in attracting new candidates for the FC from the academic staff. One of the candidates, Samer Abdelnour from the Department for Business-Society Management, is present at today's meeting, although he is not officially a member yet. The other candidate is Magdalena Cholakova, who works at the Strategy and Entrepreneurship department. She will join from January onwards as she is currently involved in a research assignment abroad. In order for them to become official members, informal

elections have to be held, as there are two vacant seats and two people applying. This means other faculty members interested in joining the FC can submit their application until Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 12.00 noon. However, if there are no other applications, the two candidates who have come forward so far can be officially appointed next week. Another potential member for the next period has also stepped forward, Marie Schmidt from the Department of Technology and Operations Management. She is planning to run for elections in May 2015.

3. The FC has sent out a letter regarding internal communication at RSM. In the last FC meeting the subject was discussed extensively with Marianne Schouten, RSM's media and PR manager. Since then, an internal meeting has taken place between Marianne, Abe and Gabi. During this meeting they set out a plan for implementing focus groups and discussed the configuration of these groups and the recruitment of the group members. The FC will be actively involved in the process and will be able to review the briefing of the moderator and the questions that will be discussed within these focus groups. There will be a public announcement on the intranet for the employees to invite them to participate in these focus groups.

### **5. Hardship clause and exceptional cases**

Lance explains that there seems to be some confusion on the side of the students about the hardship clause, the general procedures, and the hard criteria to base the decision upon, especially in the case of exceptional personal circumstances. Thea den Hartog, study advisor of the IBA program, starts by providing some information about the context and her role as a study advisor in this process. First of all, the study advisors closely monitor the study progress of the students in the first year and they have mediating role in the BSA. After each round of examination the Examination Board sends a provisional advice to all students and depending on the number of credits the students earned, they are invited to meet with the study advisors, also to find out whether there are personal circumstances that might affect study performance. As both IBA and BA are large-scale study programmes with relatively little contact between students and staff it is not always easy to get to know all first-year students. Therefore, the study advisors also depend on the second-year mentors, who meet the first-year students on a regular basis. These mentors receive training and keep the study advisors informed about any potential problems their students may have. During meetings with the students, the study advisors take a closer look at their study approach and progress. They are familiar with and aware of the many difficulties new students might experience. However, the situation is different when personal circumstances are reported as the reason for inferior study results. When personal circumstances are reported, the first step is to assess how these circumstances affect study performance and as everyone responds differently to different situations it is not always easy to estimate the impact certain circumstances have on individual students. Thea explains that this is often closely related to the cultural background of the students, and all student advisors attend trainings and seminars about intercultural communication to be aware of the cultural differences among students. International students often find it hard to share their personal issues, due to feelings of humiliation, shame and the idea of failing, especially when the family has invested much in their studies. Nevertheless, Thea emphasizes that the study advisors cannot help, nor provide advice, if students do not communicate their problems in time. Therefore, apart from efforts from the side of the study advisors, students are urged to act proactively. All personal circumstances that are reported to the study advisors are listed on a so-called "PC list", which is the basis for recommendations regarding the BSA during a meeting in August. In order to obtain the study advisors' support, a student should report personal circumstances in a timely manner, at least before the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. Secondly, students have to provide evidence of their reported personal circumstances and they need to be able to demonstrate a clear relationship between the circumstances and the courses they failed. If the student advisors believe the student was not able to obtain the full 60 ECTS due to personal circumstances, the study advisors will advise the Examination Board to allow the student to continue their studies at RSM, and in most cases, the Examination Board follows this advice. Nonetheless, personal circumstances are not always decisive. Other factors are also taken into account, such as performance throughout the year and the nature of the courses that were failed (qualitative or quantitative). At the meeting in August, the Examination Board always looks at the bigger picture and an independent student counsellor

from the central university is invited to this meeting to assure the quality of this decision-making process. If a student does not agree with the decision, there is always the option to lodge an appeal. Lastly, Thea would like to stress that all student advisors take their work very seriously and they follow all procedures as stated by Dutch law, but they also realize they cannot please everyone. This means that sometimes the personal circumstances reported by a student do not show a clear relationship with study performance at all or there is a lack of evidence or the circumstances are simply not grave enough to explain poor study results and this demonstrates that not all excuses are accepted. Carla then takes over and elaborates on the role of the Examination Board. This year, the Examination Board, together with the study advisors and the student counsellor revised and discussed all students with one or two failed exams, which were approximately 100 individual cases. These were all student without any reported personal circumstances, and during the meeting they looked at all the grades, the grade point average and the number of resits the students took. Carla mentions they were very pleased with this approach as last year, in 2013; they received around 200 letters from students and had to deal with 24 appeals. This year the number of appeals decreased to only 11.

Lance then addresses the fact that some people due to their cultural background rather not talk about their personal issues, although this is often reflected in low grades. He wonders whether the study advisors approach these students proactively. Thea refers to the aforementioned approach of sending students with low grades an invitation to come and see the study advisors. However, Carla adds that it is the student's own choice to come to this meeting as it is not mandatory. However, when a student comes, the study advisor always tries to build up a personal and confidential relationship with the student and to remove any barriers a student might have to not talk about their problems. Joy states that this was exactly one of the FC's concerns as students sometimes do not seem to know where to go when having problems, and about 15-20 students reached out to her over the past few years, most of them being IBA students, 50% Dutch and 50% internationals. She always refers them to the study advisors, but she wonders how easy it is for students to find information about these procedures themselves, as some of them do not seem to have a clue. Carla says that she is surprised about this information as students receive this information through several channels. Andrea mentions that the information could maybe be displayed more prominently on the website. Thea says that the information about the student advisers has already a very prominent place on the RSM website for current students, but she will look into the most effective and possibly additional ways to inform the students about their services, such as a little movie or by using blackboard, next to existing SIN-channel of the student advisers.

## **6. Communication students – Examination Board**

Frederieke explains that currently students are having trouble communicating to the Examination Board. She illustrates this with an example from IBA 1 last year, where an official letter was sent to the Examination Board to address an exam issue and the students received back a reply stating that the Examination Board does not communicate directly with the students. She also mentions she understands that the Examination Board cannot talk to every random student walking into their office; however, she was surprised to receive such a reply on an official letter. Frederieke wonders how communication between these parties can be improved and whether this communication barrier in some way can be removed.

Carla states that she has read the minutes of last meeting and was surprised to hear that such a reply was sent out. She emphasizes that the Examination Board communicates with students all the time and she immediately asked the secretary to find out more about this particular case. It appeared that this complaint was forwarded to and handled by Programme Management as this was a recurring situation year after year. However, she again stresses that the Examination Board does communicate with students as they are the ones dealing with (most of) the complaints. Frederieke then asks whether there would be the possibility to make this process more transparent or to simply "open up". Carla answers that these complaints usually take time and when a student files a request, they receive a reply

from the Examination Board with a time indication about when they can expect an answer. When a complaint is filed, it really depends on the type of complaint. It could involve discussions with the associated professor or social science research institute Risbo and simply always takes time as all complaints are different. However, students can walk in to the office of the Examination Board during opening hours to inform about the status of their complaint. Andrea and Frederieke are quite surprised to hear this, as, according to them, students are not aware of this possibility. Carla replies that the Examination Board is not a front office and most of the time only the secretaries are present. This means not each and every question can be answered and it is easiest to first send a letter or an email, but there is definitely the possibility to walk in and ask about the progress of a pending complaint. She adds that she would definitely like to receive the email or reply that was sent in Frederieke's example case, as she would like to look into it. Frederieke agrees to forward the message.

A related issue that is then brought up by Frederieke is the current process of peer-reviewing of exams. Over the past few years there have been many exams where questions appeared to be "incorrect" after an exam and consequently were dropped and not taken into account for grading. Carla recognizes this and explains that the exams where this happened were in fact peer-reviewed by peers, by experts and even sometimes Risbo. Frederieke mentions the case where in an exam last year five out of twenty questions were dropped, and asks whether this process could be improved. Carla states that this is a matter for the professors and the corresponding departments to improve this, as the Examination Regulations already state that every exam should be peer-reviewed. Samer adds that mistakes are only human so it is inevitable that exams sometimes contain mistakes. However, within the faculty there should be mechanisms to effectively solve such issues and that it is really a matter of how such problems are being handled and communicated. In addition, he wonders how widespread this problem really is. Frederieke and Andrea answer that it actually happened quite often last year, and sometimes the dropping of questions even diminished the students' grades. Moreover, it concerned mistakes that actually could have been avoided, such as parts of a question that were simply not translated, either correctly or at all, from Dutch into English. Gabi asks whether there are currently incentives or penalties for both the professors and the reviewers of these questions. Carla answers there are none, but in repeated cases the Examination Board informs Programme Management as they appoint the professors. Additionally, she mentions that the grading policy for mistakes in exams is currently discussed by the Examination Board and Programme Management. She suggests contacting Programme Management, as they are currently in contact with certain professors to improve the peer-reviewing of the exams that showed a high number of incorrect questions. Moreover, they might be able to shed some light to the exact procedure of peer-reviewing. Thea also suggests inviting the IBA Programme Committee, as there are also teachers involved. Frederieke and Andrea agree to get in touch with them and invite them for the next meeting.

## **7. Reorganization plan Generic Support staff RSM**

Gabi briefly introduces the proposed reorganization plan for RSM's generic support staff. The target is to reduce the generic support staff by 4.4 FTE. The FC has reviewed the document and has discussed it during their internal meeting. They noticed a mismatch between the table on the last page that gives an overview of all the people concerned and what is actually said in the text, as the academic coordinator of Sustainable RSM and the student assistant of the FC are missing. Moreover, Jan and Gabi talked to all the employees and departments involved and during these talks it became clear some of the departments would like to bring forward their case during the monthly FC meeting. This way they can demonstrate the impact on the school, would the plan be implemented as proposed. As such, the staff members of Sustainable RSM (SRSM) have been invited to elaborate on their tasks and about the consequences if staff positions were eliminated or staff time reduced from 1.7 FTE to 0.5 FTE as planned by the Executive Board, and from currently four employees to only one.

Joey Johannsen then takes over and introduces herself (sustainability coordinator), Nadine Kooiker (student assistant) and Lesa Sawahata (communication coordinator) as members from SRSM. The fourth member (academic coordinator Frank Wijen) sent regrets for not attending due to teaching commitments. As SRSM they understand that RSM has to follow the Berenschot Benchmark, and how this poses a disruption for the organisation. SRSM has been asked to work with the business school in the areas of social and environmental sustainability and thus offers to participate in the process of identifying solutions in dealing with these disruptions. Nadine then takes over and explains that the achievements of SRSM are not easy to translate to quantitative, measurable data. They build up relationships and networks with the faculty, current students, alumni and businesses and these are hard to measure. Additionally, SRSM builds up brand equity, which in turn can be used as a marketing tool. An example of this is the RSM MBA programme, which was recently ranked number one in terms of sustainability. Such accomplishments add to RSM's competitive advantages in a time where sustainability becomes more and more important. SRSM aims to advance the RSM mission of being a leading global business school that develops future leaders in sustainable business. They do so through coaching and developing activities and programmes supporting teaching, research and operations. In 2012 and 2014 SRSM staff created the PRME (Principles of Responsible Management) report that RSM submits to the United Nations, which addresses RSM's commitment to corporate social responsibility, ethics, and sustainability, illustrates the growing number of events, activities, courses, and research projects in these areas, and documents the impact of SRSM for the school. All these activities require time, and networks need to be maintained. With a staff reduction of almost 80%, the identified goals and projects for supporting RSM's mission would be practically eliminated.. A concrete example would be the potential discontinuation of the RSM Sustainability Forum, as a team of people is required to organize such a conference. Additionally, although RSM is on the right track regarding sustainability initiatives, there is still much more to be done. Joey and Nadine shared many examples highlighting the consequences of eliminating staff positions and work time reduction. They submitted a two-page list featuring important activities, programmes, mentoring, coaching, and support to all RSM programmes, alumni and corporate networks in the areas of teaching, research, student associations, school initiatives, alumni relations, and corporate networking that would simultaneously be eliminated.

Frank states that he does appreciate all the good work SRSM is doing and adds that he has addressed SRSM as his main area of concern in this reorganization plan. He does have a number of informal ideas and solutions and would be more than happy to share and discuss these during an internal meeting with the Faculty Council. He also emphasizes that this reorganization assignment comes from the CvB and that he has to respect the boundaries and cutting requirements, but nevertheless is willing to look for ways to keep the staffing capacity of SRSM as high as possible.

Joy then responds on the section English Language Support in the Reorganization Plan document. She mentions the section is not accurate in relation to the tasks of the English Language Consultant, as half of the tasks are left out and some of the tasks are described incorrectly. Apart from teaching commitments, a large part of this job is quality control of the English language. This goes beyond teaching, translating and editing, as it focuses on the contracts that go out from RSM to external parties. This is a crucial aspect of English Language Support. Gabi mentions that the EB has mentioned the intention to outsource this function to a translation bureau and asks about an opinion regarding this idea. According to Joy most of the translation bureaus do not provide services in academic and legal English. Secondly, as mentioned before, the job of English Language Consultant does not only involve translating, and the other services cannot be outsourced. Gabi then addresses a related issue, which is the general level of English at the RSM faculty and wonders whether there is an overview of the current level of English of the RSM staff. Peter states that the last assessments for support staff will be carried out next week and then there will be an overview, but early indications show an average level of B2/C1, with about 30% of the employees in level B2. Frank adds that the goal is to have everyone on level C1 and people with level B2 are encouraged to take classes. However, this

does not appear to be the case for the academic staff members, who are sometimes not comfortable teaching and preparing materials in English. Gabi and Jan will meet with the EB next week to discuss the Reorganization Plan more in-depth. They will then also discuss the initiative “Van Werk naar Werk”, as this policy is not functioning the way it should.

**8. Status Faculty Regulations**

Frank mentions the Faculty Regulations are currently “in progress”. Martin Boogaard is responsible for coordination of updating the Faculty Regulations and Frank will ask him for a plan and a time indication so he can keep the FC informed about this process. He adds the FC will be involved in this process and will also have the opportunity to review the new Faculty Regulations.

**9. Any other business**

1. Gabi asks when the diversity policy for support staff will be implemented. Frank answers that he will put the subject on the meeting agenda of the EB next week.

**10. Closure**

Gabi closes the meeting at 2.03 pm.

**Next FC meeting December 4<sup>th</sup> 2014, time to be determined.**

**To do before the next meeting**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Forward the response from the EB from last year to Carla Dirks	Frederieke	DONE
Contact and invite IBA Programme Committee and Programme Management to next FC meeting	Frederieke & Andrea	IN PROGRESS
Schedule a meeting to discuss the Reorganization Plan	Frank/Gabi/Jan	DONE
Ask Martin Boogaard about plan and time indication for Faculty Regulations	Frank	DONE
Put diversity policy for support staff on agenda EB meeting	Frank	DONE
Change time/day for next FC meeting	Liz	IN PROGRESS