

Institutional Review Year-on Report for Hólar University



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Introduction

This report is a summary of the recent actions taken by Hólar University as a response to Institute Wide Review of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education, conducted by the Review Team lead by Crichton Walker Lang and supported by Ágot Aakra, Teitur Erlingsson, Susan Hunter and Kerstin Norén.

The preparation of the Reflective Analysis of Hólar University (HU), the planning and hosting of the visit of the Evaluation committee in November 2019, the Institute Wide Review report on Hólar University, published by mid-March 2020, and the Conference arranged by HU and the Quality Board on the findings of the IWR in August 2020 were all milestones in an educating, fruitful and enjoyable journey. Simultaneously, Hólar University conducted an extensive internal review of support for staff and well-being at the university, executed by a consultant company, specialized in human resources. In the months to follow, HU prepared a progressive and ambitious strategic plan for the period 2021-2025, which was agreed upon by the University Board by February 2021.

The strategic plan was prepared through a bottom-up approach, utilizing dialogue in staff meetings and smaller working groups of faculty and staff engaged in fruitful discussions. It emphasizes five fields of focus: Outreach, Learning and teaching, Research and innovation, Team spirit and human resources, and Governance and organization. The strategic plan formalizes all major points of improvements identified in the Reflective Analysis, the IWR report and the summary compiled by the human resource representative upon interviewing all staff members at HU in spring 2020.

Implementations of general improvements

In August 2021, the organization of Hólar University underwent a structural reformation. This was a first step towards meeting the accumulated recommendations for improvement and to facilitate operational structure to secure the implementation and follow up of the strategic plan. In summary, the revised organizational chart has the overriding goal to increase clarity of operation, cohesion and integration of knowledge and information and to enhance formality and quality of day-to-day operations. The main improvement of HU operations is the emphasis on cohesion, quality and knowledge transfer reflected in two new support divisions: The Division of Research, Innovation and Academic Affairs, and the Division of Human Resources, Quality, Finance and Operations (Figure 1).

The Division of Human Resources, Quality, Finances and Operation (DHRQFO) has a clear focus on quality of operations, i.e. human resources, procedural regulations and implementation of policies and quality matters, as well as finances. The head of DHRQFO is a member of the Management Team of the university. The division has a new position of Human Resource Manager as a part of the DHRQFO team, to facilitate support for faculty and staff. The Head of DHRQFO serves as Rector in her/his absence.

The Division of Research, Innovation and Academic Affairs (DRIAA) is led by the head of the DRIAA, a new full-time position in the organizational chart of HU. The head of DRIAA is a member of the Management Team of the university and also serves as the head of the Academic Affairs Committee, the Graduate Studies Committee and the Research Committee, consequently facilitating the cohesion of knowledge transfer between committees on student affairs. The head of DRIAA, is supported by an Academic Affairs officer and a Research officer. The Head of DRIAA serves as Rector in the absence of Rector and Head of DHRQFO.

Many of the areas for improvement pointed out in the Institute Wide Review of Hólar University are addressed by the revision of the organization chart and the accompanying revision of the procedural regulations of the university. A key improvement is the inclusion of the Head of the Division of Research, Innovation and Academic Affairs, the Head of the Division of Human Resources, Quality, Finances and Operations and the Human Resource Manager into the Management Team, in addition to the Heads of Departments and Rector.

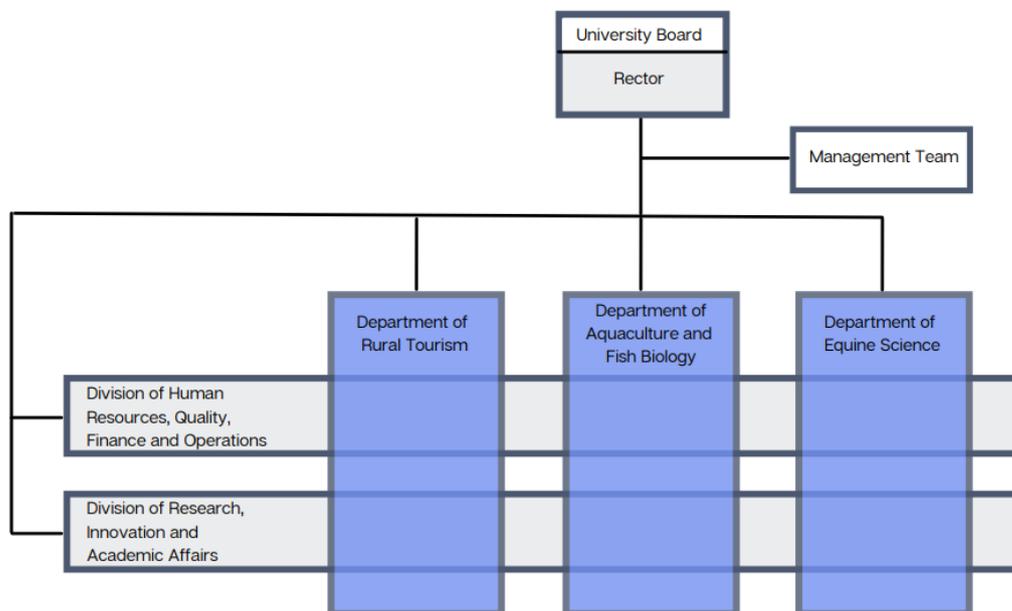


Figure 1. The organizational chart of Hólar University, as of September 1st 2021.

In addition to revising of the organizational chart, job descriptions for positions in the support divisions were revised to facilitate clearer lines of communication and efficiency in service to students and staff.

The above mentioned revisions facilitate the development of all areas of further improvement within Hólar University as identified in the IWR report. In the list below, the division responsible for the area of improvement is identified and the emphasis of improvements and progress described.

Areas for improvement summarized in IWR

*The level of **formality in the day-to-day running** of departments and the University, as well as in the institutional oversight of compliance with regulations and follow-up of action plans.*

The descriptions of essential educational background, experience and qualities characterizing the head of DRIAA and DHRQFO took into account the above-mentioned need for analytical thinking, execution and follow up. The Heads of both divisions have initiated preparation of multiple new written work procedures for departments and divisions to follow, all of which are evidence based. Furthermore, the head of DRIAA, has started a revision and update of current procedures in the management of Academic Affairs. The head of DHRQFO has launched a new cost control system designed to ensure consistency, improve cost efficiency, and provide increased support to head of departments as well as project managers.

The procedures on formality in regards to day to day running of the University is currently being improved through clarification of rules of operation and assignment of responsibilities. Operation of HU according to the new organization chart is in it's infancy and the full revision of all operations and implementation there off are expected to take a year.

***Improved formal connection and definition** of the Department of Academic Affairs and the Department of Graduate Studies within important structures and decision-making processes at the institutional level.*

The merging of the Divisions of Research, Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies into one under the operation of the Head of Division of Research, Innovation and Academic Affairs and the revised procedural regulations facilitate the inclusion of the vision for academic matters in management of Hólar University and decision making. The Head of DRIAA is further supported by the Academic Affairs officer in matters regarding the Office of Academic Affairs.

The Head of DRIAA is a member of the Management Team and thus the inclusion of academic affairs of undergraduate and graduate studies and research and innovation are highlighted at the weekly meetings. Coordination is further ensured through monthly meetings of the three committees of Academic Affairs, Graduate Studies and Research.

Status: Concluded

***Enhancing institutional infrastructure** to relieve the heavy administrative and student support load on departments and individual staff.*

The establishment of the Division of Research, Innovation and Academic Affairs, in conjunction with the Academic Affairs Officer and the Research Officer, have the role and responsibility to advance and structure academic support for students and faculty in all matters regarding teaching and research. The Division of Human Resources, Quality, Finances and Operation further alleviates the administrative load on departments and faculty, through

support in Human resource, Procedural regulations and Quality matters. The Head of DHRQFO will be supported by the new position of Human Resource Manager.

The DRIAA is reviewing and revising codes of conduct on student support as to clarify pathways of operation and consequently minimize number of inquiries. Simultaneously, the student support at the help desk at Hólar University is under revision. The revisions are ongoing:

Timely feedback by teachers through revision of working procedures – June 2022, through revision of procedural rules and implementation of technical solutions, where applicable.

Class schedules and consistency- June 2022, through revision of procedural rules and implementation of technical solutions, where applicable.

The possible benefits of including the Head of the Division of Graduate Studies on the research committee to ensure that research is appropriately considered in the development of graduate curricula.

The merging of Division of Research with Division of Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies into one under the operation of the Head of Division of Research, Innovation and Academic Affairs, and the revised procedural regulations, facilitate the inclusion of the vision for enhanced quality of graduate studies into the work of the Research committee. The Head of DRIAA serves as the head of the Research committee, supported by the Research Officer and departmental representatives. Integration across teaching of undergraduates, graduates and research is facilitated through the revision of the organization chart and the revised procedural regulations.

Head of DRIAA is the chairman of the Graduate Studies Committee and the Research Committee, coordinating their work with other responsibilities within the Office of Academic Affairs. The support of a Research Officer (50%) within the DRIAA team further ensures dialogue, consideration and development

Status: Concluded

The development and utilization of a full range of key performance indicators related to student satisfaction and student learning experience more broadly.

The head of DRIAA, with support of the Academic Affairs Officer, Research Officer and the Head of DHRQFO will lead the development and inclusion of key performance indicators on student satisfaction into the data-based improvements and revisions of the operations of HU.

Currently, provision of psychological counseling for students, along with regular student counseling is provided to students by HU, as a part of governmental effort in student support. Furthermore, a review of KPI's and evaluation tools is in preparation and will take place in autumn 2022.

*Taking deliberate steps to capture the full **student voice across cohorts and departments**, as well as finding formal and informal ways to bring the student body more closely together.*

Enhancing student engagement is an ongoing and engaging task at the departmental level and for relevant committees, such as the Equality Committee. However, integration of students across disciplines and departments has been difficult and the pandemic and shortage of in-person interactions has further restrained attempts to enhance integration.

Inclusion of students across disciplines in preparation and participation in events organized by HU, such as the open day at HU and the University Day (Háskóladagurinn), are shown to be the best media for inclusion and interaction of students across HU disciplines and cohorts. Furthermore, student engagement in event Equality Days of the Universities and the Equality Committee has improved.

The engagement of students is an ongoing project where the University encourages and supports student initiated events/activities which bring the student body across departments more closely together. This will be further advanced, past the pandemic.

*The lack of consistent understanding and practice across those interviewed on how to **refer students issues safely and in a confidential but documented manner**, e.g., student support or misconduct.*

The procedural regulations on student issues has been revised and pathways clarified, in regards to misconduct. Furthermore, student support provided by the study counselor and provision of psychological service to students, is shared with students and repeated reminders on provision of support are communicated with students.

All referrals to and interactions with the study counselor are conducted with confidentiality. Further revision will be continued in autumn 2022.

The study regulations for undergraduate and graduate studies and study regulations on appeals were revised in 2021 and shared with students during student orientation days in the fall of 2021. The support for academic staff on prevention of misconduct is ongoing. Emphasis is placed on education in use of Turnitin, both by staff and students. Additionally, clear procedural rules for teachers on confidential communication to students on misconduct are in preparation. Training in Turnitin is scheduled for spring 2022, fall 2022 and annually onward.

Status: Ongoing

*A need to **better market the brand of Hólar University** and to further raise its profile nationally, with an emphasis on the impact of its current research and teaching.*

An integrated part of the revision of the organizational chart was to increase the emphasis on outreach and the research profile of HU. The allocation of funds for a Research Officer was a strategic step to support faculty and staff in outreach, marketing of research and research

collaboration. Furthermore, the emphasis on innovation as an integral part of the DRIAA further enhances the visibility and outreach of HU to the industry, public authorities and society. Additionally, marketing and outreach is now emphasized more in the job descriptions of current staff.

A revision of the home page of HU is planned for autumn 2022, and minor revisions are ongoing, particularly in English. Additionally, the DHRQFO has increased engagement and coordinated visibility of HU on social media. Furthermore, a successful Open Day at HU took place on December 10th, 2021 and marked the start of increased outreach within HU's home base.

Status: Ongoing

*The levels of **interdisciplinarity** in Hólar's research and teaching.*

The DRIAA has the role of leading increased interdisciplinarity at HU, which is facilitated through revised job descriptions, improved support by additional positions and clearer focus on preparation of procedural regulations to facilitate collaboration and map the way forward. Focus is on integration across disciplines and innovative approaches to further collaborative efforts by HU faculty; within HU, with other academic institutions and with the industry.

Status: In preparation

The newly appointed Research Officer is conducting a review of research projects at HU, with the aim to increase knowledge exchange and collaboration in funding issues. Encouraging collaborative research between faculties will be an integral part of a strategy exercise, planned for summer 2022. The mapping and analysis of Academic Affairs within HU, including procedural rules, scheduling, and teaching methods, is underway within the Office of Academic Affairs and is expected to be concluded by end of year 2022. This will highlight opportunities for collaborative efforts in the field of Academic Affairs. The participation of HU in the Teaching Academia for Public Universities provides further opportunities for innovation in this field.

*A need to increase the **use of strategic data** in the day-to-day running of the University, for example through regularly updated dashboard.*

In conjunction with the revision of the organization chart and job descriptions, work procedures, prioritization and allocation of finances are all under revision. The work is led by the Heads of DRIAA and DHRQFO in collaboration with Rector. The revisions will enhance strategic operations of the University, in support of academia, students and staff.

The work is still at initial stages, but preliminary analysis of strategic financial data, HR matters, sustainability requirements etc has started. Once the preliminary analysis is completed, HU will identify KPI's to present regularly on a dashboard or similar system.

Strategic data will then be continuously collected, analysed and updated to provide status on each KPI.

Status: In preparation.

Strengthening the current capacity for blended learning development and ICT support to benefit both students and staff, and to facilitate future curriculum development.

The HU participates in the Teacher academia of the Public Universities (Kennisluakademía), and a HU faculty member was accepted into the first cohort of the academia. The Teachers academia fosters advanced teaching at HU, by active participation of the current HU representative in the academia and mitigation to faculty at HU. Furthermore, the Office of Academic Affairs currently leads review of courses and programs to standardize work protocols across departments. This is being conducted under the supervision of the Head of DRIAA.

The use of Canvas by all faculty and session teachers for the last year and a half in blended learning provides synchronized teaching experiences for all students which results in a stronger and more coherent work environment and experience.

Revision of ICT support has been planned and will be completed before Easter break 2022. The revision will be conducted by a third party and covers subjects such as infrastructure, equipment, reliability, and service to staff and students.

Creating more practical support for research, exemplified by the staff sabbatical process.

The presence of the position of Head of Division of Research, Innovation and Academic Affairs and the recruitment of the Research Officer, currently a part time position (50%), both facilitate practical support for research.

The Research Officer started her work for HU on January 1st 2022 and the emphasis is on strategic planning of support for faculty, e.g. mapping funding opportunities and facilitating grant writing. Furthermore, an establishment of an internal research fund is now being finalized by the research committee. A Research day will be held at HU in May 2022.

Status: Ongoing