

Complaints and Appeals Policy

The following information is intended to provide an overview of the Quality Board's Complaints and Appeals processes. The aim is to explain the difference between

- complaints about the services, actions or behaviour of any individual or group acting in a formal capacity on behalf of the *Quality Board*, and
- complaints or information relating to *Icelandic Universities* that individuals may want to relay to the Quality Board.

Remit of the Quality Board for Higher Education

The Quality Board was created at the request of the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 2010. The Board's purpose is to serve as the quality assurance body for higher education, recognised by the Icelandic Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Innovation. As such, the Quality Board provides, through the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#), assurance that all the universities in Iceland ensure the effectiveness of the management of the quality of the student experience and its enhancement; the security of the standards of awards; and the effectiveness of the management of research. The Quality Enhancement Framework is evaluated periodically and developed to keep it in line with Icelandic, European and international developments and policies.

Board Complaints and Appeals Processes

Section 5 in the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education (2nd ed.) is devoted to complaints and appeals. The Board defines complaints as "any dissatisfaction with the services, actions or behaviour of any individual or group acting in a formal capacity on behalf of the Quality Board". An appeal is specifically defined in the Handbook as "a challenge to a specific judgement in relation to IWR".

Complaints. The Handbook lays out the processes for raising complaints, starting from the relatively informal, direct approach close to the source and time of the occurrence giving rise to the complaint, escalating through to the formal processes involving the Board. Where local resolution of a complaint is not possible, the complainant has ten days within which to raise the matter in writing with the Board Manager who must acknowledge receipt within five days. Normally the Manager will deal personally with the issue and respond in writing within a maximum of four weeks. The Board Manager may consult with a neutral Board member (but not the Chair) in reaching a conclusion. If the resolution offered by the Board Manager is not considered acceptable, within ten days the complainant should state this in writing to the Board Chair who will review all the available evidence. The Chair may involve a neutral Board member in this process who has had no previous involvement in the case. The Chair has ten days to respond in writing to the complainant indicating the Chair's judgement on the case. This decision is final; no further appeal is possible within the Board processes. If the complaint is about the Manager or involves the Manager in any way, an alternative route is provided through a neutral Board member.

Appeals. The Handbook clearly indicates that an appeal can only be made against a "limited confidence" or "no confidence" judgement. It is also clearly stated that "the only grounds for an appeal relate to procedure: Irregularity of such significance that the legitimacy of decisions is called into question". Any appeal should be made only after the institution has received the final draft Report,

that is the version that has been signed off by the Board. All communications related to an appeal should be through the Board Manager. If the Board Manager is implicated, the appeal would be through an identified neutral Board member. Formal written notice of the intention to make an appeal should be received by the Board within 14 days of the institution's receipt of the final draft Report. If the institution wishes to proceed with its appeal, the formal case should be submitted in writing, normally to the Board Manager, within a further two weeks, that is a total of 28 days from receipt of the final draft Report. Normally the process of resolving an appeal will be completed within a further four working weeks. Initially, the Manager will request a written response to the appeal from the Review Team Chair (in consultation with the Team members). The Chair's response will be shared for information only with the institution. The Board will then appoint an independent adjudicator drawn from the IWR reviewers experienced in Icelandic IWR but with no connection either to the institution or to any of the original Team members. The adjudicator, supported by the Board Manager if requested and appropriate, will consider the facts carefully and form a view on the appeal. If the independent adjudicator concludes that there are no substantive grounds for the appeal the institution will be informed of this fact, the original judgement will stand, and the Board will proceed to publish the Report complete with the judgements. If, however, the Independent Adjudicator concludes that there are reasonable grounds for the appeal, a Stage 2 Appeal panel will be set up comprising three independent international experts who have experience of the Icelandic QEF. The Stage 2 Appeal Panel will meet (in person or electronically) to review the appeal and the report of the appeal's consideration at Stage 1. The Stage 2 Appeal Panel must reach a conclusion by the end of this meeting. It may either decide to "uphold the original IWR judgement(s) or remand back to the Board". The ruling of the Stage 2 Appeal Panel is final within the QEF processes. If the original judgements are upheld, the Board will then proceed to publish the Report including its judgements. If the Stage 2 Panel has upheld the appeal, it will also recommend to the Board consequential action. The action can be to: set aside the Report and undertake a fresh IWR in circumstances where the reason for upholding the appeal is so serious as to render the whole process questionable; or, uphold the Report with amendments and/or altered judgements which will then be published in this revised form.

Complaints and information on Icelandic Universities

Outside of the operation of Institution-Wide-Reviews, the Board's remit does not include acting upon individual complaints about *Icelandic Universities*. Further information about the Board's remit may be found in the [Board Constitution](#) and [Quality Enhancement Framework](#).

The Quality Board conducts Institution-Wide-Reviews (IWR) every seven years at each of the Icelandic universities. The IWR process is designed to support institutions in reflecting on the relative successes of their management of the enhancement of quality, safeguarding of standards of awards and management of research and so contribute to the formulation of future strategies.

During IWRs, each visit programme will include an Open Meeting for anyone from the institution's community, staff or student, to meet individually or in groups with the Review Team. The goal of the Open Meeting is for those who have not had a chance to meet with the Team to have their voice heard in the review, and for those who have already met with the Team to add anything they were not able to communicate in previous meetings. The purpose of the Open Meeting is therefore to provide an opportunity for *any issues to be raised with the Team which are felt to be relevant and important for the Review*, and which have been aired elsewhere in the visit programme. The Open Meeting is a part

of the formal, documented IWR process. However, it is not intended as a forum for staff or students to air their individual grievances with their respective Universities.

Review Teams cannot accept any evidence, written or verbal, outside of materials submitted by the institution and information gathered or during formal meetings. If the Quality Board Secretariat or any IWR Team member receives unsolicited information about the university, whether positive or negative in nature, the person offering the information will be referred to the above Open Meetings that the Team hosts with staff and students.

Student Complaints

The Board refers students to published complaints processes at their respective universities. This applies to any type of student complaint or grievance. In such cases when a student has exhausted all published complaints and grievance processes at their university they can contact “[Áfrýjunarnefnd í kærumálum háskólanema](#)” (the Appeals Committee for University Student Grievances), whose role is defined in the [Higher Education Act no. 63/2006](#) and [rules no. 550/2020](#).