

Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

Annual Report 2019

January 2020

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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
IWR	Institution-Wide Review
LÍS	National Union of Icelandic Students
MESC	Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
QEF	Quality Enhancement Framework
QEF1	First round of the Quality Enhancement Framework
QEF2	Second round of the Quality Enhancement Framework
RA	Reflective Analysis
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 for 2019 presents the main activities that the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education (QB) undertook during the year, building on the developments that were initiated in 2017 and deployed since then.

The second round of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF2) introduced a number of changes, which necessitated the production of new documents to guide the work of the universities and the experts who were recruited for the Institution-Wide Reviews. Several Guidance Notes were issued to clarify how some aspects of IWR should be implemented in QEF2. The Board instituted a preliminary visit of the team chairs to the universities undergoing an IWR. The Board ensured that all those new processes are compliant with the 2015 edition of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). The first IWR, at Reykjavík University, was concluded in 2019; the second one, at Hólar University, will be concluded in early 2020.

In parallel, the Quality Board has continued preparation toward the full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as agreed with the universities and MESC.

The Board adopted a strategy and an action plan, with three priorities: ensure that QEF secures the standards and improves the quality of higher education; promote the independence, competence and professionalism of QB; and enhance QB's national and international reputation.

During the year, the Quality Board met on four occasions in order to advance this agenda. The outcomes of its discussions are available on its web page and summarised in this report.

In the context of a future ENQA membership, the Quality Board welcomed a consultation initiated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC) in 2018 on a new regulation aimed at strengthening the Quality Board's official position as the body responsible for quality assurance in Iceland. The new regulation was published in early 2019.

The Research Evaluation Advisory Committee (REAC) met on four occasions in 2019 to discuss how research is evaluated in other jurisdictions and how to assist in the rollout of a CRIS system for Iceland. REAC created a post of Vice-Chair to assist with its operation.

The membership of the Quality Board was refreshed in 2019 while ensuring that the Board continues to uphold a quality assurance approach that is enhancement-led and based on a dialogue with all its partners. The Board also decided to create the post of Vice-Chair to solidify its functioning.

The Quality Board thanks the Quality Council, the National Union of Icelandic Students, the Rectors' conference and MESC for their contribution to our work. We look forward to the continued dialogue with the sector and to the further deployment of QEF2 in 2020 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. At present, all developments are on track except for the launch of a Quality Board newsletter in autumn 2019; this was not implemented because of workloads.

QEF2

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

2019 SLR

The Subject-Level Reviews (SLR) are the responsibility of the universities. The *Quality Enhancement 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”. 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 Subject-Level Review Reports were completed in 2019:

- Bifröst University:
 - Law and Social Sciences
- University of Akureyri:
 - Education
- University of Iceland:
 - Business Administration
 - Civil and Environmental Engineering
 - Industrial and Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science
 - Environmental and Natural Resources
 - Electrical and Computer Engineering
 - History & Philosophy
 - Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies
 - Language and culture
 - Social Work
 - Sociology, Anthropology and Folklore Studies
 - Theology and Religious Studies

- Icelandic University of the Arts:
 - Arts Education
 - Performing Arts
 - Music

2019 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 year of reflection in 2023.

Reykjavík University volunteered to pilot the first IWR in QEF2 and its IWR was published in September (For a list of the expert team, please see p. 13).

Hólar University received the preliminary visit of the IWR team chair in September and the visit of the full team in November. Its IWR should be ready for publication in early 2020. (For a list of the expert team, please see p. 13).

The Board recruited a team for the University of Iceland's IWR, which will take place in May 2020.

Because of the seven-year duration of the QEF2 cycle, the universities are asked to produce a Mid-term Progress report three or four years after the production of their IWR. The Agricultural University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri delivered their Mid-term Progress reports in 2019.

2019 Annual meetings

Agricultural University of Iceland	Ellen Hazelkorn
University of Akureyri	Norman Sharp and Erna Sigurðardóttir
Bifröst University	Ellen Hazelkorn
Hólar University	Barbara Brittingham
University of Iceland	Philip Winn and Oisín Hassan
Icelandic University of the Arts	Philip Winn and Erna Sigurðardóttir
Reykjavík University	Norman Sharp, Riitta Pyykkö and Oisín Hassan

Annual meetings are organised in all seven universities, generally in the spring, and are attended by one or two Quality Board members. Agendas are agreed in advance with the universities. They include their current QEF-related activities such as the outcomes of the previous IWR, the Mid-term Progress Report and any SLRs undertaken during the year or planned for the following year. The Annual meetings provide also 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.

The Board decided in March 2019 that the chair of the Quality Board will not participate in any annual meetings in order to ensure the chair's participation in the final deliberation of all IWRs, thus ensuring consistency of treatment across all seven universities.

Quality Council

The Quality Council is an essential partner of the Quality Board and plays a prominent role in the success of the Quality Enhancement Framework. 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 pp. 13-14 for a list of QC members in 2019). A major focus of the Quality Council has been on the identification and definition of quality indicators for universities.

The Chair of the Quality Council has attended all meetings of the Board as an observer (withdrawing when individual universities were discussed). The Quality Council met 10 times in 2019.

Specially commissioned work

MESC commissioned the Quality Board to undertake a review of Police Studies at the University of Akureyri. A team has been selected for this purpose and the visit will take place in 2020. Although specially commissioned work can have a different scope than an IWR, the Board is committed to ensuring that the developmental approach of QEF2 is respected.

The Research Evaluation Advisory Committee (REAC)

The Research Evaluation Advisory Committee is an advisory committee of the Quality Board. It has seven members who represent interests of the Icelandic higher education sector (see p. 12). The Quality Board decided to create the post of Vice-Chair in order to consolidate the functioning of REAC and assist the chair as needed. The post will rotate every four meetings between the two representatives of the Quality Council on REAC.

In 2018, REAC agreed that it would be useful to develop a Guidance Note for the evaluation of research management in the SLR. A draft was produced and distributed to the Quality Council and MESC for consultation. It was adopted in January 2019.

REAC followed closely the developments on the planned purchase of an Icelandic CRIS system. The Committee also discussed the role that it can play including the possibility of assisting in the roll-out and implementation of such a system in Iceland.

Communicating with the sector and partners in Iceland and abroad

One of the Quality Board's most important responsibilities is to maintain a dialogue with the sector and its partners and stakeholders in order to ensure appropriate engagement with Iceland. This has resulted in a number of activities.

Reaching out to Icelandic partners

The Quality 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 Board met with:

- The president of the rectors' conference in March.
- The Quality Council in November. In addition, the Quality Council president sits on the Board meetings and the Board manager on the Council meetings.
- National Union of Icelandic Students (LÍS) in November.
- The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture: Meeting with Una Strand Viðarsdóttir in March and November and a conference call in December.
- The Board chair and the Board manager undertook a tour of the rural universities in September, to meet the leadership teams and visit the campuses outside Reykjavík.

The Annual Conference

The 2019 Annual conference was co-organised with the Nordic Council of Ministers and MESC and hosted by Reykjavík University. Around 60 participants from Iceland and all the other Nordic countries attended the event, which was also streamed online. The conference was opened by Minister of Education Lilja D. Alfreðsdóttir and closed by Una Strand Viðarsdóttir from MESC. It focused on "*Higher Education – Its Relevance to Students and Society*", with two sub-themes: assuring quality in work placements and higher education engaging with society. The conference featured student panels that were particularly appreciated by the audience.

Reaching out to Icelandic society

Because the Quality Board wishes to extend its reach beyond the higher education sector, it invited Ragnheiður Guðmundsdóttir, Member, Technology Committee of the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council and Katrín Oddsdóttir, Chairperson, Icelandic Constitutional Society to the Annual Conference.

In the same spirit of reaching out beyond higher education, the Board organises a meeting with stakeholders, whose profiles vary from year to year in order to reach as many stakeholders as possible. The 2019 meeting included representatives of Iceland Aluminum Cluster and the Travel Industry Association. The discussion focused on their links to universities and their perceptions of the labour market readiness of Icelandic students in the specific context of Iceland's economy.

Reaching out internationally

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. To this end, the Quality Board became an affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in 2018. ENQA is the body that represents quality assurance organisations from the European Higher Education Area (www.enqa.eu). It promotes European cooperation in the field of quality assurance by disseminating information and expertise. The ENQA affiliation provides the Board Manager with invaluable professional development opportunities by networking with peer agencies and attending workshops and conferences.

Furthermore, the membership represents also an opportunity to showcase the Icelandic quality assurance approach and inform European peers that Icelandic higher education is quality assured in a trustworthy manner. Thus, at the 2019 ENQA General Assembly, the Board Manager presented a poster illustrating the links between the main recommendations from the first round of IWRs and Part 1 of *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) (<https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>).

In parallel, the Quality Board is preparing for the ENQA full membership, which is much more demanding than the affiliate status. The Quality Board must undergo a review to be accepted as a full ENQA member. This review verifies the Quality Board's compliance with Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG. The major value of the ENQA full membership is to certify that Icelandic universities are quality assured by a body that is recognised in Europe and internationally. This is of benefit to Icelandic universities and their students as well as to Icelandic society at large. A small "Task and Finish" sub-group of the Board was appointed to draft a self-evaluation report for the purpose of the ENQA review.

The Quality Board continued to maintain links with Greenland, which started in 2016 with visits to Greenland by the Quality Board Chair and the Board Manager. In 2019, representatives from the Quality Board and the Quality Council participated in a seminar on quality assurance at the University of Greenland. Continuous contact has been maintained as Greenland examines various options for developing external quality assurance processes.

The Board Manager represented the Board in the steering team for the Annual Conference of the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA). The theme of the 2019 conference was *Evidence in External Quality Assurance*. The Board Chair and the Board Manager attended the conference and the associated *Leadership Summit*, which provided further opportunities to discuss shared issues about quality assurance. The Quality Board will host NOQA in September 2020 and preparations are underway to develop the themes of the 2020 edition.

Supporting the QEF2 process

Building on the work that was started in previous years, QB developed a number of documents to solidify both QEF2 and the functioning of the Quality Board as a quality assurance body. The documents are fully in line with the ESG and Icelandic legislation.

Related to IWR	Related to administrative processes
<p>1. Six guidance notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ to clarify expectations and consistency of practice related to paragraphs 25, 49, 73-74, and 88 of the <i>Handbook</i>;▪ how to evaluate student support services;▪ how to evaluate research in SLRs. <p>2. Requirements for members of IWR teams (selecting and appointing members)</p>	<p>3. Board Constitution (board bylaws)</p> <p>4. Internal Quality Assurance Guidebook</p>

Concluding remarks: Common issues across the sector

The multiple opportunities for dialogue with the sector have led to the identification of a number of cross-cutting issues. These include:

- How to strengthen cooperation across Iceland through the national network of universities? Might interinstitutional cooperation bolster such aspects as the provision of distance learning, the management of research, interdisciplinarity, and the second and third cycles?
- How to showcase the universities' role in society?
- What are the implications for learning of (i) the profile of Icelandic students, notably with respect to gender, age and time spent working and (ii) the use of sessional staff?
- Are Masters' degrees clearly positioned in relation to the first- and third-cycle degrees?
- What are the possibilities and implications for increasing and diversifying income, especially for the public universities?
- What type of common data should be used?
- How to promote good practice in benchmarking and bench-learning?
- How to manage risks?
- How to promote staff professional development?
- Are governing boards optimised for their functions?

Other important issues have surfaced, which have great bearing on quality provision. They include placing more explicit focus on the governance and management of universities, the involvement with society, the environment for research (including ethics), doctoral education, online and collaborative provision, gender equality, and academic staff development.

These issues will be discussed with all stakeholders in the years ahead to ensure that the QEF3 Handbook 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
Barbara Brittingham, President of New England Commission on Higher Education
Robert Henthorn, European Students' Union (ESU), representative of the National Union of Icelandic Students (until January 2019)
Ellen Hazelkorn, Joint Managing Partner, BH Associates, Joint Editor, Policy Review in Higher Education
Oisín Hassan, Former Board member of the European Student Union, representative of the National Union of Icelandic Students (from September 2019)
Riitta Pyykkö, Vice Rector, University of Turku, (from November 2019)
Frank Quinault, former Director of Learning & Teaching Quality, University of St Andrews (until September 2019)
Philip Winn, Research Professor, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
Erna Sigurðardóttir, student observer, representative of the National Union of Icelandic Students (until November 2019)

Annex 2: Research Evaluation Advisory Committee Membership

Philip Winn, Chair, Research Professor, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
Skúli Skúlason, Vice-Chair, Director of Division of Research, Hólar University (From September 2019)
Tove Bull, Professor Emerita and former Rector, Tromsø University
Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Professor of Law, Reykjavik University, and Chair of the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council
Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of Research and Information Technology, Reykjavik University
Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector of Science, University of Iceland
Hulda Stefánsdóttir, Research Coordinator, The Icelandic University of the Arts
Sæmundur Rögnvaldsson, doctoral student in medicine, University of Iceland

Annex 3: Quality Council

The Quality Council (QC) is chaired by Áslaug Helgadóttir, University of Iceland. The composition of QC in 2019 was as follows:

Agricultural University of Iceland	Brita Berglund, Director of Quality (until May) Þórðra Jónsdóttir, Director of Quality and Human Resources (from June)
Bifröst University	Stefán Kalmansson, Director of Quality Management
Hólar University	Skúli Skúlason, Professor and Director of Research
Icelandic University of the Arts	Hulda Stefánsdóttir, Research Coordinator, (until September)

Reykjavík University	Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir, Director of Quality Enhancement, Teaching and Research, (from November)
University of Akureyri	Einar Hreinsson, Director of Teaching Affairs (until May)
University of Iceland	Ása Björk Stefánsdóttir, Director of Teaching Affairs (since September)
National Union of Icelandic Students	Sigrún Magnúsdóttir, Quality Manager, (until May)
	Vaka Óttarsdóttir, Director of Quality and Human Resources (since September)
	Áslaug Helgadóttir, Director of Quality Management
	Aldís Mjöll Geirdóttir, Quality Officer (until June)
	Elsa María Guðlaugs Drífudóttir, Chairperson (until June)
	Sigrún Jónsdóttir, Chairperson (from September)
	Eygló María Björnsdóttir, Quality Officer (from September)

Annex 4: Secretariat

Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson, Board Manager

Annex 5: IWR Teams

Reykjavík University

Alan Davidson, Chair, International higher education quality assurance consultant, former Dean, Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Robert Gordon University

Ísak Eyfjörð Arnarson, student, former Vice-Chair of the Student Union of Bifröst University

Kimberly Bogle Jubinville, Chief Academic Officer and Senior Vice President of Academic Quality, Accreditation and Support, Southern New Hampshire University, former Associate Dean in the School of Business, Southern New Hampshire University

Maria Knutson Wedel, Vice-Chancellor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, former Vice President of Education, Chalmers University of Technology

Jean-Marc Rapp. President, the Swiss Accreditation Council, Former Rector, University of Lausanne and former President of the Board, European University Association

Hólar University

Crichton Lang, Chair, Vice Chancellor, University of the Highlands and Islands

Ågot Aakra, Dean, Faculty of Chemistry, Biotechnology and Food Sciences, Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Teitur Erlingsson, student, former Vice-Chairperson, National Association of Icelandic Students
Susan Hunter, President Emerita, University of Maine

Kerstin Norén, Professor emerita, University of Gothenburg and former Rector of University College West

Annex 6: Calendar of meetings and events

January	Quality Board is represented at a seminar organised by LÍS to introduce Greenlandic and Faroese student associations to Quality Assurance, Reykjavík
March	Quality Board meeting, Reykjavík REAC meeting, Reykjavík Quality Board and Council are represented at a seminar at the University of Greenland, Greenland Meeting of the Board with Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Reykjavík Meeting of the Board Chair with Chair of National Rectors' Conference, Reykjavík
May	Quality Board meeting, Reykjavík REAC meeting, Reykjavík Annual meetings of Board members with Icelandic universities Meeting of the Board with working life stakeholders, Reykjavík
August	Peer site visit by representatives of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), Reykjavík Annual conference, Reykjavík
September	Quality Board meeting, Reykjavík REAC meeting, Reykjavík Publication of Reykjavík University Institution-Wide Review Report Quality Board is represented at NOQA meeting, Stockholm, Sweden Annual meetings of Board members with Icelandic universities
October	Quality Board is represented at a conference on the Bologna process, Thorshavn, Faroe Islands Quality Board is represented at the ENQA General Assembly, Yerevan, Armenia SLR Presentation by Board Manager, University of Akureyri, Akureyri
November	Quality Board meeting, Reykjavík Quality Board meeting with representative of the Greenlandic Ministry of Education REAC meeting, Reykjavík Quality Board meets with Quality Council, Reykjavík Quality Board meets with LÍS, Reykjavík Annual meetings of Board members with Icelandic universities Meeting of the Board with Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Reykjavík