

# Year-on report QEF2

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

Spring 2023



**HÁSKÓLI  
ÍSLANDS**

## 1 Introduction

In this report we provide an update on the progress relating to quality assurance in UI's main activities since receiving the Institution-Wide Review report in 2021 (IWR21). The finalising of this report coincides with the final SLR within QEF2 at UI, mainly the self-review of the management of research at the School of Education. Overall, the sentiment of academic staff towards the work conducted in the SLRs, is quite positive as demonstrated in in-house surveys conducted at the end of the review process. Most notably, the participation and input of external experts is very much appreciated.

The report is divided into two parts: *General comments* where progress towards more efficient quality management in general is described and *Comments on items in chapter 7.3 Areas for improvement* in the IWR21. For the latter part we have collected information from those responsible for each topic as described in UI26, where possible.

This report was a collaborative effort among responsible parties for each recommended area for improvement and Dr. Eiríkur Stephensen project manager in Strategy and Quality and Dr. Katrin Frimannsdóttir Director of Strategy and Quality.

## 2 General comments

The implementation of UI26 is on-going, with its ten overarching work programmes and numerous respective reform projects. As evident from our responses to the more specific comments below, individual projects within UI26 tackle many of the issues addressed in IWR21. Many of the projects are well underway while others are scheduled for later in the period.

A web-based tool, Iðunn, has been developed for managing QEF2 action plans and is in the final stages of implementation. The tool is accessible via Office365 and is dynamic, allowing for the addition of new actions as necessary, irrespective of the QEF cycle, thus encouraging work in the spirit of continuous enhancement. Each year, a status report will be generated by the tool and accumulated status reports will contribute to the SLR process every 7 years. Faculties are in the process of reviewing their action plans, some of which are too extensive to be manageable.

In 2022 a survey was conducted among participants in SLRs within QEF2 where they were asked about their opinion on, for example, the organization of the SLRs, internal guidelines, assistance of the quality team, workload of staff, cooperation within the SLR committees, external experts' input, the overall value of SLRs, participation of students etc. Open comments were welcomed from all participants and are included in the report.

### 3 Comments on items in chapter 7.3 Areas for improvement

- 1. *There is a need for general high-level strategic dialogue on the University's current state and future direction, including an analysis of the challenges imposed by the present University structure that results in significant compartmentalisation, impedes productivity and limits capacity for wide-reaching enhancements in research, teaching, and societal impact.***

Responsible: Rector

Status: Discussions along these lines are on-going within the leadership group at the UI. No decisions have been made, however in the Spring of 2023 an evaluation of the UI structure and leadership will be completed additionally a general retreat is being planned with participation of Deans of all schools and all department chairs. The focus of that retreat is lessons learned during QEF2 and preparation for QEF3.

- 2. *The high level of autonomy afforded to the faculties leads to inconsistencies in treatment of staff and students. Common academic standards and policies must be created and enforced across the University to address issues such as inconsistent treatment of doctoral students, inconsistent utilisation of Learning Outcomes and the lack of transparency regarding changes made in response to course evaluations.***

Responsible: Vice-rector of Academic Affairs/Division of Academic Affairs

Status: Within the strategic action plan (HÍ26) is a competitive fund that as of January 2023 sponsored one project that will provide training for supervisors of doctoral students and another project that aims at improving structure and support for master students.

By redefining the job description of Director of Strategy and Quality the oversight transparency regarding changes made in response to course evaluations will be in the hands of that office and the expectations are that SOP regarding use of evaluation results will be standardized.

- 3. *It is highly unlikely that the goals of "agility" and "quality" in the new UI26 strategy will be realised without comprehensively revising the University rules (no. 569/2009), investing more authority centrally in the University, for example at the school-level, and engaging in the accompanying cultural change.***

Responsible: Rector

Status: This issue has been discussed at the leadership level however nothing has been decided on how to address this.

- 4. *As numerous items identified as recommendations in the IWR in the previous cycle are largely unchanged despite development of multiple plans and action items, it is incumbent on the University to create an implementation plan with strict timelines to address a limited number of its most pressing issues.***

Responsible: Various/Head of Quality Administration

Status: UI is aware of some issues from IWR1 which have not been implemented. There are different reasons for that but they are being monitored and will be dealt with appropriately.

- 5. The Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs and Development and the Director of Quality Management need to be further empowered to effect change across the University in conjunction with the relevant committees. This would aid the University in learning from and implementing change in response to SLRs and other reviews, for example.***

Responsible: Rector

Status: In 2022 a full-time Director of Strategy and Quality was appointed, among whose duties will be increasing the coherence between quality assurance and university strategy. She will work closely with a new University Strategy and Quality Council which has been established comprised of the rector, vice-rectors, deans of schools and directors of central administration divisions.

- 6. The University should streamline its portfolio of over 350 programmes in order to reduce teaching demands, and in turn the high dependence on sessional staff.***

Responsible: Division of Academic Affairs

Status: The criteria for establishing new programmes have been applied more rigorously for the last three years than before, programmes have been cancelled or merged with others. Standard procedure for continuous evaluation of programmes is being drafted. The quality procedure: "Study programmes – design and approval" is under review.

- 7. Significant issues exist with regards to the management of doctoral programmes. The University needs to establish comprehensive policies that provide basic rights and standards and are uniformly applied and enforced across the institution. Particular attention must be paid to provisions addressing supervision irregularities and the processes for providing feedback or filing a complaint given the inherent power imbalance***

Responsible: Division of Academic Affairs/Graduate School

Status: UI26 strategy on improving graduate student experience: Promote a balance in the admission of new doctoral students and graduations with improved student support and a stronger connection between schools and the Graduate School. Nurture good communication between doctoral students and supervisors by better clarifying the roles of different parties, having clear processes for complaints and promoting and increasing participation in workshops for instructors – **ongoing**

- 8. The University should take immediate steps to clarify the profile, roles and functions of master's programmes across the University. Included in this effort should be an analysis of the role of the Graduate School and the development of general policies and procedures which would frame the operation of every programme.***

Responsible: Division of Academic Affairs/Graduate School

Status: UI26 Work Programme 8.1: Review the status of Master's studies, make improvements based on the findings and strengthen selected programmes. Increase collaboration between the Graduate School and faculties in the development of Master's studies - **ongoing**

Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation Cooperation Fund. University of Iceland is a part of a collaboration including all Icelandic Universities to offer students master's courses at several schools simultaneously with an emphasis on collaboration with the business world and studies regardless of location, domestically or internationally. Transnational collaboration on master's level studies will increase the availability of courses taught in English and thus make it easier for foreign students to take a master's program in Iceland. The benefit of the project is the increased quality and more diverse contribution of master's programs taught at Icelandic universities. - **in preparation**

**9. *The Evaluation System for Public Higher Education Institutions in Iceland does not provide a holistic review of academic staff. The University has made strides to rectify this to the extent it can and is encouraged to maintain that focus and at the same time disseminate information on system changes as they are made.***

Responsible: Division of Science and Innovation/Pro-Rector for Science

Status: The Evaluation System has recently been reviewed. This entails:

- clarifying the evaluation criteria for better transparency
- increasing the emphasis on teaching in the evaluation
- increasing the emphasis on societal outreach in the evaluation. A special fund has been initiated with the goal of increasing societal outreach.

**10. *Robust and systematic quality processes and procedures must be developed to ensure the consistent integration of the significant number of sessional staff and to ensure the quality and continuous enhancement of the important teaching delivered by sessional staff.***

Responsible: Division of Human Resources/Division of Academic Affairs/Deans of Schools/Heads of Faculties

Status: Work in progress to formalize and support the framework around sessional teachers. Center for Teaching and Learning offers courses for sessional teachers (optional). Sessional teachers are now provided with all the same equipment and teaching conditions as other teachers.

**11. *The Equality Plan needs to address the inability of part-time students to enrol in courses if not provided through eLearning, and the difficulties faced by international students for whom Icelandic is a second language, for example in accessing mental health services.***

Responsible: Equality Committee/Division of Academic Affairs/International Division

Status: Regarding the inability of part-time students to enrol in on-campus courses, this is not considered a subject for the Equality Plan and the magnitude of the problem has to be assessed before actions are taken.

International students are entitled to the same services as Icelandic students. The aim of action 1.2.2 in the current Equality Plan is to improve the information flow to international students.

A new Equality Plan 2024-2026 is in preparation and is expected to be finished by the end of 2023.

**12. The Equality Committee should have representation from more non-majority groups in order to increase its credibility. This appears particularly pressing for members of the University community who do not have Icelandic as a first language.**

Responsible: Equality Committee/University Council

Status: Has not been dealt with.