

Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

Annual Report 2022

February 2023

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For questions about this report, please email secretariat@qef.is

ABBREVIATIONS

General abbreviations

Board	Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education
Council	Quality Council for Icelandic Higher Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Also known as European Standards and Guidelines.
EUA	European University Association
IRIS	Icelandic Research Information System
IWR	Institution-Wide Review
LÍS	National Union of Students in Iceland
Ministry	Icelandic Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation
QEF	Quality Enhancement Framework
QEF1	First cycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework
QEF2	Second cycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework
RA	Reflective Analysis
REAC	Research Evaluation Advisory Committee
SLR	Subject-Level Review

Abbreviations of the Icelandic universities

AUI	Agricultural University of Iceland
BU	Bifröst University
HU	Hólar University
IUA	Icelandic University of the Arts
RU	Reykjavík University
UI	University of Iceland
UNAK	University of Akureyri

Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

Mission and principles

Mission

Safeguarding the standards and enhancing the quality of Icelandic higher education and research.

Six Principles

- 1.** Acknowledging the primary role of autonomous higher education institutions in managing and enhancing the quality of their core activities.
- 2.** Committing to the continuous enhancement of the learning experience for all students in an inclusive way.
- 3.** Involving students as partners in the learning process and as active participants in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning.
- 4.** Anchoring QEF in the Icelandic context while maintaining an international perspective.
- 5.** Promoting a partnership with all Icelandic stakeholders while retaining the independence of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education.
- 6.** Embracing transparency as an explicit value of an open consultative process.

Introduction

This annual report presents the main activities of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education (Board) in 2022, a year characterised by continuity and change.

Building on the activities that took place in previous years, the second cycle of Institution-Wide Reviews (IWRs) continued with the publication of the review reports for the Icelandic University of the Arts and the University of Akureyri, and the Year-on report from Hólar University. The IWR review reports for the Agricultural University of Iceland and the Follow-up review report for Bifröst University will close the QEF2 cycle and will be available in early 2023.

Other important activities included the Follow-up review of Police Studies at the University of Akureyri (the report will be available in 2023), and the impact evaluation of the Icelandic Research Fund (published in May 2022). At the behest of the Greenlandic Ministry, and with crucial contributions from colleagues from the Quality Council, the Board has served in an advisory capacity to the Greenlandic higher education institutions in the development of their internal quality enhancement approach. This work will continue in 2023.

The Board started a review of QEF2 in 2022 and explored ideas for the development of QEF3. A survey was sent to all stakeholders and much time was spent in discussions about the future focus of QEF3. These discussions will conclude in 2023 after consultation with all the stakeholders.

Major changes have taken place in both the Board and the Secretariat. After 12 years devoted to the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework, Prof. Norman Sharp stepped down in November. The Board would like to acknowledge Norman's outstanding contributions to Iceland. It is difficult to find the right words to describe his deep commitment to Iceland and his desire to ensure that all the universities succeed in their activities. He will be sorely missed.

The Secretariat welcomed Þorgerður Edda Hall as Senior Adviser and Dr Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir as Executive Director (framkvæmdastjóri). Ólöf succeeds Dr Sigurður (Siggi) Óli Sigurðsson who had been with the Secretariat since 2015. The Secretariat also went back to Rannís for its office space. The Board would like to thank Siggi for shouldering singlehandedly and with good humour our increasing workload over the years of his tenure. Grateful thanks are also due to both Ólöf and Þorgerður for stepping into their complex roles effortlessly. Siggi, Ólöf and Þorgerður ensured that this transition period did not affect our core work and for that we are very grateful.

In closing, the Board wishes to thank the Quality Council, LÍS, the Rectors' conference and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation for their confidence in, and their contribution to, our work. We look forward to our ongoing dialogue with the sector, and the future deployment of QEF3 as a tool for the continuing development of Icelandic universities.

Andrée Sursock
Chair, Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

The strategy and the rolling action plan

The Board adopted a strategy for the period 2019 – 2024, with the following priorities:

- Ensure that the Quality Enhancement Framework secures the standards and improves the quality of Icelandic higher education
- Promote the independence, competence and professionalism of QB
- Enhance QB's national and international reputation

An associated action plan was developed, with KPIs and deadlines. The action plan is on track, apart from two items, which were noted in previous annual reports. The Quality Board postponed its application for full membership of ENQA to 2024. The launch of a Quality Board newsletter has not been implemented because of workloads, but an update on European Higher Education and Quality Assurance was posted in April.

As one of its first priorities, the Quality Board committed to ensuring that QEF evolves in a timely and appropriate manner. To this end, a steering committee was established in 2022, chaired by Crichton Lang. The committee was tasked to oversee the evaluation of QEF2 and included representatives from the Board, the Research Evaluation Advisory Committee, the Quality Council and the National Union of Students in Iceland (LÍS). Two independent experts were commissioned: Howard Davies to analyse the results of the survey on QEF2 and Achim Hopbach to provide comments on the extent to which the second edition of the [Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education \(Handbook\)](#) complies with the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education](#). Their analyses will be important in shaping QEF3.

QEF2

The four main components of QEF2 are discussed below. They include Subject-Level Reviews (SLR), Institution-Wide Reviews (IWR), Annual Meetings and the QC.

2022 SLR

The Subject-Level Reviews (SLR) are the responsibility of the universities. The *Handbook* defines their focus as

all forms of provision, including, for example, taught, research, full-time, part-time, distance learning and work- based provision... any provision for which the institution is responsible that is undertaken in collaboration with any other institution or partner, either national or international... (and) cover the main areas related to the management of research (2017, p. 12).

Furthermore, the *Handbook* notes “The Board monitors whether reviews at the subject level are carried out, if they are robust (i.e., use an evidence-based methodology that stands up to scrutiny), constructive, in line with the HEI's strategy and lead to enhancement” (2017, p. 12).

The following SLR reports were completed in 2022:

- University of Iceland:
 - Faculty of Education and Diversity
 - Faculty of Education and Pedagogy
 - Faculty of Health Promotion, Sport and Leisure Studies
 - Faculty of Public Health Sciences
 - Faculty of Subject Teacher Education
 - School of Education: Doctoral Studies

- School of Engineering and Natural Science: Management of Research
- School of Health Sciences: Management of Research
- Reykjavík University:
 - Department of Applied Engineering
 - Department of Computer Science
 - Department of Engineering

2022 IWR

The Institution-Wide Reviews (IWR) are organised under the direct responsibility of the Quality Board; the plan has been to carry out one or two IWR every year, until the end of the cycle, which will conclude with a period of reflection in 2023.

In 2022, the IWR reports for the [Icelandic University of the Arts](#) and [University of Akureyri](#) were published. The IWR site visit for the Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI) took place in November and the follow-up review visit for Bifröst University (BU) in December. Their reports will be published in 2023. (For the composition of all review teams, please see pp. 12-13.)

2022 Annual meetings

University	Board Representative	Timing
Agricultural University of Iceland	Ellen Hazelkorn	May
Bifröst University	Crichton Lang	May
Hólar University	Riitta Pyykkö	May
Icelandic University of the Arts	Philip Winn	May
University of Akureyri	Norman Sharp	May
Reykjavík University	Ellen Hazelkorn	September
University of Iceland	Philip Winn	May

Annual meetings are organised in all seven universities and agendas are agreed in advance with the universities. They include strategic developments in the universities, their current QEF-related activities such as the outcomes of the previous IWR, any SLRs undertaken during the year or planned for the following year and the Year-on and Mid-term Progress Report, as appropriate. The Annual meetings also provide an opportunity for the universities and the Quality Board members to exchange information and ensure that the Board remains current and knowledgeable about developments in Icelandic higher education.

Quality Council

The QC is an essential partner of the Board and plays a prominent role in the success of the QEF. Its membership includes the senior staff with responsibility for quality and standards from all Icelandic universities, as well as two representatives of Icelandic students (see p. 12 for a list of QC members in 2022).

The QC met 10 times in 2022. In addition to the ongoing dialogue and sharing of resources, focus areas of the QC in 2022 have been to programme reviews and annual monitoring, embedding QA processes in everyday operations, the implementation of ESG and micro-credentials.

The QC Chair has attended all meetings of the Board as an observer (withdrawing when individual universities were discussed). From August onwards, Vaka Óttarsdóttir, quality manager at the University of Akureyri, took on the role of chair from Áslaug Helgadóttir, quality

manager at the University of Iceland. The Board thanks Áslaug for her devoted service and contribution to developing the QEF for Icelandic higher education.

Commissioned work

The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation (hereafter the Ministry) commissioned the Board to undertake a follow-up review of Police Studies at the University of Akureyri. The site visit took place in November (see p. 13 for a full list of team members). The review report will be published in 2023.

The Ministry also commissioned the Board to conduct an impact assessment of the Icelandic Research Fund over a five-year period, based on qualitative and quantitative methods. This work was led by Philip Winn, Board member and REAC Chair. Katrín Frímansdóttir, former Director of Continuous Quality Improvement and Program Evaluation at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, was hired as project manager and Fróði Guðmundur Jónsson, MA in Animal Behaviour, was hired as a data analyst on the project. The final report was published in May and its findings were presented at the annual Rannís conference in November.

The Greenlandic Ministry of Education, Culture and Church commissioned the Board to continue to support the development of internal quality assurance processes in Greenlandic higher education institutions. In 2022, activity included a workshop on annual monitoring and presentation of plans for pilot internal QA work in the academic year 2022/23 by the Greenland institutions. The project steering committee met in December 2022 to get updates on the pilot work and to agree the plan of work for 2023. Christel Lund Bøjler, Principal of the Greenland Business School, has also recently undertaken a study tour to some of the Icelandic institutions utilising contacts generated by the project.

The Árni Magnússon Institute commissioned the Board to conduct a review of its strategic management to support the development of a new strategic plan. The review team conducted a site visit in April and delivered its report in June (for the names of the review team, please see p. 13).

The Research Evaluation Advisory Committee (REAC)

REAC is an advisory committee of the Quality Board that met four times in 2022. It maintains its mission to support the evaluation of research management in the universities. The committee has representation from all seven universities, the doctoral research community and the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council. A new addition to the membership was Sara Stef. Hildardóttir, Project Manager of Research Services and Open Access, National and University Library of Iceland. Her recruitment to REAC was particularly important because a significant part of REAC's discussions this year have been to do with the development and roll-out of the Icelandic Research Information System (IRIS) across all universities and relevant research institutes. The development of IRIS will be a significant advance in the ability of Icelandic universities to manage and highlight research activity across all disciplines. REAC is planning a webinar for 2023, *Making the Most of IRIS – how it will showcase your work locally and internationally*. The webinar is not a training package – these will be developed as part of the IRIS roll-out – but a conversation across the sector about the opportunities offered by IRIS. REAC has also continued to take an interest in the national conversation about the impact of research outside academia. This will continue to inform the agenda of the committee through 2023 (for the REAC membership, see p. 11.)

Communicating with the sector and partners in Iceland and abroad

The Quality Board views maintaining a dialogue with its partners and stakeholders as one of its most important responsibilities. This ensures appropriate engagement with Iceland and keeping abreast of Icelandic policy developments that are relevant to its work. Similarly, the Board strives to stay connected with European and international developments in quality assurance and higher education to make sure that its work continues to support the Icelandic higher education sector.

Reaching out to Icelandic partners

The Board met with its Icelandic partners to discuss issues of mutual interest and to update the sector on the work undertaken during the year:

- The president of the Rectors' Conference
- QC (the QC chair also sits on the Board meetings and the QB staff on the QC meetings)
- LÍS
- Representatives of the Ministry

Reaching out beyond Iceland

Reaching out internationally is essential to a quality assurance body. It provides invaluable opportunities to benchmark and learn from others, and to lend the Quality Board's unique expertise.

The Quality Board has been an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2018. ENQA is the body that represents quality assurance organisations from the European Higher Education Area (www.enqa.eu). The Board manager attended the ENQA Membership Forum in Cardiff June 2022. Both staff members of the Secretariat attended the Quality Audit Network (QAN) in Helsinki in June and took the opportunity to visit the Finnish evaluation agency.

The Board hosted the Annual Meeting of the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) in September, attended by representatives from quality assurance agencies in the Nordic and Baltic states, as well as a Ministry representative from the Faroe Islands.

The Annual Conference

The 2022 annual Board conference – titled *Enhancing Quality of Master's Studies: Icelandic and International Perspectives* – took place in May with approximately 70 attendees (the video recordings are available [here](#)). The conference included an online presentation from an international keynote speaker on innovative ways of organising Master's education, as well as shorter presentations including Icelandic and international perspectives on the conference theme. This was followed by two sets of panel discussions with representatives from the Icelandic universities, both staff and students, as well as stakeholders from the professional field.

Concluding remarks

Every annual report is an occasion to identify emerging issues; 2022 is no exception. The legislative elections in Iceland saw the arrival of a new government with new priorities and policy recommendations, that the Board has considered carefully along with European and international policy development.

Whilst the policy environment is changing, some Icelandic-specific issues remain at the forefront of the Board's concerns because of their significant impact on quality. These include the

significant proportion of sessional staff working in universities, the number of study programmes and faculties in relation to the size of the universities, the relative informality of internal quality processes and the extent to which these are embedded in the decision-making process, and how universities are approaching issue of equality, diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, in view of developing QEF3, the Board noted the growing maturity of the internal quality processes in Icelandic universities and is discussing what implications this positive change should have on both the scope of the IWR and the SLR components in QEF3.

These issues will be discussed with all stakeholders in the year ahead to ensure that the QEF3 approach serves its function in supporting the quality of Iceland's universities.

Annex 1: Quality Board Membership

Andrée Sursock, Chair, Senior Adviser, European University Association (EUA)
Norman Sharp, Vice-Chair, former Director of QAA Scotland (until November)
Crichton W. Lang, Former Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of the Highlands and Islands
Oisín Hassan, Former Board member of the European Student Union, representative of the National Union of Icelandic Students (until May)
Ellen Hazelkorn, Joint Managing Partner, BH Associates, Joint Editor, Policy Review in Higher Education
Riitta Pyykkö, former Vice Rector, University of Turku
Philip Winn, Research Professor, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
Áslaug Helgadóttir, observer, representative of the Quality Council (until June)
Vaka Óttarsdóttir, observer, representative of the Quality Council (from September)
Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir, student observer, representative of the National Union of Icelandic Students (until May)
Alexandra Ýr van Erven, student observer, representative of the National Union of Icelandic Students (from September)
Kolbrún Lára Kjartansdóttir, student observer, vice-representative of the National Union of Icelandic Students (from September)

Annex 2: Research Evaluation Advisory Committee Membership

Philip Winn, Chair, Research Professor, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
Bjarki Þór Grönfeldt, Doctoral Student, University of Kent
Elín Díanna Gunnarsdóttir, Pro-rector, University of Akureyri
Helga Olafs, Head of Research, Bifröst University (until May)
Sigrún Lilja Einarsdóttir, Associate Professor, Bifröst University (from September)
Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Rector, Reykjavik University, and Chair of the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council (until May)
Margrét Helga Ögmundsdóttir, Associate Professor, University of Iceland and Chair of the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council (from September)
Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of Research and Information Technology, Reykjavik University
Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector of Science, University of Iceland
Christian Schultze, International Relations and Research Manager, Agricultural University of Iceland
Skúli Skúlason, Director of Division of Research, Hólar University (nominated by the Quality Council)
Hulda Stefánsdóttir, Research Coordinator, The Icelandic University of the Arts
Finnborg Salome Steinþórsdóttir, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Iceland
Guðný Zoëga, Assistant Professor, Department of Rural Tourism, Hólar University (until September)
Anna Guðrún Edvardsdóttir, Research Manager, Hólar University (from November)
Sara Stef. Hildardóttir, Project Manager of Research Services and Open Access, National and University Library of Iceland (from November)

Annex 3: Quality Council

The Quality Council (QC) was chaired by Áslaug Helgadóttir (University of Iceland) until June and replaced by Vaka Óttarsdóttir (University of Akureyri) in August. The composition of the QC in 2022 was as follows:

Agricultural University of Iceland	Guðmunda Smáradóttir, Director of Quality and Human Resources.
Bifröst University	Lydía Geirsdóttir, Quality Manager
Hólar University	Skúli Skúlason, Professor and Director of Research (until June), Edda Mattíasdóttir, CEO (from August)
Iceland University of the Arts	Sóley Björt Guðmundsdóttir, University Office Director, Human Resources and Quality Manager
Reykjavik University	Guðrún Ragna Hreinsdóttir, Quality Manager
University of Akureyri	Vaka Óttarsdóttir, Director of Quality and Human Resources
University of Iceland	Áslaug Helgadóttir, Director of Quality Management (until June), Eiríkur Stephensen, Project Manager (until December), Katrín Frímansdóttir (from December)
National Union of Icelandic Students	Alexandra Ýr van Erven, Chairperson (from June) Kolbrún Lára Kjartansdóttir, Quality Officer (from June) Derek Terrell Allen, Chairperson (until May) Björgvin Ægir Elísson, Quality Officer (until May)

Annex 4: Secretariat

Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson, Executive Director (until September)
Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir, Executive Director (from November)
Þorgerður Edda Hall, Senior Adviser (from April)

Annex 5: IWR Teams

Iceland University of the Arts

Lois Fitch, Chair, Deputy Principal, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.
Michèle Graf, Head of Accreditation and Quality Development, Zurich University of the Arts.
Helka-Liisa Hentilä, Professor of Planning and Urban Design and former Vice-Rector (Education), University of Oulu.
Nhung Hong Thi Ngo, student, University of Iceland. Kurt T. Steinberg, President, Montserrat College of Art.

Bifröst University

Alan Davidson (Chair), International higher education quality assurance consultant, former Dean of Department for Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Robert Gordon University, Scotland.
Anneli Pirttila, (Team member) Former Rector, Saimaa University of Applied Sciences.
Raymond Smith (Team member and Secretary), UK-based Higher Education Consultant.

Erlingur Sigvaldason, (Team member) student at University of Iceland.

Agricultural University of Iceland

Maria Knutson Wedel (Chair), Rector, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

Pekka Auvinen, Vice-President, Karelia University of Applied Sciences, and Chair of FINEEC's higher education committee, Finland

Tatjana Volkova, Chair of EUA-IEP Steering Committee and former rector, BA School of Business and Finance, Latvia

Sigtýr Ægir Kárasón, student, Iceland University of the Arts

Annex 6: Teams for commissioned reviews

Police Studies at the University of Akureyri

Rachel Cragg (Chair), Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education and Digital, Buckinghamshire New University and former Head of Curriculum Design and Development, National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA).

Kimmo Himberg, Former Rector of the Finnish Police University College.

Kolbrún Lára Kjartansdóttir, University of Iceland Master's student in the School of Education and LÍS Quality Officer.

Karen Willis (Secretary), Professor Emerita, Academic Quality and Enhancement, University of Chester (advisory capacity).

Árni Magnússon Institute

Boyd Robertson, Chair, former Principal, National Centre of Excellence for Gaelic Language and Culture.

Antal van den Bosch, Director, Meertens Institute.

Tove Bull, former Rector, University of Tromsø and former Board member.

Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir, student member.

Annex 7: Calendar of meetings and events

February	Quality Board meeting, online
April	ENQA General Assembly, online
May	Quality Board meeting, online Quality Board meeting, Reykjavik REAC meeting, Reykjavik Meeting of the Board with the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation Meeting with Rector Jón Atli Benediktsson, Chair of the Rectors' Conference Quality Board annual conference, hosted by Iceland University of the Arts Annual meetings of Board representatives with Bifröst University, Hólar University, Icelandic University of the Arts, University of Akureyri, and University of Iceland Webinar on Annual monitoring – building capacity for internal quality assurance in Greenland
June	ENQA Members' Forum, Cardiff Quality Audit Network Meeting, Helsinki
August	Quality Board meeting, online
September	Quality Board meeting, Reykjavik REAC meeting, Reykjavik Meeting of the Board with Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation Meeting of the Board with the Quality Council Meeting of the Board with LÍS Annual meeting of Board representative with Reykjavík University NOQA Annual Meeting, Reykjavik
November	Quality Board meeting, Reykjavik REAC meeting, Reykjavik