

Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education

INSTITUTION-WIDE REVIEW

The Agricultural University of Iceland

April 2023

Preface

This is the report of an Institution-Wide Review of The Agricultural University of Iceland undertaken by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education under the authority of the Icelandic Government.

The review was carried out by an independent Review Team of senior international higher education experts together with a student from the higher education sector in Iceland. The Team was appointed by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education.

The Institution-Wide Review is one component of the second cycle of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF2) established by the Icelandic Government in 2017. The main elements of the QEF are:

- Quality Board-led Institution-Wide Reviews (IWRs)
- University-led Subject-Level Reviews (SLRs)
- University-led Year-on and Mid-Term Progress reports
- Annual meetings between universities and Quality Board members to discuss institutional developments, including in quality assurance
- Quality Council-led enhancement workshops and conferences
- Quality Board-led special reviews

Further information on QEF is available on the website of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (www.qef.is).

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Glossary and List of Abbreviations

AS. Agricultural Sciences Study Programme.

AUI. Agricultural University of Iceland.

ECTS. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

EN-CHIL. MSc in Environmental Changes at Higher Latitudes.

ES. Equine Sciences Study Programme.

ESG. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015 edition. Also known as European Standards and Guidelines.

FAS. Faculty of Agricultural Sciences.

FEFS. Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences.

FPD. Faculty of Planning and Design.

FS-REM. Forest Sciences, Restoration Ecology and Management Study Programme.

GRÓ-LRT. GRÓ Land Restoration Training Programme.

IRIS. Icelandic Research Information System.

IWR. Institution-Wide Review. Board-led review of institutions, based on QEF.

LA. Landscape Architecture Study Programme.

NA-EN. Nature and Environment Study Programme.

QEF. Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education.

QEF1. First cycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education, 2011-2015.

QEF2. Second cycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education, scheduled for 2017-2023.

RA. Reflective Analysis produced by the Agricultural University of Iceland in preparation for the IWR.

SLR. Subject-Level Review. Institution-led review of an individual faculty, based on QEF.

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1. Introduction: The Review in Context

1.1 Overview of review process

The Institution Wide Review (IWR) of the University of Agriculture in Iceland (hereafter the University) was performed as part of the second cycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF2), and the process followed the guidelines given in the 2nd edition of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education.¹

In the previous QEF cycle (QEF1), the University took part in an IWR in 2013.

The University submitted its Reflective Analysis (RA) on 9 September 2022. In addition, the Review Team (hereafter the Team) received access to supporting documentation, including the report of the IWR in QEF1 from 2013, the Year-on Report from 2016, the mid-term progress report from 2020, and Subject-Level Reviews for all three faculties undertaken in 2021 in the QEF2, including the faculty reports from independent external experts. The University also provided minor additional information upon request from the Team. The review visit took place 1-4 November 2022. The full programme of the visit can be found in Annex 1.

As part of the review, the Team also undertook a systematic evaluation of evidence of the University's procedures with reference to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), and the commentary on ESG provided in Annex 11 of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education. The Team's conclusions are included in the summaries for Sections 3, 4, 6 and 7.

1.2 About the institution

The Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI) is one of seven universities in Iceland and one of four public universities. It is an educational and research institution in the fields of agriculture, land resources, environmental sciences, urban and regional planning, and landscape architecture. It has a strong sustainable development focus. The topics taught, and the BSc,

¹ www.qef.is and https://qef.is/assets/PDFs/Others/Guidelines-for-IWR-team-chair-and-team-members_FINAL-1-9-2020.pdf

MSc and PhD degrees, vocational training and continuing education, are unique in the national context. The University therefore has an important and clear role in sustainable development of both rural and urban communities of Iceland.

The University was founded in 2005 as a result of the merging of three established institutions: the Agricultural University at Hvanneyri, the Agricultural Research Institute in Reykjavik, and the Horticultural College at Reykir. In 2022 the horticulture vocational programme was moved from the University to the South Iceland College (Fjölbrautaskóli Suðurlands).

Since autumn 2022, the University has had two main campuses: Hvanneyri in Borgarbyggð and Keldnaholt in Reykjavik. The operations in Reykir in Ölfus were at that point moved to the South Iceland College. The main campus, Hvanneyri in West Iceland, has been Iceland's main agricultural education centre since 1889, with the foundation of the Agricultural School, which developed into the Agricultural University of Hvanneyri in 1999.

Additionally, the University runs a sheep farm at Hestur, a horse-riding centre at Mið-Fossar and Möðruvellir farm in North Iceland. It also operates, as separate companies, the Hvanneyrarbú dairy farm, the Agricultural Museum in Hvanneyri and student housing.

The University encompasses three faculties at higher education level: the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences (FAS), the Faculty of Planning and Design (FPD) and the Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences (FEFS). The three faculties were established in January 2020, as a result of a reorganisation of the University. In addition, the University offers vocational training and continuing education, which are not part of the remit of this review.

The University is a small but fast growing institution in terms of both education and research. However, the research activities are strongly concentrated in one of the three faculties.

The number of full-time staff as of 1 June 2022, was 93 (84,5 FTE). 23 of these are faculty members in academic positions. In addition, around 75 sessional teachers contribute to the teaching at the University every year. There are seven professors, four associate professors and 12 assistant professors. 25 staff members (including PhD students and adjunct professors) are international, providing an academic environment encompassing 15 nationalities.

The University has 327 students at higher education level, an increase of 63% over ten years. The number of PhD students is 19, an increase from three in 2013. From autumn 2022, eight study programmes have been offered, awarding degrees ranging from vocational training to PhD. In addition, there is a diploma degree in land restoration offered by GRÓ LRT.

1.3 Key committee and managerial structures

Figure 1 shows the managerial structure of the University as presented in its RA. For clarification, the Team has added an overview of committees and other bodies.

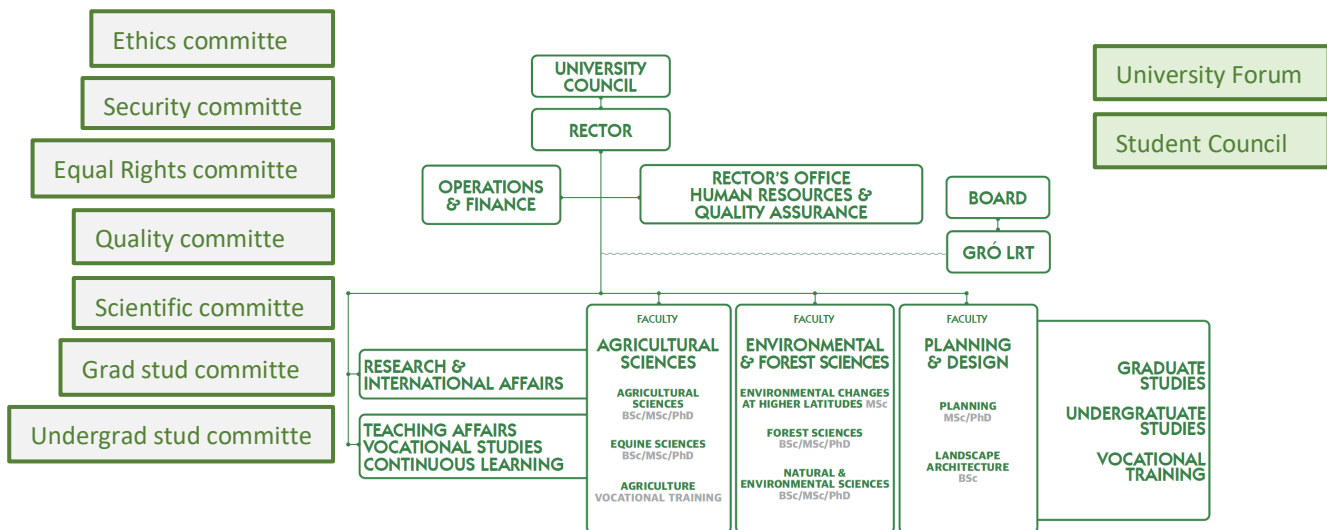


Figure 1. The University Organisational Chart as implemented 1 January 2020, revised after transfer of vocational training horticulture programmes 2022.

The University Council

- is chaired by the Rector. There is one representative nominated by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, one student by the University student association, two University representatives by the University Forum, and two representatives by existing Council representatives. This is in accordance with Law 85/2008 on public universities in Iceland;
- is appointed for a period of two years;
- is responsible for the University operating in compliance with current laws and regulations;
- determines the set-up for organisational units, their function and duties (fundamental organisational changes require a statement from the University Forum);

- establishes the overall approach to teaching and research and conducts general supervision;
- oversees the confirmation of the calendar, the curricula, and course catalogues. Establishes rules for vocational education courses, undergraduate courses and for graduate studies for master's and doctoral degrees.

The Executive Board

- is composed of the University Rector, the Heads of Faculties, the Vocational Education Coordinator, and the Head of the Rector's Office, the Head of Finance and Operations, the Head of International Relations and Research, and the Head of Teaching and Learning. This is a new formation, as formerly there were two separate meetings for administration and faculties;
- oversees the daily operations of the University;
- follows up on the decisions of the University Council, and initiates new ideas, projects and policy issues that relate to the interests of the University;
- reviews and takes decisions concerning finances, planning, settlement of cooperation agreements, the progress of development projects and innovation, and the harmonisation of projects among single organisational units of the University.

The University Forum

- is a common meeting of all staff, as well as of student representatives; and
- according to the law on Public Universities, is to be held annually to discuss the general policy formation for the University in the areas of teaching and research, plans of operations and various other relevant affairs.

A study programme coordinator for each study programme is responsible for

- academic oversight of the respective programme;
- communication with students, the Office of Teaching and Learning and the PR Manager.

Seven committees govern and have responsibility for different areas. The Quality Committee works closely with the Scientific Committee and Graduate Studies Committee.

1. The Ethics Committee

- is advisory to the University Council and the Executive Board regarding the structure and interpretation of ethical standards.
2. The Quality Committee
 - is responsible for quality assurance (QA) policies and provides guidance and support to the faculties, study programmes, and administration.
 3. The Equal Rights Committee
 - is responsible for the equality policy, for providing training and for responding to offences that are reported.
 4. The Security Committee
 - is responsible for workplace safety policy and procedures and training and collaborates with external institutions on safety issues.
 5. The Scientific Committee
 - promotes research and the financing thereof by grant applications.
 6. The Graduate Studies Committee
 - designs policies and monitors their quality, addresses and approves curricula and course catalogues, directs the application process and addresses key issues concerning individual students and controversial issues that may arise.
 7. The Undergraduate Studies Committee
 - addresses teaching development and the harmonisation between study programmes, curricula and course documentation for individual study programmes, monitors their quality and handles key issues concerning individual students and controversial issues that may arise.

1.4 Funding and resources

The University is one of four public universities in Iceland. Government allocations form approximately 60% of the total income, with goods and services 18% and other income 22%. The government contributions are partly based on the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students.

The total turnover has increased in recent years. In 2021 the turnover was 2.1 billion ISK, compared to 1.5 billion ISK in 2018. The turnover has increased due to more funding from the growing number of students and from mostly national competitive funds, but an increased number of proposals have also been submitted to European and Nordic funds. The total funding from competitive funds has almost tripled from 2018 to 2021, from approximately 100–120 million ISK per year in the period 2012–2018 to 340 million ISK in 2021. The financial standing of the continuing educational services has been improved, and after years of budget deficit, the income is now fully sustainable.

Being an agricultural university, the AUI has farm operations and facilities for plant growth. From a financial perspective these require resources to maintain and develop and the University strategy has defined “Efficient use of resources” as one of the focus areas. As part of the strategy, farm operations on the Hvanneyri dairy farm and at the agronomy centre have been improved with new equipment for sustainable and technological development which, in many cases, also decrease the environmental impact. The use of the farming facilities for project work has increased. As farming facilities are essential infrastructures for an agricultural university, but costly, the Team recommends the University to continue to highlight their unique infrastructure also in future strategic action plans.

1.5 Mission and strategy

The AUI Strategy 2019-2024 builds on the sustainability goals of the United Nations, together with the Icelandic government’s target that agriculture in Iceland should be self-sustainable and play a leading role in the production of healthy agricultural products.

The AUI Mission statement is to create and disseminate knowledge in the field of sustainable use of resources, environment, planning and food production in the Arctic region.

The AUI Vision is to be locally and internationally recognized for progressive teaching, research and innovation, resulting in value creation and food security through sustainable use of resources.

The University states three values:

- SUSTAINABILITY - the University promotes sustainable use of resources and first-class food production.

- PROSPERITY - the University aims to create prosperity for producers, consumers, society and the environment.
- PROGRESSIVENESS - the University places key emphasis on internationally approved innovation and research which it integrates into its studies, with the aim of increasing competitiveness and value creation in society.

To reach its vision, six focus areas of development have been chosen:

1. Innovation and value creation
2. Research and development
3. Progressive and value enhancing education
4. Efficient use of resources
5. Human resources and team spirit
6. Trust and reputation

Each focus area has defined actions, key measures and goals.

1.6 The Reflective Analysis

The Team found the reflective analysis (RA) to be comprehensive and well-written, providing a good foundation for the Team to prepare the visit.

The Team was impressed by the clearly structured and transparent description of the current management of quality work and strategy (2019-2024), and how the results from the QEF1 had been analysed and turned into actions. Helpful links for further reading were embedded in the text. Only minor additional requests for details, such as examples of the use in practice of systematic quality work, were made ahead of the review visit.

The RA was undertaken as a participatory process. The preparatory work was guided by an extensive steering group, in which the University's management, staff members and students were diversely represented.

Linkages between the present IWR and the processes of the wider QEF (including SLRs, the previous IWR in 2013 and the additional IWR follow-up report in 2016) were clear and constructive. The reflective process undertaken by the University as part of the RA was evident and marked by an ambitious, forward thinking and constructive approach towards development. It reflects well on lessons learnt following its first IWR.

As noted above, the University's approach to quality management is ambitious, and the RA describes how a multitude of measures or plans have been applied to address recommendations from the SLRs and the IWR in QEF1. However, the Team encourages the University to strengthen the implementation of its quality system by adjusting the measures to its own context, being a small university. A good existing example is the change from standard course evaluation surveys to focus groups to gain feedback to inform course development.

The RA presents a thorough SWOT analysis made by the University Forum, followed by a set of action priorities. The Team recommends that the University continue to work on the different action priorities. Currently the list is a mix of actions and targets, as exemplified by *"New housing for the University agronomy center"* and *"Improving retention and graduation rates"*. The first is an action, but the latter is a target and lacks the description of the actions needed to attain it.

1.7 Summary evaluation

The Team's impression from the RA was of a university with an important national role for Icelandic agriculture, forestry, land use and planning. It has an ambitious strategy, especially regarding growth in both research and education, connected to the SWOT analysis in which the University recognises its size as a weakness. The ample examples of how the University had acted on the many comments from earlier reviews clearly show that its goals are also accompanied by the capacity to develop accordingly. During the visit, the Team noticed from the interviews with both students and staff that the awareness of the University's role and small size, accompanied by an ambition to grow, was widely spread. The leadership is committed and enhancement oriented, skilfully using their networks to share resources and knowledge to meet the challenges connected to the size. It also appears that the University manages to maintain good support services at both campuses. A good example of how senior management acts swiftly and appropriately is the Rector's Friday e-mail, which is sent to both staff and students, as a result of a request for increased transparency. The interviews showed that this is highly appreciated.

The Team approached the visit interested to find out more about the processes for future development and the implementation of processes for quality management. The Team

wanted, among other things, to understand how staff and students engage in future development and how the new organisation's several committees and three faculties work in practice to serve quality and research management. The Team was also somewhat puzzled by the high student retention rates for year one being followed by remarkably low completion rates.

The visit revealed a quality system in development, building on recommendations from previous evaluations. The institution has strengthened quality, human resources (HR) and international functions accordingly and prioritised resources to create strategy and policies underpinning the quality work. However, after the full review visit the Team finds the documentation of common operating models on the intranet and in the quality manual to be incomplete, and it is difficult to get an overview of how different policies and documents are connected into a system. This was underpinned by the fact that the interviews highlighted some differences in how the three faculties implemented quality policies, as well as in their awareness on how the system is intended to work. Notwithstanding this, the Team found in all interviews abundant evidence of a sincere attitude towards maintaining and further improving quality, and that the informal strong quality culture is positively promoted by close collaboration between staff and students. There was high attendance and lively discussion in the open meetings. Staff are aware of the low completion rates and have many ideas on how to address this. To develop the quality management into a working system it is therefore important to maintain simplicity and fully engage faculty, students and stakeholders in relevant phases.

Regarding the management of research, the Team praises the University for its efforts to improve management of research activities and research outcomes. Development of research is one of the focus areas in the University Strategy 2019-2024. New research governance structures have been created, thus helping to build research capacity. The University has addressed the comments from the 2013 IWR, to elaborate an overall Research Policy which provides guidance on the relationship between research and teaching, reflecting the distinctions among the disciplines while encouraging collaborations, interdisciplinary activity, and the need for increased scholarly productivity. The Research Policy was approved by the University Council on 30th October 2019. The University addressed the previous comments from 2013 regarding the evaluation of research in the promotion and tenure

process. The Rules for the advancement of academic employees were approved by the University Council on 21st January 2022, specifying that assessment for advancement is built on a comprehensive professional evaluation of performance and success in research, teaching, management and services.

From the RA, it was clear that the University had addressed the previous comments from 2013 regarding a tendency to be inward looking. Internationalisation plays an important role in the drive for higher quality and it was clear at the visit that organisation, staff and strategy in that aspect also work very well. Both students and staff complimented the work of the Office on International Relations and Research and the Team agrees that the new UNIGreen alliance, a European Universities Initiatives (EUI), provides an opportunity to develop quality management at the University. However, considerable changes are still needed, including becoming fully bilingual, for example by translating documents into English and improving information on the intranet.

There is a strong focus of attention on the small numbers of students, and a high awareness of the need for flexibility in education. Many students are mature and already working professionals. The University therefore has a strong commitment to accommodate this by providing blended and distance learning as well as individualised research master's studies. Although highly appropriate, this produces a challenge to creating a vibrant campus and a university experience for both on-site and distance students. To meet that challenge, compulsory on-site weeks have become part of the curriculum, which is commendable. However, students mentioned during the visit that some courses have very few on-site students and in that case they miss out on classmates and university social life. The Team therefore encourages the University to continue to find creative ways to create close connections between on-site and distance students.

The University chose the graduate learning environment as its case study, which the Team found appropriate. It showed how the institution can work systematically and the high awareness of the importance of the working environment and the farms, including the research there. It also showed how the University has a clear image of the importance of the two campuses and their different roles.

2. Learning From Prior Reviews

2.1 Learning from previous IWR

In the previous IWR in 2013, the University received many extensive and fundamental development proposals. Many changes have been developed as a response.

In 2013, the Institutional Review Team commended the following strengths:

- The distinctiveness of the University's role in Iceland;
- A strong and respected senior management team;
- An impressive capacity for self-reflection (which, however, needs to be complemented by more robust prioritisation);
- The readiness of the management team to listen to the views of both staff and students;
- Extensive land resources, which support the institution's applied research mission;
- Attractive and well-maintained buildings, supportive to the educational programme;
- An effective use of educational networks and openness to new collaborative possibilities;
- A strong research urge, good research links to industry, and the integration of research into the whole curriculum;
- Commitment to the development of blended and distance learning, appropriate to the institution's mission;
- Easy access for students to information and support;
- A strong record of graduate employment and further studies, nationally and internationally.

Recommendations from the 2013 review included:

- As a matter of priority, formalising quality assurance processes and making them more visible within the institution;
- Creating more transparent and consistent processes for the assessment of student work;

- Resolving the mismatch between the aspiration to raise admission standards and the need to strengthen academic support for non-traditional entrants;
- Monitoring graduate performance and progress more effectively and systematically, especially for students on individually planned master's programmes;
- Producing, as part of its next Strategic Plan, a research strategy that is appropriate to its developing research culture;
- Addressing current tensions between full-time studies and distance learning;
- Taking better account of the particular need to safeguard student confidentiality in a very small institution;
- Ensuring that policies for equal opportunity and disability issues permeate the entire institution;
- Strengthening all aspects of staff development, and formalising the HR function;
- As funding permits, addressing the inadequacies of the physical library;
- Providing a comprehensive career guidance service;
- Fostering synergies between the various departments.

Three important contextual facts were noted by the review:

- A substantial funding gap since 2005 has hindered the development of the institution and limited its ability to implement recommendations from accreditation reviews.
- The University's facilities cover a wide geographical area, as is appropriate to the institution's mission; but this situation also presents organisational difficulties.
- The small size and critical mass of the institution, together with the high proportion of distance learners, threatens the viability of some programmes.

As noted above, the IWR report from 2013 called for more formalised quality assurance processes, a quality handbook and more systematic work with assessment, monitoring and support. Much work has been done to increase the number of formal processes. The University has undertaken a major revision of QA processes following the recommendations. New roles have resulted from the recommendations from the previous review. An HR and Quality Manager has been employed, as well as a Records and Information Manager. New

committees have also been created. From three education committees (undergraduate, master's and Phd level), there are now two committees, for Undergraduate and Graduate Studies respectively, and additional committees for Ethics, Quality, Equal Rights, Security and Science. A research strategy has been formed at institutional level and internationalisation has become an inherent part of academic activities.

In summary, based on the 2020 Mid-Term Progress Report, the Team finds that the University's quality assurance, HR management and quality management practices have become significantly clearer. Staff and student satisfaction have also improved significantly. But, as described in the coming chapters, the Team recommends that more should be done to develop quality management into a quality system that is fully implemented on all levels and fit for purpose. The University also states in the RA that there has been a high focus on quality issues, revising strategies, regulations, and policy procedures. However, there is still work to be done, especially in the areas of improving formalised benchmarking studies and following up on student feedback on individual courses.

2.2 Learning from SLRs

Subject-Level Reviews were undertaken in 2021 on the three newly formed faculties established in January 2020. This first self-evaluation process served as a reference point for the development of the faculties, and the external reviewers noted that the faculties showed full responsibility in producing an honest analysis.

The three SLR reports share the same format, the use of the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) method for formulating objectives, and the aim for the SLR to become an active document over the years to come. The intention to review the action plan annually was commended as a useful exercise by the reviewers. The external experts noted that high satisfaction with the student experience was a common theme between the three faculties. Another commonality was that it was difficult for the external experts to confirm the standards of student achievement, but they evaluated that the processes to secure standards were in place.

However, there were also several differences. A major difference noted between the three faculties was in how they design and review their study programmes, and design learning outcomes for courses, as well as in the structure of the review meetings. Differences were

also found relating to research. With regard to research output, as assessed by the Evaluation System for Public Higher Education Institutions in Iceland for the period 2016–2019, FEFS contributes on average over 60% of the mean research points of the University, and nearly 70% of the research points from peer-reviewed publications. FEFS researchers are active participants in relevant international societies. FEFS documents the societal impact of their research, and their activities are widely disseminated. The FEFS appear to have a good system for research monitoring, which the SLR reviewers suggested might be implemented in the other faculties. For FAS, both research activity and the societal impact of research, were assessed as high. The faculty was recommended to have clear ambitions to increase funding for its research activities. The faculty has accepted this recommendation, and the Team found during the IWR visit that this ambition is part of the new faculty strategy. FPD is a small faculty and considerably weaker in research output. It was recommended that the University recognise the specialism of the discipline and consider including it in the University research assessment, for example through participation in planning competitions and other design work.

During the SLRs, all three faculties were in the process of forming their own research strategies. They were recommended to design a complete action plan to cover teaching, research, resources, organisation and serving society. At the IWR visit, it was clear that this work was almost finished. The Team would like to add that continued work on strategic planning in each faculty, taking into account the overall University strategy as well as possibilities for cooperation between faculties, is needed to further advance the development of the whole University.

3 Managing Standards

3.1 Institutional approach and resources for the management of standards

The RA provided details on the University's governance and management structure, particularly focused on quality management responsibilities. The governance of the University is delegated to the University Council and to the Rector, who has the main responsibility for the quality of the University. At the faculty level, the heads have

responsibility for the quality of their own units and each staff member is responsible for the quality of their own work.

The HR and Quality Manager is responsible for the Quality Assurance system and takes care of management and coordination of everyday quality operations. In these duties the HR and Quality Manager is supported by the Quality Committee. The Quality Committee is currently composed of the HR and Quality Manager, the Records and Information Manager and one student representative. It is responsible for the QA policies of the University and provides guidance and support to the faculties, study programmes, and administration, for example on self-assessment, evaluations, monitoring of key performance indicators, implementing improvements, proofreading and promoting a quality culture. The Quality Committee works closely with the Scientific Committee, the Graduate Studies Committee and the Undergraduate Studies Committee. All the staff members of the Quality Committee are drawn from the administration. The Team recommends that at least one representative of the academic staff should be appointed as a member of the committee. In this way, the implementation of quality assurance practices at the faculty level could be strengthened.

During the visit, staff expressed enthusiasm and passion for the collective vision of the University, for the University's role, and for its students and the quality of teaching. However, this was not accompanied by the same level of enthusiasm for the framework, processes and systems that support safeguarding of standards. Within a small institution, faculty members have many responsibilities and limited resources and time to implement policies. It is therefore important to have a system of proportionate size, that builds on current culture and practice.

The Quality Manual of the University was updated recently. The Quality Manual is mainly a list of documents that guide the University's operations. It does not clearly describe the University's quality policy, nor the quality system built on the basis of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, nor the quality evaluation practices relating to the different phases of this cycle in the University. The Team recommends the University to continue updating the quality manual, with particular reference to these issues.

3.2 Admissions Criteria

The University adheres to the national requirements for students enrolling at Icelandic universities. The admissions criteria have been described clearly. Detailed information and guidelines on admission requirements are available and also communicated on the University's website. However, the regulations for admission at BSc level are not fully available in English. This would be an important improvement in moving towards stronger internationalisation and building a bilingual approach.

Students enrolling in a public higher education institution in studies leading to a first-cycle degree must have passed the matriculation examination from an upper secondary school, or an equivalent examination. The University also offers opportunities for admission without formal qualification, based on its judgement of equivalent background and experience. According to the RA, few students take advantage of this opportunity. It is not fully clear to the Team how the applicants are informed about how to apply to enrol without formal qualification.

Attracting students is an issue for some study programmes. Attempts had been made to solve this challenge, for example by strengthening marketing and changing the names of study programmes to be more modern and better suited to the content of the programme. For example, the University has changed the name of one programme from Environmental Planning to Landscape Architecture. The Team's assessment of attractiveness and its changes was complicated by the lack of clear statistics on the number of applicants at the University and national level.

According to interviews at the site visit, the diversity and heterogeneity of student groups has grown. The variety of students' backgrounds, previous competence and age has increased, thus enriching the student learning experience. Based on information from interviews, it appears that the institution admits students with varying levels of prior knowledge in mathematics from secondary school level. If it is the case that compulsory content from secondary level is included in university level programmes, the Team recommends that this should preferably be taught as part of preparatory studies.

3.3 External reference points and benchmarks

According to the RA, external reference points and benchmarks are important for the University to ensure the quality of its study programmes. This has been addressed by including external stakeholders in curriculum development and through international collaborations and comparisons. Study programmes have been designed and reviewed in consultation with representatives from the relevant areas of work, for example the Farmer's Association and the Icelandic Association of Planners. At the site visit, external stakeholders expressed their willingness to cooperate much more closely than at present in the planning and implementation of education.

The University has identified the formalisation of stakeholder relations as a development target. Currently partnerships are informal and often based on interpersonal relationships. The Team recommends that the University set goals and build an operating model for managing partnerships, select its main partners and initiate contractual cooperation with the main partners.

In national university partnerships, the challenge for the University is that it is the only agricultural and environmental university in Iceland. For this reason, international university networks play an important role and the University is participating actively in these. The University's professors and teachers have good international networks in the Nordic countries - especially in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Many staff members completed their postgraduate degrees at Nordic universities and therefore have close relations with these partner universities and colleagues. Also, many students at the University continue their studies at postgraduate level abroad. In many ways, good international relations are an important resource for a small university. The Team recommends that the University continue to intensify and systematise international cooperation, especially with strategically important partner universities.

In addition to individual professors and teachers, the entire University management has made benchmarking visits to partner universities. In the spring of 2022, a large number of staff participated in a benchmarking visit to Wageningen University in the Netherlands. This was a significant and positive investment from the University, which the staff considered important for learning and development. However, the level of international cooperation varies from

one educational programme to another. In some programmes, cooperation is mainly based on interpersonal contacts. On the other hand, the Landscape Architecture BSc programme has gained international accreditation, which the Team considers to be good practice.

3.4 Design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes

There are common procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of study programmes. In practice, however, these common procedures are implemented in different ways in the faculties and partly also at the study programme level. Programme and individual course descriptors follow the guidelines of Icelandic National Quality Framework for Higher Education. Course content is validated by the Graduate or Undergraduate Committee.

The University has launched new study programmes in recent years. There are also plans to launch a new study programme in the next few years. The University has clear responsibilities for the design and approval of new study programmes. The preparation of a new study programme, as well as financial and academic approval, takes place at the faculty level and finally at the University Council. Based on the review material, the University does not have a written description of the planning and approval process for a new study programme. The Team recommends writing a formal process description. In this way, the University could build a clear and simple internal approach to the approval of new study programmes, in order to ensure and verify the quality of new programmes and the preparation process.

Study programmes and curricula have been actively reformed in the University. As with the design of new study programmes, the evaluation and renewal of existing programmes takes place at the faculty level. From the evidence of the interviews, the University's programme review processes are based on an informal quality culture which seems to differ between programmes and faculties. There is a risk of wasting resources, low effectiveness of processes, and missed opportunities for mutual learning. A joint review process every few years at institutional level could improve the quality of the process, support pedagogical development and increase cooperation across faculties.

Staff and students are clearly involved in the programme review processes and students must approve any significant changes to existing study programmes. Involvement of external stakeholders and anticipation of the needs of working life should, though, be stronger than at present.

3.5 Assessment policies and regulations

One of the cornerstones of the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has been the introduction of a common European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). ECTS is a student-centred and competence based approach. The two most salient notions of the ECTS system are sizing of student workload and defining the objectives as learning outcomes (LOs) at course as well as degree level.

In achieving the main objectives of the ECTS system, student assessment plays a key role. It is especially important that student assessment forms a consistent whole and supports the attainment of LOs at course and degree level. The assessment of LOs in the University takes place mainly at course level, and individual teachers independently decide on the assessment in their own courses. The assessment of LOs as a whole is not planned at degree or academic year level and the University has few practices for assessing LOs at degree level.

The University has designed a written template on how to write a course description. The Team sees this as an emerging good practice. There are opportunities to improve the template in order to facilitate course design and assessment of LOs, as it does not clearly describe how assessment is to be linked to LOs. It was also unclear how this template will be applied in practice. In the template, the University uses the term 'learning criteria' instead of the commonly used '(intended) LOs'. This can cause confusion, especially in an international context.

The Team had access to one example of a curriculum description, in the BSc Landscape Architecture programme, which stated degree level LOs and curriculum mapping of courses. The structure of the curriculum is very clear and understandable with six core courses in the curriculum forming the backbone. In the matrix all courses in the curriculum are linked to 16 degree level LOs. In this curriculum, course mapping seemed justified and logical. However, based on the University's website, the structure of the curricula varied in different faculties. The curricula of other study programmes consisted of small courses, and the courses that together fulfilled degree level LOs were not as clearly visible as in the programme of BSc Landscape Architecture.

In defining LOs at degree level, the University follows the national qualifications framework in which LOs are defined as knowledge, skills and abilities. In this model, the descriptions

remain at a fairly general level and it is not clear how the course level LOs contribute to the requirements of the degree level. This opens up the possibility of repetition of lectures and overlap of content, which was also mentioned by students in interviews.

There is a need to improve the use of course descriptions, assessment, learning outcomes, rubrics and monitoring of consistent application of these. The Team recommends continuing development work and harmonisation of practices in the University.

3.6 Consistency in grading and assigning ECTS

The University has identified that fair and objective grading is one of the challenges teachers are facing at all levels of education, not least in higher education. To increase the transparency of grading, the University has emphasised the use of a scoring guide (or rubric). The aim of the reform is to reduce arbitrary evaluation and unify grading scales across the University. At the moment, there are various grading scales in the University depending on the preferences of individual teachers.

The reform has been launched by piloting a new grading scale in one course in BSc studies at the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences. This course is a 10 ECTS individual research project that all undergraduate students must complete. As the BSc project is carried out both under the guidance of University staff as well as outside advisors, a scoring guide is an important tool to make sure that both students and external advisors know what is expected prior to grading. The longer-term plan is for this system to serve as a platform for further use of scoring guides in other courses. If the pilot is successful, teachers will be encouraged to use these tools more widely in assessments, where applicable.

The Team considers it very positive that the University has started the implementation of a common grading scale and is piloting it in one course. It is important that the University continues its development work with determination. The scale is still on a general level, and it should be tailored and linked to the learning outcomes of each course to be of real use.

Each year all Bachelor theses from the same programme are read by an academic member of staff not involved in supervising, to ensure comparability between grades. This is a good practice and the Team encourages the University to continue and to implement this across the University.

The University has implemented the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) but it remained unclear to the Team whether academic staff receive adequate support and coaching on how student workload should be calculated in course and assessment design. Uneven workload was frequently brought up during student interviews. There seems to be great variation in the student workload required to complete the studies compared to the size of the course. The Team encourages the University to aim for standardised workload guidelines at an institutional level to ensure equal treatment of students.

3.7 Collaborative provision

As a small university, strategic cooperation is especially important. The University cooperates with other Icelandic universities, especially public universities. The Team encourages the University to continue this collaboration and to develop it in a strategic direction. There are still many untapped opportunities between Icelandic universities, for example in terms of pooling resources, strategic cooperation of resources and also in the division of labour.

As noted in section 3.3, there are also close co-operative relationships with many Nordic universities. The Team encourages the University to continue this valuable activity and to develop this in the direction of strategic partnerships. This requires choices, negotiations and agreements with partner universities. The University is involved in close-knit European university networks, a good example of which is the EUI alliance UNIGreen. However, building such partnerships requires both resources and time. It is therefore important that the University prioritise and select those networks with which it is able to integrate closely with limited resources.

Cooperation with partners from the world of work and other stakeholders could be closer than at present. At the site visit, stakeholders expressed a strong desire for even closer cooperation and partnership with the University. Although it should be noted that there were no signs of student complaints on this topic at the visit, the Team encourages the University to actively seize the possibilities of partnership with external stakeholders when appropriate, in order to strengthen the connection of working life to teaching.

3.8 Staff induction, appraisal and development

During the site visit, it became clear to the Team that the University's personnel are competent, motivated and strongly committed to their work. The relationship with the students seemed close and informal. The University HR policy is under revision, focusing on team spirit, a good working environment, constructive communication, professional development and equality. Based on the site visit, these principles were well implemented and expressed in the University.

The number of University staff has increased, but is still very small. The total number of employees in June 2022 was 93 (84.5 FTE). In addition, around 75 sessional academic staff worked at the University annually. The number of academic staff (professors, associate professors, and assistant professors) was 23 and has remained at the same level in recent years, but is increasing during the current year. The number of PhD students has increased significantly in the last two years. In academic year 2021-22, the University had 18 PhD students. In the previous academic year, the number of students was 10 and in the previous decade, the number of PhD students ranged from two to six. This has strengthened the University's academic and human resource pool, and its ability to respond to academic staff recruitment challenges in the future.

There are clear regulations for recruitment and employment of new staff in the University. The site visit showed that there is no systematic introductory programme for new staff on the university level. The Team recommends that the University build a systematic and sufficiently simple induction system. In this development work it would be important to make use of the models and good practices of other universities and organisations.

According to the RA the performance of academic staff is evaluated in accordance with the Evaluation System for Public Higher Education Institutions in Iceland. The evaluation is divided into six main sections: Research, teaching, administration, service, previous employment and general. Payments are based mainly on research and academic performance and there is considerably less emphasis on good teaching. In interviews, many staff members of the university considered this practice to be very unfair. The evaluation system does not encourage a focus on teaching tasks and the development of teaching, which would be very important for the University.

The University has invested in HR matters. The new part-time HR Manager position was established in 2016 and expanded to the full-time HR and Quality Manager position in 2019. This solution appears to have brought more professionalism to the management and development of personnel matters. Since 2017, the University has been a part of a national employee satisfaction survey for public organisations. Overall scores have been similar during the last five years. The highest scores are given for flexibility, independence and resources, and the lowest for pay and benefits. Based on the survey results, steps have been taken to increase transparency and improve management and communication, for example by improving the flow of information, regular staff meetings, and salary review.

The competence of the staff has been developed in many different ways. Career development includes employee participation in targeted continuous education, with increased responsibility in work, through participation in projects and research, and in work-related professional associations, committees and councils. The Team finds it valuable that a wide range of approaches, and also learning in connection with work, are utilised in competence development. Academic staff members can apply for half-year or one-year sabbatical leave from the University. This is a good practice and, by international comparison, a rare opportunity for developing the competence of academic staff.

The University employee interview is an annual formal confidential conversation between a manager and an employee about work, performance, career development and future goals. The main goal is to improve job satisfaction and success. It is important that career development is discussed regularly. However, based on the review data, the University does not have a systematic way of assessing the competence of its personnel. The Team recommends building such an operating model and drawing up a strategic competence development plan at university and faculty levels. It is important for a small university such as this to make more effective use of cooperation and use staff mobility between other universities and partner organisations to strengthen their competence.

The University provides pedagogical training for academic staff. The public universities of Iceland founded the Teaching Academy in 2021. The aim of this Academy is to encourage teachers to share good practice and to reward exemplary teaching. In autumn 2022 the University introduced mandatory pedagogical training for all teaching staff. This is organised by the Office of Teaching and Learning in collaboration with some pedagogically skilled

academic staff members of the University. The Team found during the site visit examples of teachers who individually engage proactively in pedagogic competence development, for which they were reimbursed. The Team encourages the University to continue to systematise the strengthening of pedagogical competence of the permanent staff, as well as adjunct teachers.

3.9 Using SLRs to safeguard standards

During spring 2021 the three university faculties all underwent Subject-Level Review. Each faculty published a report that was subject to external review, and external reports were received in May 2021. The external reports acknowledged that the process of writing the self-assessment reports had been a useful exercise for the faculties and commended the writing teams for their efforts.

The importance of this process was underlined by the fact that this was the first time that the three faculties of the University had evaluated their activities since the organisational reform. The Team found that the SLRs had been thoroughly drafted and that faculties had produced a diverse and transparent assessment of the status and development needs of their operations.

Based on the SLRs, the University has a systematic way of monitoring and evaluating the development of the number of students, their progress in their studies, graduation, and the quality of teaching and resources. There are many systematic ways to collect feedback from students in the University. A key challenge regarding this is the low response rate of surveys. Recently launched student focus groups appears to be a new good practice. They provide direct student feedback, and can be used to discuss together the good practices and development needs of teaching, and the operating practices of the University. Stakeholder feedback or cooperation with working life partners and other stakeholders was not handled as systematically in the SLRs. The Team encourages a stronger inclusion of this perspective in SLR.

The University has a systematic approach and timetables for implementation of the observed development measures and reporting of the results. As part of the SLRs, each faculty has drawn up an Action Plan to implement the identified development needs. The implementation of the Action Plan is a standing item at faculty meetings. The Head of the

Faculty will report annually to the Rector on the status of the implementation and plans for the following year. These reports are followed up at the Executive Board of the University. The Heads of Faculties will submit their annual reports to the Quality Committee in March. The Committee will consolidate a short report to the Rector at the beginning of April, to be discussed in a meeting between the Quality Committee, the Rector and the Heads of Faculties.

3.10 Summary evaluation of security of standards

There is a strong commitment which drives a quality culture at the University, and numerous informal practices which contribute to a thriving quality culture. However, these need to be recognised and made part of the formal system across the whole University. Being a small institution, it is important to have a system of appropriate and proportionate size that builds on culture and current practice. The Office of Teaching and Learning plays a central role in safeguarding standards and a quality manager heads the Quality Committee that ensures that there are templates and policies. However, there is a need to establish a coherent process across faculties in close dialogue with academic staff. All the staff members of the Quality Committee represent the administration. The Team recommends that at least one representative of the academic staff should be appointed as a member of the committee to facilitate the implementation of quality assurance practices at the faculty level.

The Quality Manual is currently mainly a list of documents that guide the University's operations. The Team recommends that the University continue updating the quality manual to clearly describe the University's quality policy, the quality system built on the basis of the PDCA cycle, and the quality evaluation practices related to the different phases of the cycle in the University.

The University adheres to the national requirements for students enrolling at Icelandic universities. The admission criteria have been described clearly and communicated on the website, but there is an opportunity to improve this by making everything accessible in English.

The University uses external reference points and benchmarks to ensure the quality of study programmes, and includes external stakeholders and representatives of working life in curriculum development. The University is the only agricultural university in Iceland and

international university networks play an important role. The BSc Landscape Architecture programme has passed international accreditation, which the Team considers to be good practice. Currently, partnerships are informal and often based on interpersonal relationships. The University has identified the formalisation of stakeholder relations as a development target. The Team recommends that the University continue to move forward with this formalisation.

There are common procedures for design, approval, monitoring and review of study programmes. In practice, common procedures are implemented in different ways in the faculties and partly also at the study programme level. The Team recommends writing a process description for the planning and approval process of a new study programme, in close collaboration with staff. In this way, the University could build a clear and simple internal approach for the approval.

The assessment of learning outcomes (LOs) in the University takes place mainly at course level and the assessment of LOs is not planned at degree level. Based on the University's website, the structure and clarity of curricula varies in different faculties. In defining LOs at degree level, the University applies a national qualifications framework in which LOs are defined as knowledge, skills and abilities. In this model, the descriptions remain at a fairly general level and it is not clear how the course level learning outcomes contribute to the requirements of the degree level. This opens up the possibility of repetition of lectures and overlap of content, which was also mentioned by students in interviews. There is a need to improve the use of course descriptions, assessment, learning outcomes, rubrics and monitoring of consistent application of these. The Team recommends continuing development work and harmonisation of practices in the University.

The Team considers it very positive that the University has started the implementation of a common grading scale and is piloting it in one course. A good practice is that each year all bachelor's theses from the same programme are read by an academic member of staff not involved in supervising, to ensure comparability between grades. The University has implemented the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), but uneven workload was brought up during student interviews. The Team encourages the University to aim for standardised workload guidelines at the institutional level to ensure equal treatment of students.

In autumn 2022 the University introduced mandatory pedagogical training for all teaching staff. The Team found during the site visit examples of teachers who individually engage proactively in pedagogic competence development, for which they are reimbursed. The Team encourages the University to continue and systematise the strengthening of the pedagogical competence of the permanent staff, as well as adjunct teachers.

As part of the SLRs, each faculties has drawn up an Action Plan to implement identified development needs. The Team commends the systematic approach and timetables for implementation of the observed development measures and reporting of the results.

As part of the review, the Team undertook a systematic evaluation of evidence of the University's procedures with reference to the ESG, and the commentary on ESG provided in Annex 11 of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education. The Team concluded that the University's procedures relating to managing standards are generally aligned to the ESG.

- *ESG 1.1: Policy for Quality Assurance.* The University has many documents in place and a formulated quality policy is described in the Quality Manual. However, the Manual describes the quality policy very narrowly. To fully support identification of priorities and strategic goals, the quality policy should be a more elaborate text aligned with other strategic documents such as the AUI Strategy.
- *ESG 1.2: Design and Approval of Programmes.* The University has clear processes for the design and approval of study programmes. Implementation of processes are based on informal quality culture which seems to differ between programmes and faculties. Documentation of the process at the university level is inadequate. Faculty staff and students are involved in these processes but there are varying practices in involving external stakeholders.
- *ESG 1.3: Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment.* Cooperation between students and staff is natural and informal. The University has a student-oriented operating culture, but the manifestation varies between faculties. The University has templates including Learning Outcomes but improvement can be made towards a full programme design matrix, indicating alignment with ESG 1.3.
- *ESG 1.4: Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification.* The University has clear processes for managing admissions with reference to national regulations. The University has systems to manage progression, recognition and certification.
- *ESG 1.5: Teaching Staff.* The University has fair and transparent processes for the recruitment of the staff. The staff are encouraged to develop their competences in many different ways in connection with their work and through training. However, the University does not have a systematic plan and operating method for the strategic development of staff competence.
- *ESG 1.6: Learning Resources and Student Support.* The University has adequate on-campus and virtual learning resources and student support. The University operates on two campuses and arranging comprehensive student services on both campuses is challenging
- *ESG 1.7: Information Management.* The University has recently recruited a Records and Information Manager. The collection, analysis and use of relevant data has evolved, but there is still a lot of need for development. Data is not used systematically in the management of study programmes and other activities.
- *ESG 1.8: Public Information.* The University website is the main way to publish information. The website is published in Icelandic and partially in English. The

information published is clear, mainly up-to date and accessible.

- *ESG 1.9: On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes.* Study programmes are actively evaluated, but the University does not have a common process for conducting monitoring and review. The role of external stakeholders and the systematic consideration of society's needs should be strengthened.
- *ESG 1.10: Cyclical External Quality Assurance.* The University has fully engaged with the national requirements of IWR and the preparation of the RA and the related self-assessment are actively utilised in institutional development.

4. Student Learning Experience

4.1 Overview: Institution's management of standards of the student learning experience

Within the University there are many systematic ways to collect feedback from students. The University conducts student feedback surveys in order to monitor student satisfaction of courses and teaching methods, and to identify good practices and potential for improvement. Student focus groups are a more recent addition. This good practice helps the institution to understand students' needs even further and to identify the more immediate developments it may need to address. The focus groups provide direct feedback and opportunities for constructive discussion. The University is small and so also has additional means of collecting feedback through informal discussions with students.

Results from student surveys between 2017-2022 have been fairly stable. However, the average participation rate and the number of evaluated courses has decreased in recent years, possibly due to effects of the global coronavirus pandemic. Giving students time within lectures to answer the questionnaires appears to be a good idea to improve participation rates. The University aims to focus the surveys more on the course content, and the Team acknowledges the possibility of also including students' self evaluation of the development of their own competences.

Student satisfaction surveys have been conducted since 2016 in collaboration with other public universities.

Undergraduate students are in general satisfied with their degree programmes and the results have been quite stable in previous years. The University is addressing reported issues such as the lack of variety of courses and teaching methods, and a lack of awareness of whether students' feedback has been acted on.

Graduate students' satisfaction is lower than in previous years, dropping from 80-90% to 62% of responses answering "somewhat/strongly agree". However, there are significant differences between faculties. The percentage ranged from 93% to 31% for the overall quality of the study programme, being lowest among graduate students in the Faculty of Planning and Design at Keldnaholt. The University is aware of this and interviews also showed that the

problem is twofold, since there are also challenges with recruitment of qualified faculty who are familiar with Icelandic context. There were comments in the interviews on the need to evaluate and reform curriculum. In order to facilitate continuous reflection and improvement at programme level, the Team recommends that a systematic process involving external stakeholders be adopted. This would be a proactive move in regards to development.

Alumni satisfaction has been high during the last five years.

4.2 Relevance of Case Study to enhancing student learning experience

The University chose the graduate learning environment as its case study, which the Team found appropriate based on the student satisfaction survey results mentioned in the previous section. The case study provided an example of how the University works systematically to improve its learning environment and to address and understand problems in depth. It showed that the University has a high awareness of the importance of the learning and working environment for theoretical studies and, from the visit, for practical learning in farms and research facilities in agricultural sciences. Some of the facilities are run in close collaboration with external stakeholders.

The case study also showed how the University has a clear image of the importance of the two campuses and their different roles, and how the University prioritises providing support on both.

4.3 Resources for enhancing the student learning experience

The small size of the University and the high student to faculty ratio means that students have easy access to academic staff, administrative staff and working professionals. This environment enables informal and immediate co-operation. Students are involved in governance through their seats on numerous meetings and committees. The interviews showed that student culture was an important issue for the University Board.

The University has closely-knit groups of on-site students and seeks to involve distance learning students by gathering both groups together at least once per semester. The interviews showed that the students appreciated that it was important to form a joint class.

The visit revealed that employees and students share passion, interest and dedication to their field. Both current and former students pointed out the attractiveness and relevance of courses. This results in an engaging student learning experience where students are encouraged to be responsible citizens in a variety of issues on different levels. Examples of this were given during the visit, such as internships, summer jobs, harvest party, and lotteries.

The Team also noted from interviews that the University has a good system to encourage and handle mobility and exchange, supported by a dedicated and knowledgeable support staff.

At the University, pedagogical qualification is not required for promotion. As far as the Team understood, there is an ongoing discussion (in Iceland) on whether staff should be required to have pedagogical training. Even though that initially might lower the number of qualified specialists who could teach at the University, the Team recommends the University to work proactively and systematically with pedagogical training and with rewards for good teaching.

Current and former students alike hope to see more equipment at the University which would allow more specialised students and alumni to pursue PhD and graduate studies in their respective fields, while having access to facilities that are competitive in the global context.

Encouraging students to be lifelong learners is achieved both by providing interesting materials for students and by encouraging active learning. The faculty provides opportunities for students to do so by participation in seminars promoting their thesis projects and gaining ECTS points for this. Likewise, students at all levels of study are regularly encouraged via the University's mailing system and in-person conversations to apply for local research grants such as the Icelandic Student Innovation Fund, and to seek research project assistant roles with faculty members, community members and external stakeholders. Students can work over the summer within a strict system to gain up to 6 ECTS for their work in a field relevant to their studies.

There is focus on preparing undergraduate students for graduate studies and simultaneously preparing for entrance into the job market as socially conscious professionals. The University focuses on realistic projects, in collaboration mostly with the surrounding community around the campuses at both Hvanneyri and Reykjavík, to not only focus on research and jobs specifically but also on the importance of an individual's social responsibility to improve

society. The University aims to form a learning community with students and society, one which strengthens in both directions.

4.4 Student recruitment and induction

The interviews showed that students submit applications to the University through various methods and for various reasons. Some apply independently and others through international networks and fellowships that collaborate with the University. Reasons students have given for applying to study at the University at undergraduate and graduate levels include: great interest in their field of study; research opportunities at master's level which reflect their personal interest; the chance to be well informed and capable before taking over a family farm; and the University's reputation for support and consideration for individual circumstances, including readiness to solve problems, provide accommodation and allow students to complete studies on their own schedule.

Students mentioned that their respective programmes expanded their study related fields of interest beyond their initial expectations. The University has articulated, and is actively working towards, the goals of recruiting students who are interested in their fields, and of then maintaining their passion both for these initial interests and for those they encounter in their studies. Staff members are eager and willing to show students that the University has good facilities and good resources in terms of financing and research opportunities.

The University has identified high dropout numbers as a weakness and has investigated the reasons behind this. Additionally, not many graduate on schedule with their bachelor's and master's degrees. The interviews showed that external stakeholders, employees, students and alumni share a common understanding of this. Although some students change or leave their studies because of a lack of interest in the topic, this is quite uncommon. As in other institutions, personal and global issues such as illness, family matters, Covid and other uncontrollable factors play a part in dropout rates. The University is seeking appropriate measures and the Team encourages it to continue this work.

4.5 The student voice and engagement of students in QA

Students are in the centre of the University's operations, and the review visit showed many examples of this.

The main tool for students to evaluate their courses, the faculty and their education as a whole is the digital feedback survey. Some teachers bring the student evaluations from past years to the beginning of their course and review with students what they intend to change. This is optional but appreciated by students when practised. Some students mentioned that they had little influence over their own courses but had the ability to influence the experiences of future students. They would like to see course evaluations evolve so that students feel more empowered to contribute and shape their courses, in addition to using the ample opportunities they have to speak to the respective faculty head with suggestions for review. Students are heard by teachers and faculty heads, but the process of implementing changes takes a long time by the standards of the students.

The small size of the University means a high degree of acquaintance and informality within the University culture as a whole. The teachers' offices are always open to students, and individual contact was mentioned in interviews to be important. In the case of distance students, teacher contact was also appreciated.

There is some systematic cooperation between the student union and the University which should continue to develop and grow. The interviews showed that the responsibilities of the student organisation to the University were quite clear to the students, with resources available. The student member on the Quality Committee serves a two year term. There is some collaboration with other university student unions such as with Bifröst University and Hólar University, and the University has active student representatives within LÍS, the National Union of Icelandic Students.

During the preparation of the RA, the University used processes to reflect on its decision making on a larger scale, beyond this one project. Students from both campuses were engaged, and given the chance to contribute, anonymously if preferred. They shared their opinions on the RA and the student union president reviewed and delivered these to the RA steering group. In general, students have the opportunity to attend faculty meetings twice a year. While the inclusion of students in the RA process was indicative of the institution's general practices, it seemed to the Team that it also served as a tool to awaken students' interest and confidence in contributing to the matters of the University. The interviews showed that their work with the RA had strengthened the students' enthusiasm for participation, and that the University appreciated the stronger student voice.

The vocational studies have a strong campus culture and presence on site, while the degree studies are more distance based. Degree students more commonly prioritise their studies over contributing to the organisation of social events or proactively contributing to social or institutional development. Because of this, it is very important that these students have clear and effective ways to contribute.

Students are expected to contribute to event planning and funding for this is provided by the University, although some events are themselves fundraisers. Connections with community halls are good, meaning that event space within and around the University is available. Students are also involved in clubs and sub-committees within different departments. A variety of social opportunities are available to students within their groups or faculties, while gatherings of the whole student population are more infrequent. There is no on-campus shop, a situation that students have become accustomed to but wish to change.

During the interviews, it was made clear that students want societal issues to be more visible, and have been vocal about this. Reflecting this interest, there is a will from the University to develop more programmes related directly to societal issues, such as ecological conservation and restoration.

4.6 Student support services

During the interviews the Team had the impression that the Office of International Relations and Research, the Office of Teaching and Learning Services and the Study and Career Counselling Services are in active communication both between themselves and with students. The students expressed their appreciation of these services. There is currently a high awareness in Europe and worldwide of student mental welfare, especially post-Covid.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the University increased support to students and supplied more access to psychologists and this has been ongoing since. The Ministry financially supported this .

The interviews revealed that student support is centred at Hvanneyri, while there are services in place two days a week at Keldnaholt. The students reported that they did not have issues with this, as students reside at Hvanneyri to a much larger extent.

Induction days are used to inform first year students of the available support services. The Study and Career Counsellor is available to students throughout their studies and helps, alongside their supervisor, to guide them with their studies and desired academic direction.

The online repositories hvar.is and skemman.is provide students with the same peer-reviewed materials as are available in other Icelandic universities, and the internal network Uglá.is has a collection of useful educational resources for students. The inhouse Information and Data Manager who is currently facilitating library services is also available to students and staff for guidance on resources, although the first contact point for any potential lack of study resource materials is the student's own teacher, programme leader or department head.

Students are contacted should they begin to disengage from their studies. The Study and Career Counselling Services are also informed and the student encouraged to get in touch with them to potentially reschedule and prolong their studies. These communications occur via e-mail and phone. Bachelor's graduates who progress to master's programmes abroad are also contacted to ensure they have been provided with an adequate foundation for their further academic studies.

The small size of the institution presents challenges relating to impartiality for the parties responsible for resolving potential reported issues of bullying, sexual- and gender-based harassment. Due to this, the Team recommends that an outside party should be contacted to deal with reports of bullying. While the current plan is quite clear and robust, staff within the University pointed out that it is not fully implemented or properly followed. It is the responsibility of staff to handle such issues, but there are student representatives or class representatives for each department who are chosen so their fellow students may seek them out if they wish to communicate with a fellow student rather than a staff member.

4.7 Student-centred learning, teaching, and assessment

During the visit, both former and current students expressed general satisfaction when discussing learning, teaching and assessment at the University. Some students mentioned that there are good theoretical and practical courses, good facilities, and programmes that meet their needs and expectations. Some also mentioned wanting to see an increase in access to courses abroad. Both the RA and interviews highlighted the University's student-centred

view on education, reflected in the positive approach towards the students' need for a flexible learning path, whether by distance or hybrid learning, or through a research master's programme.

Interviews showed that learning outcomes (LOs) and assessment methods in general were quite clear to the students in the Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences. In other faculties, the students mentioned that it could vary between different courses. All teachers introduce the assessment methods at the beginning of their courses. However, the quality of these documents varies, from some with simple pass-fail systems and no clear learning outcomes to those with clear learning outcomes and assessment expectations, and a breakdown of ECTS points and expected work hours. Some teachers provide just grades while others provide more specific assessment feedback. Students mentioned that timelines provided for their assignments were considerate, realistic and satisfactory. Final exams are widely used as an assessment method, with their value typically ranging from 50-60-80% of a final course grade. The Team recommends that the University strengthen and streamline between faculties the implementation of quality processes regarding learning outcomes and assessment, addressing the subcultures in different faculties. The development of processes should be based on a shared understanding and current good practices.

One measure of the quality of student-centred learning is reflected in the opportunities faculty and staff have to attend courses relating to quality assurance. However, while these are available, faculty mentioned lack of time to seek them out. As an example, the University organises an annual Teachers' Day where lecturers share practical advice on teaching. It was mentioned that this was appreciated, but that faculty find it difficult to find time to apply these pieces of advice.

4.8 The language experience

It was reported to the Team that no extra resources are available within the University to support learning of the Icelandic language for foreign students. The Team also noticed that the University is not fully bilingual. However, there was no indication that language was perceived as a hindrance towards education.

There is a push within the University at student and faculty levels to offer undergraduate studies in Icelandic and all master's studies in English. Until this potential goal may be realised,

the Team would like to highlight the opportunities offered by community organisations to non-native Icelandic speakers.

4.9 Internationalisation

Internationalisation has been improved in recent years and further expansion, for example with the UNiGreen alliance, is a good approach. Students reported that they were actively encouraged to take part in mobility and internationalisation. However, the exchange programmes are not fully utilised by local students due to the diverse nature of the University student body. Having a higher number of older students and students with families who are unable to go abroad for extended time periods has contributed to this.

The appeal for foreign exchange students to seek education in Iceland at the University is apparent. It relates to the charm of the small community, the small institution, familiarity with faculty and staff and access to facilities with less competition from a large student body. Recently there has been an increase in the number of exchange students arriving from abroad to study in Iceland, in part for these reasons and in part due to new Erasmus-related contracts between the University and international programmes. The students who come from abroad to study at the University are typically resourceful, mobile throughout the countryside and capital area, and independent but ready to utilise the available advice and assistance of local students in proximity to them in the student housing units. The international students are fully integrated into the student group and were very appreciative of the student experience at the University.

For more immediately upcoming programmes, recruitment will be directed at North American students, through targeted online advertising. This is part of the long term goal of maintaining a diverse and balanced student body with exchange students from a wide range of countries. A restriction on the desired rapid growth of incoming exchange students is the lack of student housing. This is currently exemplified by the limited number of students from each country. To address this, the municipality has expressed an interest in co-funding the construction of further student housing, which would be beneficial for both the municipality and the University.

Both outgoing and locally based Icelandic students tend after graduating to move to full time work abroad, at least temporarily, since employment opportunities abroad are more readily

available in many fields relevant to alumni. Former students have mentioned, however, that connections made through the University are good for students, and that students in any discipline can more easily approach experienced professionals in Iceland than abroad, due to the small population.

4.10 Links between research and teaching

As part of a small university, students are a natural part of research activities and are encouraged to take part in different capacities.

Some subjects are taught within fields in which the University does not undertake research, which limits the possibilities for conducting master's thesis projects. The institution is aware of these limitations, and teachers aim to integrate the latest research into students' education, for instance by students having access to and reading research papers during their studies. In addition internationalisation, cooperation with external stakeholders and sharing of resources of local universities are all used as a means to strengthen links to research. Larger base funding could facilitate capability building at an advanced level, which could both strengthen research links and meet future needs in Iceland, for example for food security.

Interviews showed that the reasons for students to apply at postgraduate level include the chance to teach at the University, which can then lead to research opportunities and eventually PhD status, or similar research opportunities during their studies as well as after graduating.

4.11 Postgraduate programmes

PhD students are few but numbers are growing. To design policies, courses or provide other opportunities or facilities to PhD students, the University works collaboratively under a joint graduate programme with the University of Iceland. Each doctoral student has a tutor (usually the principal supervisor) who is a tenured member of teaching staff in the Faculty in the relevant field of study, with whom he/she consults regarding the organisation of the study programme, the selection of courses and other matters related to the programme. For each of the current 18 or 19 students, there is a doctoral committee of at least three people composed of the tutor, two supervisors and possibly two more persons suggested by the

student or the supervisors. In each doctoral committee there is, if possible, one foreign member to bring in an international perspective.

The Team found that the requirements and rules for the doctoral programme are clearly described in regard to attendance, research and publishing output. Graduate students at the University attend mandatory training courses in research ethics, and research methods and methodology. The expectations of the PhD student in terms of research are also clear. There are three review phases: to show a research plan, a result sample and then a third review to determine the eligibility of a student for a dissertation. Students have access to a special internal website for PhD students only, where they hand in their research progress twice a year and gain credits after having their work evaluated. The interviews showed that the rules and requirements are known and implemented by staff and students.

PhD and master's students have a seat on the Graduate Studies Committee, where they can influence and understand what happens within the university. The Graduate Studies Committee's role includes approving applications to doctoral studies after their approval by academic staff, so these students are also a part of that process. Throughout their studies, the University Student Counsellor is available to students and, alongside their tutor, helps to guide them both in their studies and in their personal academic goals.

PhD opportunities are advertised within and outside the University. During the review interviews, some academic staff expressed that they would also appreciate if financial resources were set aside to pay students to participate in research work. The goal would be to get qualified student assistants for researchers while simultaneously recruiting new doctoral students. To some extent, this is already done by the University (see chapter 5.9).

[4.12 Collaborative programmes \(provision\)](#)

There are some joint programmes, such as the NOVA PhD courses and the Nordic master's programme EnChil, together with Lund University and Helsinki University. The quality assurance policy is that the education shall fulfil the quality system requirements of the provider of the respective courses.

There are several possibilities for many kinds of cooperation in the coming EUI UNIGreen initiative, including joint study programmes.

4.13 Serving the needs of different student populations

The University has high diversity in the student body and it serves the needs of different students well. The needs of dyslexic students are taken into account. Extra time in examinations is given for non Icelandic speaking students. In some courses, especially technical courses, the University records lectures, which facilitates repetition and improves accessibility for students.

Students comment positively on the personalised curriculum and study pace, especially for distance learning. The small size of the University offers easy communication. Academic staff offices are open to students, and in the interviews direct individual contact is mentioned as important.

Availability of distance study programmes gives students the opportunity to work alongside their studies, rather than taking out student loans. This allows the University to recruit a more diverse student body, with regard to finances and family commitments. The student population is very diverse in age, ranging from new graduates from upper secondary education to older students, who may take a longer time to finish studies because of family and work commitments. For those students, distance studies are a good option; in the interviews, the lack of family housing and employment opportunities near campus were mentioned as factors that might limit full time study on campus.

Related to the University's strategic goals, the goals for lowering the dropout rates are fitting. The University needs to continue its analysis of the reasons for dropout, but there was no sign during the visit that a lack of serving the needs of different student populations might be one of those reasons.

4.14 Management of information

The University has a new officer employed for data management and uses various methods of collecting information on student progression, success and dropout rates, for example through student surveys, graduate surveys, and focus group discussions. The RA describes and shows examples of how the University analyses and uses relevant information for the effective management of research and teaching.

The RA and interviews gave a picture of IT services that meet the students' needs, such as the PhD portal and the internal information system Uglá. The University also collaborates with other universities in Iceland when needed, and the PhD portal is shared with the University of Iceland. To minimise the risk of information security breach or misuse, students receive annual lectures on online comportment. Staff also have some informal training in the same field and the active office culture means that any suspicious activity could be noticed easily and addressed.

The interviews indicated that staff and students receive necessary information. An earlier perceived lack of information has resulted in the Rector's Friday e-mail, sent to both staff and students, which the Team found highly appreciated. It is good practice to make sure that all staff and students have the same information.

4.15 Public information

The interviews did not reveal any comments from students regarding problems in finding information and the Team found the website easy to access and navigate. However, the University has a strategy to increase the number of international students. The website is partly bilingual with some documents, such as the AUI Regulations, only available in Icelandic. The Team encourages the University to continue improving bilingual access to information.

4.16 Using SLR to enhance student learning experience

The Subject-Level Review (SLR) undertaken in Spring 2021 by all three faculties included external experts who drafted a joint opinion on the international comparability of the quality of the student learning experience. All three faculty self evaluation reports were reviewed by experts, who made comments on faculty-specific matters as well as conclusions regarding matters common for all faculties.

At the point of the review visit there had not yet been much time for change and improvement based on the SLRs, and it was not possible for the Team to check whether all actions had been addressed. However, the Team found that the faculties had undertaken a thorough review and transparent assessment of the student learning experience in the SLR process. All three faculties had created action plans to improve and develop the student learning experience, based on their self evaluations and the opinions of the external

reviewers. The SLR reports are also living documents and actions are to be reviewed once per year by faculty.

The external reports commended the process. They commented that the arrangements for oversight of student support services in the University are clearly articulated. Access to IT and support seemed to be good and students had access to a range of online packages. The external reviewers also acknowledged that high satisfaction with the student experience was common between the three faculties.

The external reviewers also found several differences between the three faculties. The faculties design and develop study programmes and design and assess learning outcomes for courses differently. There are differences in how the faculties strengthen the feedback loop. The Team recommends further work on streamlining these differences. The quality of the student learning experience at the University should not depend on which faculty the student is studying at.

The Faculty of Planning and Design (FPD) provides a comprehensive list of actions, addressing the development needed according to the review. Different actions include, for instance, improving faculty to student ratio, improving the feedback loop, a better working environment at Keldnaholt and better workspace for modelling and creative work, increasing students' participation in faculty meetings, strengthening connections to working life as well as research, an orientation programme for PhD students, and support for a graduate student association. The Team finds that several of the different actions could be positive also from the perspective of addressing the dropout rate.

The Faculty of Agricultural Sciences also provides a list of actions which address the development needed according to the review. Different actions include, for instance, improving the feedback loop, access to specialised teaching equipment, more diversity in teaching methods and increased practical studies, improved internet, a formal protocol for approving and modification of study programmes, supervisor training, an orientation programme for PhD students and support for a graduate student association. The external reviewers note, however, that the action plan is not clear on how the students' participation in the surveys will be increased to 60%. The IWR Team notes that the SLR self evaluation report acknowledges that new formal processes for programme modification need to be

established at AUI, and the Team encourages the University to include student participation in that protocol, which might strengthen the feedback loop further.

The Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences has a large proportion of the master's students at the University and is the most research intensive faculty. The SLR self evaluation recognises that the anticipated growth in master's and PhD students demands scaleable support systems. The faculty provides a long list of actions to address the development needed according to the SLR report. Different actions include, for instance, improving the feedback loop, a formal study committee for the BSc Forest Science programme, improving participation of bachelor's, master's and PhD students in faculty meetings, a review of effectiveness of support services, a review of student workload, access to specialised teaching equipment, supervisor training, an orientation programme for PhD students and support for a graduate student association.

4.17 Summary evaluation of the student learning experience

The University is small and the students are at its heart, in a tight-knit community with an informal and strong quality culture. Interviews show that students feel they can address problems directly to staff and have trust in the University's capacity to handle them. The University has many systematic ways to collect feedback from students. Student satisfaction surveys are undertaken and show in general very positive results, but the University is aware of the lower results at graduate level, especially in the Faculty of Planning and Design. A systematic process for the development of study programmes involving external stakeholders would be an important move for the University to become more proactive. Students apply through a variety of methods and for a variety of reasons and there is awareness and understanding of dropout rates. The current work to address dropout rates needs to be monitored and documented.

The case study on the graduate learning environment showed that the University has a high awareness of the importance of the learning and working environment for practical experience, such as farms and facilities for research in agricultural science. Enhancement of the student learning experience is a strength for the University and many activities supporting this are in place. Support services are available at both campuses and appreciated by

students, including IT systems and the system to encourage and handle mobility and exchange, supported by dedicated and knowledgeable support staff.

Teaching at the University is student-centred, exemplified by flexibility in study paths and the high satisfaction among students in interviews on this matter. SLR reports and interviews showed, however, a challenge in terms of a large difference between the three faculties in how they design and develop study programmes and design and assess learning outcomes for courses. The Team recommends further work on streamlining these processes, addressing subcultures in different faculties. The development should be based on a shared understanding and current good practices. Such a development would increase quality from the student perspective substantially.

The University has a high ambition and is on its way to becoming more international, and the Team commends the work so far. Important steps forward include development of quality management and study opportunities within the EUI UNIGreen, and strengthening bilingual information.

The University has a new officer employed for data management and uses various methods of collecting information on student progression. Data is available to staff and students on the PhD portal or Uglia and for information. The Rector's Friday e-mail is highly appreciated and a good example to be valued.

The Team found that the faculties had undertaken a thorough review and transparent assessment of the student learning experience in the SLR process. All three faculties have created plans with lists of actions to improve and develop the student learning experience based on the self evaluation and the opinions of the external reviewers. The actions chosen are, and will be, important for development. The SLR reports are also living documents and actions are to be reviewed once per year by faculty.

As part of the review, the Team undertook a systematic evaluation of evidence of the University's procedures with reference to the ESG, and the commentary on ESG provided in Annex 11 of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education. The Team concluded that the University's procedures relating to student learning experience are aligned to the ESG.

- *ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance.* The University has a quality system and policy for quality assurance which is publicly available. The quality policy sets goals towards fostering a culture of quality mindset through continuous improvement, training and education and to promote continued good collaboration with students and ensure their participation in the University's improvement and quality work. The students are few and at the centre of University operations and there is a high awareness of the need for flexibility in education. However, the Team finds the documentation of common operating models incomplete on the intranet and in the quality manual, and it is difficult to get an overview of how different policies and documents are connected into a system for improving the students' overall learning experience.
- *ESG 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes.* The design of LOs explicitly involves students, but assessment of students' LOs could be more elaborated to ensure better alignment with the defined programme level LOs. In some courses assessment is merely pass/fail, while in others clear rubrics are formulated.
- *ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.* The University encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process. The University respects the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.
- *ESG 1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification.* The University consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student life cycle, for example student admission, progression, recognition and certification. All study programmes have defined LOs which are communicated to students. There are possibilities for supportive and flexible ways of studying for students in special circumstances. However, there seems to be a need for a more systematic way of addressing student dropout rates.
- *ESG 1.5: Teaching Staff reflects the importance of formal evaluation, on-going training and recognition of excellence.* There is a formal evaluation in accordance with the Evaluation System for Public Higher Education Institutions in Iceland, on-going training and recognition of excellence at the University. The academic staff evaluation and reward system is focused on research activities, rather than teaching.
- *ESG 1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support.* The University has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensures that adequate and readily accessible resources and student support are provided on both campuses.

- *ESG 1.7. Information management.* The University collects, analyses and uses relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities. The University has a new officer employed for data management and uses various methods of collecting information on student progression, success and dropout rates, for example students and graduates surveys, and focus group discussions. The University's internal information system Uglu is appreciated by the students.
- *ESG 1.8. Public information.* The University publishes information on its website regarding its activities, including programmes, study information and services provided, although information in English related to studies is rather limited.
- *ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.* Study programmes are actively evaluated by the faculties, but the University does not have a common process for conducting monitoring and review. Programme reviews include students. The role of external stakeholders and the systematic consideration of society's needs should be strengthened.

5. Management of Research

5.1 Research Policy and strategy

The University Research Policy is approved by the University Council and is a part of the AUI Quality Handbook. Each faculty works on its own research strategy based on the AUI Strategy, the AUI Research Policy and the overarching strategic aims at faculty level. According to the RA, this work is expected to be completed in 2023. The main objectives of the Research Policy are formulated for different aspects of strategic planning (for example, the number of peer review articles); principles (for example, academic freedom for every researcher to have the autonomy to choose topics); and tasks (for example, to build strong research that supports teaching).

The University Strategy 2019-2024 emphasises that research and development are the foundations to progressive teaching, innovation and value creation. The University is aiming to substantially increase its research and development efforts, strive to seek increased funding through competitive research funds and support its staff in increasing the relevant skills for doing so.

The actions, key measures and goals for research and development activities are also formulated in the University Strategy 2019-2024. The stated actions, for example to increase research, development and innovation projects, and to increase staff training in research and development, could be seen as goals rather than actions. For the goals, the Strategy document gives performance indicators, for example a 30% yearly increase in amounts obtained through competitive funding, and an average of more than one published peer-reviewed article per faculty member every year.

A better alignment of research objectives and other aims mentioned in the Research Policy and the University Strategy 2019 - 2024 is required. For example, the Research Policy aim “..to strengthen graduate studies at the University and for the University to create a research environment that attracts postdoctoral fellows” needs to be aligned with the actions, key measures and goals formulated in the University Strategy. This would help the University to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its research activities, especially as faculties work to develop their own research strategies. Closer attention by the management team to

separate research objectives, principles and tasks in the Research Policy document would make it more meaningful .

In the Team's opinion, in addition to quantitative growth targets, it would be beneficial for the University to define qualitative goals as part of their institutional strategy or policy on research, in accordance with the principles and core commitments of the Agreement on Research Assessment (2022), thus building a stronger research culture at the University.

From the interviews, the Team learned that there is a strong tradition of academic freedom at the University, so research and the decision on which subject field and research topic to apply funding for is very individually based, rather than top-down. The Research Policy states that "...academic freedom prevails at the University and that each researcher has autonomy in choosing subjects", which means that individual researchers' interests and the availability of external funding determine research activity currently.

Presently, the University does not have a systematic way of strategically selecting and directing the priorities for research activities at an institutional level, as each faculty is working on its own research strategy, albeit based on the AUI Strategy, the AUI Research Policy and the faculties' overarching strategic aims. The University is a small institution which has to prioritise its resources. There is therefore a clear need to develop an agenda of strategic priorities for research at an institutional level, as opposed to solely on faculty level, that meets the University's strategic aims as well as current and future societal needs. To be successful, such a research agenda needs to address individual researchers' strength and interests, and provide opportunities for cross-disciplinary research across faculties, as well as for collaboration with international peers.

One mechanism by which the University could introduce new research topics is by employing new faculty members. The Team considers that beyond that there are other opportunities to introduce new research topics, such as providing internal grants for development of new research areas, and policies fostering interdisciplinary research activity. This applies both to opportunities for internal research collaboration and also outside opportunities for interdisciplinary research with partner organisations and institutions.

5.2 Monitoring of scientific quality of outputs

The scientific quality of research outputs is closely monitored at the University. The quality of research outputs is measured by the number of PhD and MSc students and the increase in number of publications. The University's goal is to for each faculty member to publish more than one peer-reviewed article per year, on average. The quantity of scientific outputs is monitored for each faculty. The International Relations and Research Office is responsible for reporting on research output. The Scientific Committee is the central body which discusses and advises on research-related issues. The members of the Scientific Committee are Heads of Faculties and the Head of International Relations and Research, therefore forming a good platform for monitoring and steering the research agenda. The Scientific Committee works closely with the Quality Committee. Inclusion of a graduate student representative as a Scientific Committee member would be good research governance practice.

Master's and doctoral students play a key role in research and the publication of scientific results. Doctoral students are required to publish articles before defending their theses. Postdoctoral positions also contribute to the University research outputs. The PhD and master's students have a seat in the Graduate Student Committee, and thus have an active role in monitoring the scientific quality of research outputs by graduate students.

University reports on research outputs are sent annually to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of Iceland. The University is taking initial steps to implement the Icelandic Research Information System (IRIS), which will provide further opportunities to the University for better monitoring and overview of academic staff research output, and also for comparison with other Icelandic Universities.

From meetings with faculties, the Team learned that there are three different research disciplines at the University: livestock, crops, and management, and that these often interact. However, international research output is unevenly spread between the faculties. There is a high level of awareness at the University that the Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences (FEFS) is the strongest in terms of research output. Staff members of FEFS are experienced researchers. From information provided in the RA, FEFS contributes on average over 60% of the mean research points of the whole University, and nearly 70% of these research points are from peer-reviewed publications.

From interviews with faculty members, the Team learned that many faculty members go beyond writing peer-reviewed papers; they engage with society and publish in local and national papers, thus communicating research outcomes to a wider society. The Team learned during the visit that this work is less recognised in comparison with publications in peer-reviewed international journals. The University is aware of this matter but lacks opportunities to reward such activity in a systematic way.

The Faculty of Planning and Design (FPD) is quite new. From meeting with academic staff, the Team learned that there is limited research output regarding planning in Iceland, and it was pointed out by faculty members that there are many opportunities to expand in this area. The final draft of the FPD research strategy is still under review. However, the Team learned that there is a consensus within the faculty to actively conduct research in planning and landscape architecture, to meet the needs of stakeholders and provide quality education that will prepare students for their future fields of employment. The FPD aims to lead research in its respective fields. The Team was informed that at a recent meeting on how to build up research (held because of newcomers to the faculty), the FPD emphasised that they would concentrate on themes relevant to local contexts and drive strategic development in this field.

The Team learned that the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences (FAS) aims to improve the number of published articles per year, and enhance cooperation with national and international partners. The research strategy had already been discussed at a faculty meeting. There has been interactive dialogue inside the FAS on progressing further research development to address acute societal challenges, such as the importance of national security of supply, self-sufficiency, food security and food production, which have been highlighted due to the Covid 19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, climate change and natural hazards.

The Scientific Committee defines criteria for the societal activity of the University's researchers, which includes, among other things, the scope of projects, work for the government and participation in discussions in society (see the Research Policy). The University also prepares non peer-reviewed reports in Icelandic (the University reports) aimed at practitioners and professionals.

5.3 External support

The Heads of Faculties are responsible for research funding. The Head of Faculty should be informed what source of funding members of staff are using on each occasion. One source is basic funding to the University from the Ministry, and competitive research funding sources are also available to finance research. Over the last few years there has been an increase in successful applications to competitive research funds. During the period 2019-2021, a success rate of more than 60% of applications has been recorded. External funding has increased in the period 2019-2020 by 24%, with the majority (average 77.1 % in 2019-2021) sourced from domestic funds. Funding attracted from international sources grew by 24%. Heads of Faculties stressed that some additional support is needed for seeking funds and for research.

5.4 Impact

The University does much towards maintaining close relations with society. Being an agricultural university, its impact is pivotal for society in times of climate change and challenges of food security. For example, during the meeting with faculty members of the Faculty of Environment and Forest Sciences, the Team learned that they are engaged in relationships with surrounding communities, due in part to the legacy of the two institutions which merged to form the University.

The twin green and digital challenges highlights the importance of all areas encompassed within the University. There is a high demand from society for graduates and for access to new knowledge. Interviews showed that stakeholders would like more interaction and knowledge transfer. However, it should be noted that there is already considerable interaction and that resources within the University may limit any further increase. According to interviews with external stakeholders, the Team heard that strong research activity impedes the University from taking into account the needs of local society. During the site visit the team learned that the farmers' unions are looking to the future in regard to environmental awareness and food security; these alignments with global driving forces in current agricultural research show that valuable local light can be shed on global issues.

External stakeholders informed the Team that there is no official forum for them to discuss with the University matters of common interest. The establishment of such a forum would be beneficial for research development at the University.

The systemic and systematic evaluation of the impact of research on local society should be implemented, and the results communicated and monitored accordingly.

5.5 Institutional enhancement of research management

The Director of the Office of International Relations and Research and his staff play a central role in research management. The Team learned during the interviews that there is no centralised official IT system for handling grant applications as “it happens between humans”.

As confirmed during a meeting on research management, the role of the Scientific Committee is to follow upcoming calls at national level (Rannis - the Icelandic Center for Research) and the international level, and also to collect research statistics from the faculties.

The University's Science Day has been organised by the Scientific Committee twice a year since 2020. This represents good practice in developing research culture and contributes to public visibility of the University's research. The research is presented to students and other members outside the faculty. This is important for student recruitment into research projects. There are foreign guest lectures, by invitation. Recordings of these presentations are then shared within the University and sometimes publicly on its website.

For the past five years, there have also been Thesis Days twice a year, where master's students present two projects and PhD students present three. This forum is important for the faculty understanding of research being undertaken at the student level. The presentations are streamed and accessible to the public and then the presented materials are published on skemman.is. As learned during the meeting on research management, the importance of these days is bringing together the whole university culture and contributing to its flow of knowledge.

There is an incentive system for research activities. Remuneration is based on a points system; the number of points received in research, teaching, and administration thus serves as a good approach for the enhancement of research at the University.

The University supports its academic staff to actively participate in research networks and consortium building activities, such as the European Cooperation in Science and Technology COST Actions, which facilitate research development. Participation in different professional networks, international conferences, seminars and meetings is also supported, thereby helping to develop better understanding of the current and future needs of society. To bring an international perspective in research performed by doctoral students, each doctoral committee includes one international member if possible.

The University aims to increase the access, use and impact of research results nationally and internationally. It supports its researchers in publishing results in internationally recognised, peer-reviewed scientific publications and assists them in the dissemination of new knowledge in an accessible format through open access on the University's website.

The Rules of the AUI Doctoral Fund are part of the Quality Management Handbook. The purpose of the Doctoral Fund is: to strengthen the University as an international research university; further increase knowledge in the fields of environmental science, natural resources and agricultural sciences in Iceland; and enable talented students to pursue doctoral programmes at the University. Awards from the University Doctoral Fund support full-time doctoral research positions at the University.

For the enhancement of research management, the quality management system should be further developed to cover key research management activities, including processes for evaluating research output.

5.6 Benchmarks

In the RA and at the site visit, the Team found no indication currently of any systematic benchmarking in relation to research at the institutional level. However, the University has initiated some activities in this area, and the staff visit to the Wageningen University in the Netherlands was a positive step towards research benchmarking. Implementation of IRIS will enable comparison of research outputs with those of other Icelandic universities.

There are other opportunities for the University to increase its use of benchmarks as a tool to strengthen its research activities and increase funding. For example, the UNIGreen strategic alliance could be used as a means to develop more systematic benchmarking. Furthermore,

external partners could be invited to take part in an internal audit related to research activities of the University.

5.7 Collaboration

The University participates actively in national and international networks (Future Arctic research network, and the Centre of Advanced Research on Environmental Services from Nordic Forest Ecosystems (CAR-ES) among others). Participation in the UNIgreen alliance will lead to a strengthening of capacity to attract international funding.

During the interviews, the Team learned that the local context provides research opportunities, employment for alumni, professional collaboration and research applications in the relevant fields. On the other hand, international partnerships guarantee comparison and collaboration with other agricultural universities.

From the meeting with FPD, the Team learned that there are very few planners working with municipalities, and that this is a societal need. However, the low number of faculty members limits the institution's ability to enrol and graduate more students in order eventually to meet this societal need.

5.8 Teaching-research balance

Academic staff are involved in both teaching and research activities. The Research Policy provides a good framework for ensuring the balance of research and teaching. Research leave, whereby an academic employee is exempted from teaching and/or administrative duties for a certain period of time to carry out only research work and professional development, is an integral part of the University's activities.

Integration of teaching and research is well established at the University also due to increased funding from competitive funds. Students' research projects are linked in some cases to the University farms. Another way in which teaching is linked to research is that PhD students take an active part in teaching and bring their research results into the particular subjects they teach. Those faculty members who are active in research and publishing articles integrate their expertise into their teaching.

5.9 Support for grant capture activities and grant management

The Office of International Relations and Research monitors opportunities to obtain external funding for research, organises training of faculty members in obtaining research funds, assists them with application work and provides necessary support, depending on the needs. Competitive funds, the economy and the Government Offices of Iceland are the main sources of research funding. The majority of external research funding is sourced from national funds, ranging from 63.1% to 84.3% (average 77.1% in 2019-2021).

The University Strategy has set a goal of an overall average of three applications per academic faculty member per year to competitive funds. The goal has been reached all years in the period 2019-2022, which the Team finds commendable.

During a meeting with academic staff members, the Team learned that there is support for grant acquisition by students. The University e-mails students about grants options, including national grants open to all students. In addition, the University has internal funding available to distribute to students for research activities. The internal funds are open for application by all students. There is internal funding for two doctoral students, as well as two internal funds open for applications each spring for research activities (Framfarasjóður appr. 300.000 ISK every year divided between 1-2 students and Blikastaðasjóður 1.000.000-1.500.000 ISK every year divided between 1-3 students). The University also actively participates in proposals to the Student Innovation Fund, Rannsóknasjóður Landsvirkjunar and other funds supporting students' research specifically. The university presents these opportunities to the students on a regular basis.

At least once a year, the Office of International Relations and Research organises courses, workshops and presentations on grant applications. It was confirmed during the visit that the Office regularly informs academic staff about funding opportunities.

The University lists all publications in the Annual Report every year, but could benefit from strengthening its efforts to implement a research system that collects information more broadly about results of the scientific activities of academic staff, including projects, awards, research activities, data sets, and communication in the press, for example.

5.10 General comments on the management of research

The research activities of the University have strengthened considerably in recent years. Research and development is one of the key focus areas of the University's Strategy 2019-2024. A separation of objectives, principles and tasks in the Research Policy would be beneficial in order to make more meaningful and structured use of it. The better alignment of research objectives formulated in the Research Policy with the goals and indicators formulated in the University Strategy 2019-2024 should be ensured. The Team recommends that goals and indicators (KPIs) for research quality in addition to research quantity, be elaborated and closely monitored.

The number of applications to competitive funds has increased and external research funding has tripled since 2018. In research and development work, there are big differences between the faculties and activities are strongly concentrated in one faculty.

The University strongly emphasises academic freedom and every researcher has the freedom to choose their own topics. According to the RA, there are many research fields in all faculties. The University has not clearly defined which are the most important research fields or set targets for those fields. There is a clear need to develop a research agenda at University level as opposed to solely on faculty level, and a research profile that meets strategic priorities and current and future societal needs. For this to be successful, senior management needs to address individual researchers' strengths and interests as well as opportunities for joint, cross-disciplinary research.

Research at the University would benefit from strengthening collaboration between faculty members from different disciplines, thus allowing new interdisciplinary topics to emerge through the involvement of international peers and further cooperation between faculty members. Devising a research agenda based on the University's development priorities and future positioning, while taking account of new evolving research areas, could lead to more efficient use of limited resources. The University could also build its research profile identity by reflecting the national needs of Iceland, as well as the emerging international research agenda.

A systemic and systematic evaluation of the impact of research on local society should be implemented, and the results communicated and monitored accordingly.

In order to build the future agenda for research and the use of its results, the establishment of a Forum involving external stakeholders could be considered.

6. Managing Enhancement

6.1 General enhancement context

The Team received the impression that the AUI is a small and ambitious university. The RA and visit revealed ample examples of how the University has acted on the many comments from earlier reviews, which clearly shows that its ambition is also accompanied by a capacity to enhance and develop its processes accordingly.

There is good engagement among both staff and students. The RA was written in a participatory manner and it also describes a participatory process for enhancement, whereby the University Forum has undertaken a thorough SWOT analysis followed by a list of prioritised actions.

As a small university, the AUI has to prioritise its resources and the Team found several good examples of how it cooperates nationally to save resources and share knowledge. It remains a challenge, though, to prioritise the allocation of resources for research to specific areas; the current strategy is largely based on individual academic freedom to choose research subjects. However, there are processes in place to follow up on research output. WorkPoint record management has been implemented in the administration and partly in the academic part of the University.

The student experience is at the centre of the University and teaching is a matter of priority. The infrastructure, technology and IT support for teaching and assessment have improved the student learning environment and the service to students. However, much enhancement depends on informal processes for development. The students seemed to appreciate the informal atmosphere and had full trust in the University's capacity to handle problems when such arose. To solve problems where they arise is positive, but the system needs to be developed and strengthened by describing the processes for implementation of quality management.

6.2 Strategic planning and action planning

The University Strategy 2019–2024 lays out six key focus areas:

- To emphasise innovation and value creation;
- To substantially increase research and development (R&D);
- To offer progressive and value enhancing education programmes;
- To ensure efficient use of resources;
- To strengthen the University's human resources and team spirit;
- To enhance trust and maintain a good reputation.

Each area has a number of action points and specific goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) are identified.

The University has an ambitious strategy, especially regarding growth in both research and education, which is connected to its own recognition of a weakness in its size. The interviews showed that despite the current local societal need for professionals educated at the University, the small size and limited finances inhibit the University. For instance, the low number of Planning and Design faculty members restricts the institution's ability to enrol and graduate more students and eventually meet this societal need. It is a clear but broad strategy and the strategic goals are challenging and ambitious. The Team found the number of strategic goals and planned actions quite extensive in relation to the size of the University. In addition to the main strategy, the University has other strategies and plans, for example the action plan resulting from the SWOT in the RA, and the faculty strategies. This makes it difficult to grasp the whole set of guiding documents. The Strategy would also benefit from differentiating more clearly between goals and actions. It might also be strengthened by more substance-based choices or policies to support prioritisation and exclusions. The list of action priorities defined by the University as priorities for enhancement, emerging from the evidence used to compile the RA, are:

1. Continuing strengthening RDI and infrastructure including new housing for the University agronomy centre and implementing transdisciplinary research and teaching using Mid-Fossar facilities;
2. Strengthening internationalisation and improving the visibility of the University;
3. Promoting pedagogical development and improved teaching methods;

4. Increasing the number of students especially with focus on postgraduate students;
5. Improving retention and graduation rates;
6. Implementing new study programmes, e.g., MSc in Landscape Architecture, MSc in Restoration Ecology and BSc or Diploma in Horticulture;
7. Improving the formality and benchmarking for the process of programme approval, revisions, and modifications;
8. Revising student satisfaction surveys and increasing student participation in course evaluations;
9. Formalising the feedback to students on improvements made to courses/study programmes based on the student feedback;
10. Increasing student involvement in quality enhancement processes and development of the University;
11. Improving staff and student satisfaction.

All eleven action priorities are highly relevant, based upon analysis, and designed in a participatory manner, which is commendable. However, they are a mix of objectives and actions. For example numbers 5 and 11 are objectives and need to be accompanied by relevant actions and a target level, while number 6 is a concrete action: deciding on new study programmes. There are also links between the action priorities that could be highlighted, since prioritisation of one might have a positive effect on others on the list.

The Team formed the positive impression that enhancement at the University is closely linked to the Strategy 2019-2024. In the interviews, the Strategy was often mentioned and seemed to be well known. This provides a good foundation for streamlining and enhancement work to go hand in hand with managerial work, at both strategic and day-to-day operational levels. Quality enhancement is firmly noted by the improvement of the quality handbook and development and revision of policies, regulations, and procedures. There is, however, a lack of engaging staff in the design of implementation processes and the University therefore misses out on opportunities to build upon already existing good practices.

There is also a challenge in terms of the three faculties that are working out faculty strategies separately, and seem to implement policies and rules differently. This might bring a risk of wasting resources through parallel work and lack of knowledge sharing in developments.

6.3 Committee structure

The University Council is chaired by the Rector. In addition there are six representatives, of which one is a student, in accordance with Law 85/2008 on public universities in Iceland. The Executive Board is composed of the University Rector, the Heads of Faculties, the Vocational Education Coordinator, the Head of the Rector's Office, the Head of Finance and Operations, the Head of International Relations and Research and the Head of Teaching and Learning. There used to be separate meetings for administration and faculties, and the new formation seemed to be a step in a positive direction, knitting administration, research and teaching together more closely.

The University has seven committees: the Ethics Committee, the Quality Committee, the Equal Rights Committee, the Security Committee, the Scientific Committee, the Graduate Studies Committee and the Undergraduate Studies Committee. The Ethics Committee is composed of three members from outside the University. The other committees are a mix of administrative staff, faculty staff and students, with the exception of the Quality Committee that consists of only administrative staff and one student.

At first impression, this seems to be many committees for a small university, but the interviews showed that they work in cooperation and that staff appear to have a clear picture of the different responsibilities. The Team recommends including faculty staff on the Quality Committee, to facilitate the development of implementation of policies and shared processes (see chapter 7.3).

6.4 Evidence base

The RA evidences in all parts the use of figures for analysis, for example following PhD students in the PhD Portal online learning management system in Ugla. During the interviews, Ugla was mentioned frequently as the tool used for data management. In 2019 a new position of Records and Information Manager was implemented, as well as a new Work Point record system.

To follow up on the Strategy, a set of key performance indicators has been formulated which is compact and easy to overview (Table 0.1 in the RA). Many of them are easily measurable,

but it could be difficult to assess the achievement of some (for example stakeholder trust, innovation and sustainability as integral part of each programme and sustainable operations).

The University is small and the interviews provided examples on how students' informal input and feedback has been followed up and acted upon. There are in addition formal systems for feedback but poor response rates on student surveys seemed to be an issue which was solved by replacing surveys with focus groups.

6.5 Benchmarks

The RA describes how the University consults external stakeholders over curriculum development and in 2020, the BSc Landscape Architecture programme was accredited by IFLA Europe. There is also collaboration with other universities abroad, where faculty exchange leads to learning from each other.

The management had also made a trip with a large group to Wageningen to compare the University with a major international top university, and referred to the trip as highly useful with much learning gained.

Reviews of BSc programmes have been ongoing, with data gathered from external stakeholders, for example, on employer satisfaction. However, the Team found opportunities for improvement in the development and application of systematic processes for benchmarking, by comparing data sets with chosen institutions, or periodic external review of curriculum. The RA also mentioned the need, which it plans to address, to produce annual monitoring reports on study programmes which could become a key part of the data for periodic external reviews. The growth of international networks also raises possibilities for increased systematic benchmarking.

6.6 Internal sharing of best practice

The University is a small institution and the Team formed the impression that internal sharing of best practice was informal and frequent, on a day-to-day basis. The interviews showed, though, that there are differences in organisation and quality culture between the three faculties leading to unnecessary hindrances to sharing.

The annual Science Days, where all PhD and master's students share their presentations across faculties, are an excellent example of overcoming organisational boundaries to share knowledge. The interviews provided evidence that the Science Days were appreciated as such. The RA mentions that several courses are shared, which is an easy way to facilitate sharing of best practice.

The inclusion of academic staff in management and committee work provides a good basis for sharing discussions, and could be capitalised on further (see section 7.3).

6.7 Drawing on international experience

From both the RA and interviews, the Team noticed that the University had a focus on internationalisation as part of their quality enhancement in terms of both international collaboration and international hiring of academics. 25 staff members from 15 nationalities work at the University, including PhD students and adjunct professors.

The University has established a platform for strong international collaboration such as the EUI UNIgreen, the NOVA network, UArctic and EnCHIL, which drive development. The Nordic MSc EnCHIL, launched in 2020, is a joint MSc programme between three universities in the Nordic Countries (the University, University of Helsinki and Lund University). A European university network such as UNIgreen is a huge undertaking for a small institution but the Team finds the University prepared to join the alliance, which will offer an excellent opportunity to share resources and knowledge.

The prerequisites to further develop international collaboration are in place. The Office of International Relations and Research was mentioned in several interviews as proactive and working collaboratively with faculty and students, resulting in a high degree of trust from both staff and students.

6.8 Domestic cooperation

Both the RA and the interviews provided evidence of active domestic collaboration with other Icelandic universities. The University of Iceland was frequently mentioned as a partner; for instance, student career and counselling services have been offered in collaboration with the University of Iceland (UI) and the University of Hólar until autumn 2022, the counsellor

working 25% at the University. The Rector appears proactive in finding other means of collaboration; library services were also mentioned.

The University's role as a key actor in national agriculture generates extensive collaboration with national and regional stakeholders, and during the visit several research projects were mentioned. Collaboration also includes the infrastructure for research and education (for example, horses).

6.9 Evaluation

AUI is a small university but the review left the Team with a strong impression of continuous enhancement. Recommendations from earlier reviews have been addressed, the Strategy is clear and ambitious with many activities and KPIs for follow-up, and analysis is made on an evidence base. There is, however, a lack of staff engagement in the design of implementation processes and the University therefore misses out on opportunities to build upon already existing good practices. It is also a challenge that the three faculties interpret and implement policies differently.

National and international collaboration is an inherent part of activities and enhancement and internationalisation especially is growing positively, in line with the strategic choices of the University.

Benchmarking has been undertaken, but the Team sees possibilities for improvement in the development and application of systematic processes for benchmarking and external review. The committee structure is adequate for the management of enhancement but further development should be undertaken with simplification and prioritisation guiding the work, building on sharing already existing best practices and involving staff in committee work.

7. Conclusion

7.1 General summary, including overview of management of research

The review process was facilitated by an RA that was found to be comprehensive and well-written, providing a good foundation for the Team to prepare for the visit.

During the visit the Team was grateful for meeting staff, stakeholders and students who readily shared their experiences and reflections in a transparent manner, in an atmosphere of development and improvement. The Team had the opportunity to learn from many helpful examples of practice and views on current quality management.

Growth in student numbers, research and internationalisation seem to be pivotal to the Strategy and the University has already taken several steps towards that. The recommendations given in previous reviews have been addressed, even though there are further steps still to be taken.

7.2 Summary of strengths

Instances of good practice include:

- The University's strategy for 2019-2024 is ambitious and clear. The strategy has been implemented consistently.
- Research is one of the key focus areas of the strategy and research activities have increased and strengthened over the last years. The University is aiming to substantially increase its research and development efforts, increase funding through competitive research funds and support its staff in developing the relevant skills for doing so.
- Quality management is ambitious, and measures have been applied on all accounts in response to input from SLRs and QEF1.
- The Office of International Relations and Research and the International Committee stand out as ambitious, with a high degree of trust from faculty and students.
- The University manages to work positively with its small size in various ways:
 - The University has taken advantage of its role as a stand-alone University by establishing a platform for strong international collaboration such as the EUI UNIgreen, the NOVA network, UArctic and EnCHIL, which will drive development;
 - Through its importance as a regional university and its active societal collaboration, the municipality supports the University's endeavour and vision;

- The University has a national role for Icelandic agriculture, forestry, land use and planning. It has identified a need for expansion in this area and is planning strategic development accordingly;
- There are examples of good practice in sharing resources within the community of Icelandic universities.
- The University is a close-knit higher education community where there is natural and informal collegial cooperation between management, staff and students. There is a high level of enthusiasm and passion expressed among employees, students and stakeholders for the institution's collective vision, the institution's role and its students.
- The University's study programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process.

7.3 Summary of areas for improvement

Areas for further development that the Agricultural University of Iceland will need to consider, include:

- As a small university, it is important to prioritise development activities and to document and communicate decisions clearly.
- The quality system is based on the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of continuous improvement. The different phases of the cycle are visible in the University's operations, but the documentation of common operating models is incomplete on the intranet and in the quality manual. The Team encourages the University to maintain simplicity and engage faculty, students and stakeholders in relevant phases.
- There are inconsistencies in the implementation of quality processes between faculties. This could be linked to the lack of easily available, clear, written and formalised processes at the institutional level or subcultures in different faculties. The development of processes should be based on a shared understanding and already existing good practices.
- The Team would like to encourage the institution to engage faculty members in quality work and strengthen the collective awareness and ownership of quality across the University. This could be exemplified by engaging faculty in committee work.

- The strategy towards internationalisation needs to be accompanied by a bilingual culture and availability of all necessary information in English as well as Icelandic.
- In relation to the management of research, the Team wishes to highlight the following conclusions:
 - In line with the University strategy, research activities are growing rapidly. However, the volume of research activities is distributed unevenly between faculties.
 - In addition to quantitative growth targets, it would be beneficial for the University to define qualitative goals as part of their institutional strategy on research. Currently, individual researchers' interests and availability of external funding determine research activity. There is a clear need to develop a research agenda at institutional level, as opposed to faculty level, that meets strategic choices as well as current and future societal needs. To be successful, such a research agenda needs to address individual researchers' strengths and interests, and opportunities for cross-disciplinary research across faculties as well as for collaboration with international peers.
 - A systemic and systematic evaluation of the impact of research on local society should be implemented and the results communicated and monitored accordingly. The Team would like to encourage the University to develop measures for research impact, following the development work currently in progress internationally.

7.4 Judgement on managing standards of degrees and awards

The Review Team commissioned by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education concluded that:

- Confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Agricultural University of Iceland's present and likely future arrangements to secure the academic standards of its awards.

7.5 Judgement on managing standards of student learning experience

The Review Team commissioned by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education concluded that:

- Confidence can be placed in the soundness of the Agricultural University of Iceland's present and likely future arrangements to secure the quality of the student learning experience.

Annex 1: Visit Schedule

Tuesday November 1

Time	Meeting	Attendees
08:30-9:15	Briefing with Rector	Dr Ragnheiður I. Þórarinsdóttir, Rector
09:20-11:45	University Showcase	Dr Ragnheiður I. Þórarinsdóttir, Rector Guðmunda Smáradóttir Human Resource and Quality Manager Þóroddur Sveinsson, Head of Faculty of Agricultural Sciences Christian Schultze, Head of International Relations <i>AUI's farm managers:</i> Logi Sigurðsson (Hestur) Guðbjartur Þór Stefánsson (Mið-fossar) Egill Gunnarsson (Hvanneyrarbúið)
12:30-13:20	Self-evaluation Team	Dr Ragnheiður I. Þórarinsdóttir, Rector Álfheiður Marinósdóttir, Head of Teaching and Learning Christian Schultze, Head of International Relations and Research Dr Isabel C Barrio, Head of Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences Dr Samaneh Nickayin, Head of Faculty of Planning and Design Þóroddur Sveinsson, Head of Faculty of Agricultural Sciences Dr Björn Þorsteinsson, Professor Jón Hallsson, Professor Guðmunda Smáradóttir, Human Resource and Quality Manager Anna Björk Haraldsdóttir, Records and Information Manager Sólveig Sanchez, Student Representative (PhD student Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences) Kristín Sveiney Baldursdóttir, Student Representative (MSc student, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences) Gunnhildur Gísladóttir, Student Representative (BSc student Faculty of Agricultural Sciences) Þorvaldur Ragnar Þorbjarnarson, Student Representative (BSc student, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences)
13:30-14:30	Senior Management	Dr Ragnheiður Þórarinsdóttir, Rector Álfheiður Marinósdóttir, Head of Teaching and Learning Christian Schultze, Head of International Relations and Research Guðmunda Smáradóttir, Human Resource and Quality Manager Dr Isabel C Barrio, Head of Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences Dr Samaneh Nickayin, Head of Faculty of Planning and Design Kristín Theodóra Ragnarsdóttir, Head of Finance and Operations Þóroddur Sveinsson, Head of Faculty of Agricultural Sciences
15:00-15:55	Heads of Faculties	Isabel C. Barrio, Environmental and Forest Sciences Samaneh Nickayin, Planning and Design Þóroddur Sveinsson, Agricultural Sciences
16:05-17:00	Quality management and enhancement	Guðmunda Smáradóttir, Human Resource and Quality Manager Anna Björk Haraldsdóttir, Records and Information Manager Álfheiður Marinósdóttir, Head of Teaching and Learning Hlynur Óskarsson, Professor, Head of Graduate Studies <i>Programme Directors:</i> Fanneý Gísladóttir, Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences Páll Sigurðsson, Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences

		Ragnhildur Helga Jónsdóttir, Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences Samaneh Nickayin, Faculty of Planning and Design Sigríður Bjarnadóttir, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences
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Wednesday November 2

Time	Meeting	Attendees
08:30-8:55	Student Representatives	Not disclosed. N=3
09:00-09:45	University Council	Dr Ragnheiður I. Þórarinsdóttir, Rector Lilja Björg Ágústsdóttir, Lawyer, appointed by the Minister Daði Már Kristófersson, Professor, University of Iceland, appointed by the University Council Þórunn Jónsdóttir, Management Consultant, appointed by the University Council Jóhannes Sveinbjörnsson, Associate Professor, employee representative Haukur Þórðarson, Teacher, employee representative Þorvaldur Ragnar Þorbjarnarson, Chairman of AUI's student association, student representative
09:55-10:25	Students in Agricultural Sciences	Not disclosed. N=3
10:45-11:15	Students in Planning and Landscape architecture	Not disclosed. N=3
11:15-11:45	Students in Environmental and Forest Sciences	Not disclosed. N=3
12:15-12:55	Open meeting with students	Not disclosed. N = 22
13:15-14:15	Faculty of Agricultural Sciences	Dr Björn Þorsteinsson, Professor Dr Friederike Dima Danneil, Research Specialist Jónína Svavarsdóttir, Research Assistant Ólöf Ósk Guðmundsdóttir, Adjunct Lecturer
14:45-15:45	Faculty of Planning and Landscape architecture	Helena Guttormsdóttir, Assistant Professor Dr Astrid Blanche Narcissa Lelarge, Assistant Professor Samson B Harðarson, Assistant Professor Hermann Georg Gunnlaugsson, Part-time Teacher Dr Harpa Stefánsdóttir, Professor Dr Samaneh Nickayin, Assistant Professor
16:15-17:15	Faculty of Environmental and Forest Sciences	Dr Alejandro Salazar Villegas, Assistant Professor Dr Emmanuel Pierre Pagneux, Assistant Professor Dr Ólafur Arnalds, Professor Ragnhildur Helga Jónsdóttir, Adjunct Lecturer Starri Heiðmarsson, Part-time Teacher

Thursday November 3

Time	Meeting	Attendees
08:30-9:15	Research Management	Christian Schultze, Head of International Relations and Research (member of AUI's science committee) Dr Ása Aradóttir, Professor, Environmental and Forest Sciences Dr Bjarni Diðrik, Professor, Environmental and Forest Sciences Dr Erla Sturludóttir, Associate Professor, Agricultural Sciences Dr Hlynur Óskarsson, Professor, Environmental and Forest Sciences

		Dr Björn Þorsteinsson, Professor Agricultural Sciences Dr Samaneh Nickayin, Planning and Landscape architecture (member of AUI's science committee)
9:30-10:15	Internationalisation	Christian Schultze, Head of International Relations and Research Helga Guðný Þorgrímsdóttir, BS student Gunnhildur Guðbrandsdóttir, Administrative officer Áshildur Bragadóttir, Innovation & Continuing Education Manager Dr Jóhanna Gísladóttir, Environmental Manager
10:30-11:30	Open Meeting with Staff	Not disclosed. N = 12
12:30-13:30	Support Staff	Álfheiður Marinósdóttir, Head of Teaching and Learning Christian Schultze, Head of International Relations and Research Guðmunda Smáradóttir, Human Resource and Quality Manager Kristín Theodóra Ragnarsdóttir, Finance Manager Þórunn Edda Bjarnadóttir, Administrative Officer Álfheiður Sverrisdóttir, Administrative Officer Gunnhildur Guðbrandsdóttir, Administrative officer of Graduate Studies
14:00-14:45	Alumni	Anja Mager, Teacher Drífa Gústafsdóttir, Planning Officer, Municipality of Borgarbyggð Baldur Örn Samúelsson, Feeding Consultant, The Icelandic Agricultural Advisory Centre Hrafnhildur Tryggvadóttir, representative of the Department of Environment and Planning at Municipality of Borgarbyggð
15:00-16:00	External Stakeholders	Árni Bragason, Director of the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland Guðveig Eyglóardóttir, representative of the local government in Borgarbyggð Auður Sveinsdóttir, landscape architect Dr Skúli Skúlason, professor at Holar University Hilmar Vilberg Gylfason, head lawyer at the Agricultural Association of Iceland Pétur Diðriksson, farmer at Helgavatn, West Iceland
16:30-17:00	Debriefing with Rector	Dr Ragnheiður I Þórarinsdóttir, Rector