

Guidance Note: *Handbook* paragraph 26

Reviewing central support services

Approved by the Quality Board on 7 March 2019

Preamble

Notes of Guidance are issued by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education following consultation with the higher education institutions, LÍS (the National Union of Students in Iceland) and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC). They are offered for guidance to amplify statements contained in the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education* (the *Handbook*). They are designed to clarify expectations and promote transparency as well as equity and consistency of practice across the sector. Please note, however, that the *Handbook* in all circumstances remains the definitive statement on the QEF. Any enquiries related to this Note of Guidance should be referred to the Manager of the Quality Board (secretariat@qef.is).

This Note relates to paragraph 26 of the *Handbook*.

Guidance

Paragraph 26 of the *Handbook* discusses the scope of the SLR and notes the following in relation to support services:

SLRs should include the effectiveness of student-support services that directly impact on the quality of the student learning experience, including, for example, library, laboratories, formal career guidance (both within the academic unit and as part of institution-wide services), counselling services, and information technology services. It is for the institution to decide whether it is more effective to review such services additionally as separate entities, or whether they should be reviewed only in relation to their effectiveness in supporting students within each SLR.

Central support services include academic support (such as registrar, academic advising, centre for teaching and learning, research and innovation support services, academic staff development, international office) and services that are more administrative in nature (such as IT, financial services and human resources) but are meant, nevertheless, to support the university's academic activities. This distinction affects to a certain extent the kind of questions to pursue in a review of central services. The following ten questions **could** serve as a guide. Questions 1-9 apply to both types of services while Question 10 relates to academic support services only:

1. Does the university's strategy include a statement about the support services and their staff, and how they are meant to support the overall strategy? To what extent are all staff involved in developing and supporting the mission of the university?

2. To what extent and how does each service support the university's strategy and activities?
3. In what ways is management supportive of the mission of the various administrative/support functions on campus (e.g., Is there a professional development plan/strategy for staff in support services? Is there verbal, financial or other forms of support?)
4. Are administrative staff included in university monitoring and evaluation processes?
5. How does each central service interact with its faculty counterparts (where they exist) to ensure a coherent and complementary approach to service delivery? Is the balance between centralised and decentralised services working well or should it be adjusted and how?
6. How do central services interact with their main constituencies: for instance, for academic affairs: how are students involved in decision-making, evaluation of the service? Are students and front-line academic staff sufficiently supported by the resources available to them?
7. How does each service know that it is achieving its goals? Does it have an internal quality assurance process? Is there action planning around reaching specific goals in the university's strategy?
8. Would each service be able to provide examples of improvement introduced through its internal QA process and evidence of success?
9. What, if any, have been major changes in the number, type and rank of administrative staff since the last IWR?
10. For the academic services: if there is a double reporting line – to the head of administration and the vice-rector in charge of that particular area – how well is this working out in practice in achieving the objectives of the unit and of the university?

These questions are suggested as means of supporting an enhancement-led review and should help in demonstrating a coherent and comprehensive enhancement agenda for these units.

Further information

Any further information on this Note of Guidance is available from the Board Manager (secretariat@qef.is).