

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK
INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDEBOOK

MAY 2020

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Introduction: Why, What and How

1. Why an Internal Quality Guidebook?

The purposes of the *Internal Quality Guidebook* are:

- To contribute to the professionalism of the Board and the Secretariat.
- To provide assurance to QB's partners and stakeholders that the processes in place ensure an equitable treatment of each Icelandic university, in a transparent and accountable manner.
- To document that the processes of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education (QB) are in line with the Icelandic enhancement-led approach for quality assurance and with best international good practice, including the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) (<https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>).

2. What is included in the *Internal Quality Guidebook*?

The *Internal Quality Guidebook* presents four sets of processes:¹

- **Management Processes:** Management processes refer to the internal organisation of the Quality Board, the scope of its decisions and its decision-making processes. These different procedures are described in fact sheets that are coded MP. Included in the section are also "Notes of Guidance", which clarify some key aspects of IWR following the publication of the *QEF2 Handbook*.
- **Operational Processes:** Operational processes refer to all phases of an IWR process from the perspective of the secretariat and are coded OP.
- **Quality Management:** Quality management refers to the way that the QB monitors its activities and their impact, through surveys following the Institutional-Wide reviews and regular meetings with its partners and stakeholders. These different procedures are coded QM.
- **Administrative Processes:** Administrative processes refer to the ways that the QB secretariat manages processes such as travel archives, and accounting process. These procedures are coded AP.

3. How is the *Internal Quality Guidebook* updated?

At the end of every academic year, the Board Secretariat reviews the Guidebook to ensure that it integrates lessons learned during the year, whether they stem from the results of the questionnaires following each Institutional-Wide Review; formal and informal feedback received from the universities, the Quality Council (QC), the National Union for Icelandic Students (LÍS) and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC); and the major decisions the Board took during the year. Any significant change to this Guidebook is validated by the Quality Board.

¹ The Internal Quality Assurance Guidebook took its inspiration from the AEQES Guidebook.

I. MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

MP 01 – Board’s Decision-making processes

Adopted: 22 January 2019

Updated: 18 November 2019

The Board is independent in its operation and works within the legal and policy framework of Iceland and also within its own remit set by the Government. The Board is governed by a constitution, available on its website. While a brief outline of the QEF follows below, full information on the QEF is provided in the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education* (2nd Edition, 2017) (thereafter *Handbook*).²

Board’s responsibilities include:

- **The IWRs:** It is the responsibility of the Board to select and appoint the IWR Chair and team members, all drawn from outside Iceland (with the exception of the student member). The Board is responsible for the training of review team members. On behalf of the Board, the Secretariat oversees the efficient administration of each IWR and, normally, acts as secretary to the IWR Team. The Board reviews the IWR reports and is responsible for finalising them prior to publication.
- **Confidence judgments:** The Board validates the judgments provided in the IWR and ensure that they are well-supported by evidence. In the event of a confirmed ‘limited confidence’ judgement, it is the Board’s responsibility to agree a Follow-up Action Plan with the university and to monitor the implementation of that Action Plan. As described in the *Handbook* (p. 23), this would be done in consultation with the Ministry. In the event of a confirmed judgement of ‘no confidence’, the Board would agree with the Ministry the required follow-up action.
- **Appeals and complaints:** In cases where a university disagrees with a judgment of limited or no confidence and wishes to appeal that judgment, the Board is responsible for implementing the Appeals mechanism described in the *Handbook* (p. 25). It is also possible for a university to file a complaint in case it is dissatisfied with any aspect of the review or with any aspect of the QEF operation.
- **Annual Meetings:** Each Board member (with the exception of the Board Chair) is allocated to a university (sometimes two) for the purpose of these meetings, which take place every year, normally on dates adjacent to Board meetings. They are intended as a relatively informal exchange of information regarding developments in the management and enhancement of quality in the university, including outcomes and follow-up to recent SLRs. The Board member will also provide updates on Board activities and related matters. As appropriate, the agenda

² For the full text of the *Handbook*, and additional information on the QEF, see www.qef.is

will also include discussion of the year-on follow-up report. A note of each Annual Meeting is kept on file (Annex 2 in the *Handbook* provides a full description of the Annual Meetings).

- **Follow up to the Institution-wide Reviews:** Each university is required to produce and publish a ‘year-on’ report one year following the publication of the IWR Report. The Board is responsible for ensuring that this is done and that the Follow-up Report is published. A Board member will discuss the Follow-up Report with the university (see Annual Meetings in Annex 2, *Handbook*).
- **Mid-term Progress Report and the Annual Meetings:** Some three years following the completion of an IWR, each university will undertake a Mid-Term Review independently, resulting in the submission of a Mid-term Progress Report, which is largely a stocktaking exercise. On this occasion the Board member responsible for the Annual Meeting at that university will be accompanied by a member of the IWR Team (normally the Team Chair³) who undertook the most recent review of that institution. A formal note is prepared of this meeting and published.
- **Ad hoc Special Board-led Reviews:** Occasionally the Board may be asked to undertake a special review of a particular aspect of higher education provision in Iceland. Such a request (e.g., to undertake a review of distance/open learning) might come, for example, from the Ministry or from the sector. It is for the Board to decide whether to agree to such requests, which, if undertaken, are resourced directly by the commissioner. The statement of “Principles of Commissioned Reviews” serve as guide (see MP 02). Once the terms of reference are agreed, the Board acts independently in carrying out and reporting on such a review. Board members would be expected to contribute as appropriate to a special review. It is anticipated that these reviews will continue to be infrequent.
- **Liaising with stakeholders:** Board members are expected to participate in meetings and events with a range of stakeholders including:
 - the Ministry and its officials;
 - the Rectors, individually and collectively through the Rectors’ Conference;
 - the Quality Council;
 - student associations and Lís, the national student body;
 - employers and civil society stakeholders.
- **Evaluating the QEF:** The Board is responsible for undertaking regular monitoring and evaluation of all its activities, sharing publicly the outcomes of such evaluations at least annually. In addition, it undertakes a formal evaluation of the entire QEF at the end of each cycle, involving significant externality, and abides by the review cycle required to maintain ENQA membership. All Board members are expected to contribute to the design, implementation and analysis of such evaluations.

³ For the institutions whose immediate past IWR took place in QEF1, the Team Chair (who was then a Board member) will not be invited to that meeting.

MP 02 – Principles of commissioned work

Adopted: 22 January 2019

This note lays down the principles for accepting commissioned work. It is guided by the Quality Board's commitment to serve all stakeholders of Icelandic Higher Education and its commitment to enhancement-led evaluation.

- The Quality Board will secure the agreement of the commissioning body to the *Terms of Reference* before accepting the contract. The *Terms of Reference* will, at a minimum, specify the following aspects:
 - Background of the commissioned work
 - Specific objectives of the evaluation, the key evaluation questions, and the general methodological approach
 - The required profile of the review team members
 - Deliverables
 - Time frame
 - Any follow up
 - A budget
- The Quality Board will agree to *Terms of Reference* that are congruent with the Quality Board's Principles and Values. The philosophy of the Quality Board, which emphasises an improvement-orientated and fitness-for-purpose approach, must be preserved.
- Evaluation guidelines will be anchored in both an international and Icelandic perspective.
- The Quality Board will select the experts for the review team independently. Team members will be selected to fit the particular characteristics of the exercise. Team members will receive the relevant background to the project. The Quality Board will appoint a lead chair to report to the Quality Board, through the Secretariat, on the progress of the project.
- The final review report, including its conclusions, are the responsibility of the Quality Board. It will be sent to the commissioning organisation for action.

MP 03 – Issuing Notes of Guidance

Adopted: 11 November 2018

Purpose

The purpose of issuing Notes of Guidance is to provide additional guidance to the sector on the implementation of the QEF as defined in the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education*, 2nd Edition (thereafter, the *Handbook*).

Background

The *Handbook* is the definitive statement on the operation of the QEF over the lifetime of the *Handbook*. The *Handbook* should always be the first port of call for anyone seeking information of the QEF. In all circumstances, the *Handbook* remains the definitive statement on the QEF. This is deemed to be an important contribution to the Board's transparency and ensuring consistency and fairness in the application of the QEF. Similarly, any questioning or challenging of QEF processes within the QEF should be set against the processes as defined in the *Handbook*. However, it is generally neither possible nor desirable to include every operational detail within a quality agency's handbook. For this reason, it is common for additional operational guidance to be provided to support transparency and consistency of practice, for example in an accompanying operational manual or some similar publication.

In the first round of the QEF it was not necessary to provide such additional guidance since there were very regular formal and informal meetings and discussions between the Board (members and, especially, the Board Manager) and the institutions. In addition, in relation to IWR, Board members were directly involved with the institutions through their roles as chair and vice-chair of IWR Teams and operational details were discussed extensively at all Board meetings. While objectivity and independence in action and judgement of the Board was strictly observed, these mechanisms provided the institutions with ample guidance on all operational processes and expectations and ensured consistency of practice between institutions.

In the second round of operation of the QEF the Board is consciously operating at arm's length from the institutions to further reinforce its independence. One of the costs of this decision is that the very frequent interactions on operational details are no longer so accessible to the institutions. It is already apparent in the second cycle that some operational details are capable of different interpretations. This is always likely to be the case in the context of the QEF since the Board membership and institutions embrace a variety of languages and cultures. While there is inevitably some desirable variation in detail of practice reflecting the widely diverging nature of the Icelandic institutions, in general key operational processes should be constant throughout the sector. For this reason, it is proposed to issue periodic 'Notes of Guidance' to clarify operational details where it becomes apparent that there is, or is likely to be, any danger of significant variation in interpretation. Such Notes of Guidance will add considerably to consistency of practice, equity of treatment throughout the sector, and transparency in the operation of the Board.

Notes of Guidance

It is anticipated that these Notes of Guidance will be relatively few in number (perhaps fewer than 10) and are likely to be most helpful early in the cycle. Each Note will be relatively brief.

The Notes would follow a common format with a common preamble highlighting that in every case the *Handbook* remains the definitive document. Each Note will specify the section and paragraphs of the *Handbook* on which additional guidance is being offered.

The production of a Note of Guidance may be initiated by the Board itself or requested by the key partners of the Board (i.e., the Quality Council, LÍS, and MESC). In preparing a Note, the Board will consult with the Quality Council, LÍS and MESC. In all cases, however, the Board itself will have the absolute authority to decide whether or not a Note should be produced and on the content of any Note.

All Notes of Guidance, once formally agreed by the Board, will be published on the Board website. A link to the Note will be placed at the appropriate section of the web copy of the *Handbook*. In addition, copies will be sent to all members of the Quality Council, LÍS, the members of the Rectors Conference and MESC.

These notes may be useful in informing QEF III.

MP 04 – Guidance Note: *Handbook* paragraph 25: SLRs and alternative reviews

Adopted: 18 November 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*, 2nd edition, (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 25 of the *Handbook*.

Guidance

Paragraph 25 states: “Where there is a concurrent professional/statutory body accrediting process, then the institution, at its own discretion, can use that as an integral part of the SLR. Where appropriate and practical, they may use common externals for both reviews.”

An accreditation report could be combined with a SLR provided that the resulting report meets all the requirements of SLRs as described in paragraphs 26-53 of the *Handbook*, including:

- ... “information on the composition of the Review Team, the review process, the findings, Action Plan(s), the review recommendations and the intended institutional and departmental/faculty follow-up processes.” (paragraph 52)
- A summary of the main conclusions of the review and actions to be taken, which should be published on the university’s website within three months of completion as specified in paragraph 53.

In addition, the institution would be required to provide supplementary information to cover areas that are not part of the report of the professional/statutory body but are specified in the *Handbook*. For example, if management of research is not part of the accreditation report, the institution would include additional materials on management of research in its submission of the SLR.

Further information

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

MP 05 – Guidance Note: *Handbook* paragraph 26: Reviewing central support services

Adopted: 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*, 2nd edition, (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).

MP 06 – Guidance Note: *Handbook* paragraph 49: Research in Subject-Level Reviews (SLRs)

Adopted: 4 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*, 2nd edition (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 49 of the *Handbook*.

OVERVIEW TABLE OF THE 5 DIMENSIONS OF THE CORE MODEL

From the Handbook: Reports on research in the core model

Units (Departments, Schools etc.) should include in their subject level review (SLR) reports or commentaries on the quality of their management of research using the four dimensions outlined below. Where the overall SLR unit has been further subdivided for the evaluation of research, these reports should be included as separate elements or combined as the institution feels appropriate and useful. The format of the section of the report dealing with management of research should be determined by the institution, but in every case should conclude with an Action Plan. It may be, for example, that a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) framework could prove to be a useful starting point for the analysis section of the report, followed by the concluding Action Plan.

From the Handbook: Conclusions on management of research in the core model

No judgements are made in relation to either teaching & learning or research in SLR Reports under QEF2. The conclusions in both areas normally take the form of Action Plans. In relation to the quality of the management of research, the institution-wide review (IWR) will conclude in terms of commentaries on the four dimensions of research, but under QEF2 no judgement will be passed on the institutional management of research.

Explanatory note regarding the Table below

The table below has three columns. The first contains what is presented in the QEF2 Handbook. The second (central) column contains explanatory notes to guide anyone submitting a Subject Level Review report. The third gives further details of the types of material that might be included and an indication of length. It is important to note that the review of research management in QEF2 does not form part of the overall quality judgement. This is exploratory and should not deflect from the main analysis of teaching learning and assessment.

| This is the text contained in the QEF2 Handbook | Explanatory notes | Typical text for inclusion might include ... |
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| a. Research strategy. | | |
| <p>Does the unit have a research strategy? How does it relate to the institutional strategy?</p> | <p>If there are written strategies publicly available, reference can be made – usually a web link – with a brief outline of contents. If there are no written strategies it might still be possible to make explicit any implicit approaches to, and assumptions about, research in the unit. If a unit does not have an explicitly formulated research strategy, it may wish to discuss in some detail how the institutional strategy is followed through with at the level of that particular unit. This is an opportunity to emphasise particular missions and unique selling points and the alignment of unit and institutional strategy. This would also be the section to note if interdisciplinary research is emphasised in the strategy, and whether</p> | <p><i>Brief outline of the University and its research strategy – around 100 words plus links to relevant web pages</i></p> <p><i>Brief outline of how the unit relates its own research and research strategy to the University strategy – around 100 words plus relevant links to website pages.</i></p> |

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| <p>How realistic is the strategy?</p> | <p>research has been mainstreamed into an overarching strategy.</p> <p>Does the unit or institution benchmark itself against others? On what basis are benchmarks identified and how are they used?</p> <p>How realistic the strategy is will depend on a number of factors. For example, is it affordable, is it properly resourced, do its demands exceed staff capacity, is there are track record of achievement that supports the strategy? Does the strategy “maximize capability beyond capacity”?</p> | <p><i>Brief outline of how the unit benchmarks itself – around 100 words.</i></p> <p><i>Brief description of how the strategy is realistic, noting for example, appropriate policies, levers and monitoring; physical research infrastructure; qualified staff; postgraduate community; budget for research, including internal resources and competitively won grants. Rather than include detailed text here, this could reference sections below where some of this will be described in more detail.</i></p> |
| <p>Does the strategy link research to teaching?</p> | <p>At undergraduate level, this is likely to be made explicit in teaching strategies rather than those for research. Descriptions of the links between teaching and research might include short statements about practical research training and students’ research projects; and the use of original research reports in teaching. There may be opportunities to describe how teaching in the unit draws on research activity in the subject including, when possible, the research carried out in the unit. It is helpful if development of <i>research mindedness</i> year-by-year can be highlighted. If available, extracurricular research</p> | <p><i>Research in undergraduate degrees</i></p> <p><i>This could be a bullet point list of about 200 words. Describe research training and development through the programmes; make reference to any programme and module handbooks, with weblinks. Are there any research internships outside the credit bearing programme?</i></p> |

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| | <p>opportunities such as summer research internships for undergraduate students should be discussed.</p> <p>At postgraduate level research is integral to the degree. It is important to describe how third cycle research degrees are structured and their quality assured. Opportunities for postgraduate students to work outside academia could be included, as well as education in research ethics. The quality of the research student research training experience should be commented on. Are there collaborations across institutions to support this as well as multidisciplinary research?</p> | <p>Research in Masters degrees <i>This could be a bullet point list of about 200 words. Describe research training and development through the programmes; are there different types of Masters degree with variable amounts of research? How are these approved and regulated? Make reference to any programme and module handbooks, with weblinks</i></p> <p>Research in Doctoral degrees <i>This could be a bullet point list of about 200 words. Describe research training and development through the programmes; how are they funded? How are students examined? Make reference to any programme and module handbooks, with weblinks.</i></p> |
| <p>What policies serve as a lever to support the strategy?</p> | <p>This question relates to supporting policies, usually at a University level, that help individuals or groups do research properly, giving guidance and setting regulations and parameters for how research must be done. Many policies will relate to nationally or internationally agreed frameworks.</p> | <p><i>This does not need extensive text. It could list the types of polices, with weblinks to them. For example, there might be policies for Research Integrity, Researcher Development, Ethical Review, Open Access Publication, Occupational Health & Safety, Staff Wellbeing, Equality & Diversity. There are also supra-national policies such as the EU HR Excellence in Research policy.</i></p> |

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| <p>How is the strategy supported at unit and institutional levels?</p> | <p>There is likely to be overlap between unit and institution reporting here, describing for example facilities provided centrally that benefit research in a unit as well as practices within units that do so.</p> | <p><i>This could include brief statements (50-100 words) about such things as Budget, Library, Physical Infrastructure, Career Progression, Graduate Students, Workload Models and any Local Practices that exist. Weblinks should be used to direct readers to relevant information.</i></p> |
| <p>Is strategy effectively monitored?</p> | <p>There are various ways in which research strategy can be monitored, within a unit and centrally within the University. This will include prospective work (<i>how is the strategy being developed, how will it align with the University or national priorities?</i>) and retrospective work (<i>are staff comfortable with the strategy, are formal or informal targets being met, is the strategy delivering?</i>).</p> | <p><i>This could include a brief note about overarching monitoring strategies (50-100 words) followed by bullet point lists of how these in practice relate to staff individually; the unit as a whole (are there for example any professional accreditations that review strategy?); and monitoring of the whole institution. Mention should be made of any Key Performance Indicators or other metrics that are used.</i></p> |
| <p>Is the research environment designed to support the strategy?</p> | <p>Environment and strategy are necessarily synergistic. Effective research requires appropriate buildings, kit and people. What is required in this section is a commentary on how these are managed, supported and developed. It should explain how the unit is making best use of what it has and any immediate concrete plans to improve it.</p> <p>Inevitably any unit can claim that more resources would help improve its research. This section is not to be treated as an opportunity to plead for more resources. The focus should be on organisational and structural factors.</p> | <p><i>The research environment is created by people operating within a physical infrastructure. As such it would be appropriate to relate this explicitly to:</i></p> <p><i>(1) People: how are appointments made? What staff development is there? How are graduate students and postdoctoral fellows supported? How is external networking managed?</i></p> <p><i>(2) The physical environment – any further comments over and above what was described above in strategy support.</i></p> |

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| <p>Does the research strategy take account of issues of equality, including gender?</p> | <p>Are there policies or practices within the unit or centrally within the University that deal with equality and diversity?</p> | <p><i>Describe any legal frameworks and awards that are available and have been won, with weblinks as required.</i></p> |
| <p>b. Management of research outputs.</p> | | |
| <p>This refers to the unit’s mechanisms for monitoring and managing the quality of its research outputs. The quality of outputs should be defined in relation to the application of good practice methodologies and the critical robust judgements, directly or indirectly, of respected peers or users of outputs who are in a position to make informed professional judgements of quality. This dimension will be refined as experience develops, including through the input of the REAC, and will also draw on the outputs of research (at least in the vast majority, if not all, cases) recorded on the CRIS system. The question to be addressed is how do academic units evaluate and manage the quality of their research output? In some cases, perhaps the majority, the first part of this question is already at least partly addressed through the current framework described in the paper ‘Evaluation system for public higher education systems’ and applied in many institutions. In addition, there is an interesting established evaluation framework for the evaluation of research outputs within Reykjavík University which aims to separate the evaluation of</p> | <p>This is about quality control not comparative judgments of excellence.</p> <p>Research outputs are defined by subject and will necessarily differ across them, but be recognizable to experts in the field, locally and internationally. The process may or may not involve bibliometrics.</p> <p>How are research outputs managed once they have been produced? This might include outputs of multidisciplinary research and multi-institutional research, with both national and international collaborators.</p> <p>Is there an institutional repository for archiving and open access?</p> <p>Judgment of research quality could involve consultation (inside or outside the unit) with independent researchers.</p> | <p><i>This might include brief descriptions of:</i></p> <p><i>Describe briefly what the research outputs for the unit are – publications, artefacts, what?</i></p> <p><i>Briefly describe (100 words) of any internal review and support strategies for developing research outputs.</i></p> <p><i>Are the research outputs and any supporting material (data from experiments, analysis of creative process, archive materials) open and accessible? A short sentence or two describing this would be sufficient.</i></p> <p><i>If quality of student research is monitored formally, how is that done? How are the rights and responsibilities of the student and the</i></p> |

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| <p>research quality from publication counting. There is also a useful framework applied in the Icelandic Academy of the Arts. It is appreciated that none of these frameworks currently apply universally in Iceland, and these examples are meant to be illustrative of the resources available to institutions when evaluating the management of their research outputs. It is important to note that this approach is adopted in order that research achievements in a wide variety of areas (including production and performance) may be celebrated. This obviously includes, but is not limited to research outputs traditionally measured through international bibliometric or similar techniques. There are many different kinds of legitimate research outputs to be celebrated, the ‘quality’ of which can be benchmarked in a variety of ways – e.g. informing and taking account of the views of SLR externals, external stakeholders, professionals in the field, the business or professional community, policy makers etc. The second part of this question relates to how institutions manage the quality of their outputs by strategic allocation of resources and through staff development.</p> | <p>It is important to be able to demonstrate how strategic resource allocation and staff development supports the production of good outputs.</p> | <p><i>unit/institution managed in terms of student participation in research?</i></p> <p><i>Brief descriptions (around 200 words overall) of, for example: what development programmes support the production of good research outputs; where do resources for research come from and how are they allocated; whether or not graduate students are expected to produce research outputs and how their development is supported.</i></p> |
| <p>c. External support.</p> | | |
| <p>External support should include both additional research funding (i.e. in addition to that</p> | <p>This section should include grant activity over the last five years.</p> | <p><i>This could include a list of actual grants awarded over a defined period (the last six years for</i></p> |

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| <p>received as part of the block grant), and also support in kind. It will include both cash and non-cash forms of support. External funding will include the competitive funds secured through the Icelandic Government’s various bidding processes. It will also include EU funding and all other funding from international sources as well as commercial funding both national and international. Support in kind will include all non-cash external support received including equipment, personnel, buildings etc. (Handbook p. 16)</p> | <p>Units could detail what external support they receive, as grants or as in-kind support. It would be appropriate not just to list these but also to comment on what the unit does proactively to secure external support – not just what grants exist but how are they won. This might include methods to help improve the quality of submissions to grant awarding bodies and contacts made with external agencies (government or private) to develop targeted research support.</p> | <p><i>example). If there are multiple grants it would be helpful to append a spreadsheet that included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Date of award</i> <i>Duration of award</i> <i>End date</i> <i>Award value</i> <i>Awarding agency</i> <i>Principal Investigator name and affiliation</i> <i>Co-investigator names and affiliations (if different to the PI)</i> <i>Award title</i> <i>Any other salient information including staff/students employed as part of the award</i> <p><i>University and Unit support mechanisms for grant seeking could be outlined in brief bullet point lists. Are there goals at the unit level for applying for and/or securing grants?</i></p> |
| <p>d. The impact of the unit</p> | | |
| <p>... refers to the reach and significance of the research output of the unit. Impact is to be interpreted broadly to include impact on: the subject area; on policy and practice related to the subject area; on significant developments in culture; and, importantly, on the local, national or international economy or society more generally. In all the above areas, local, national and international dimensions should be considered. Impact also includes the external</p> | <p>Impact has become an integral part of research evaluation internationally. It is important that Iceland adopts an approach to impact that is compatible with its understanding elsewhere but which also suits itself. As such, units should be very inclusive in what they write. Impact can be considered as part of Knowledge Exchange which can include:</p> | <p><i>This section should not be much longer than approximately 500 words. Bullet points lists, references to material elsewhere and simple text are appropriate.</i></p> |

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| <p>reach of the unit through for example researcher national and international mobility, external consultancies in academic or professional contexts, external advising roles etc. (Handbook, p. 16)</p> | <p>Public engagement, including for example talks open to the public and communications through the media.</p> <p>Pathways to Impact can also be included here: what plans does the unit have to deliver impact from specific projects?</p> <p>Impact – the demonstrable contribution excellent research makes to society and the economy. The measurement of impact is not an exact science because it can involve so many things – policy, culture, manufacturing, health and so on. Case studies can be developed for analysis eg by subject experts and comparison with case studies from similar subjects. Reach and significance are important in comparing case studies: how many people were effected over what range?</p> <p>Consultancy – will include work that has impact (demonstrable change to society and the</p> | <p><i>Public Engagement might cover lectures, online materials, radio and TV, engagement in particular outreach programmes.</i></p> <p><i>Pathways to Impact describe how impact is planned, covering for example: who is effected and with what reach and significance; the means for disseminating research outputs to interested audiences; engagement outside the University with relevant bodies; how relevant bodies might adopt the research findings in their work; potential benefits to the relevant bodies and their end-users; and indicative dates.</i></p> <p><i>Impact that has been achieved could be described in similar terms, relating the impact to academic work that had been done – that is “this particular research output led to this demonstrable change“. Descriptions of impact can highlight reach (how far does it spread – locally, nationally, internationally? Lots of people or a handful of specialists) and significance (how important was it – a niche specialty of wide-ranging applicability)?</i></p> <p><i>Brief description of how unit staff have delivered demonstrable change but without a basis in particular research outputs – that is “our general</i></p> |
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| | <p>economy) but which has no specific underpinning research.</p> <p>General – units can if they choose to include material that might not fit into the above categories but which they believe has value to Icelandic society and beyond.</p> | <p><i>expertise led us to be asked to undertake work which produced this demonstrable change”.</i></p> |
| <p>e. Exceptional blue-skies research.</p> | | |
| <p>It is sometimes the case that particularly exciting and innovative forms of/areas of research open up which are difficult to encapsulate within existing paradigms for recognizing the significance of research. It is important that these are captured within research evaluations and these areas should simply be identified separately if they do not fit appropriately into the above framework. (Handbook, p. 16)</p> | <p>As well as offering the opportunity to include material that would otherwise be excluded, this section might include outputs of whatever nature that are thought to have been particularly important, broadly defined to include anything considered important within the subject under review.</p> | <p><i>This section should be kept relatively brief (250 words) and can include anything that the unit thinks should be highlighted, with a clear rationale for inclusion.</i></p> |

MP 07 – Guidance Note: *Handbook* paragraphs 73 & 74: Initial consideration of the Reflective Analysis

Adopted: 4 March 2019

Updated: 18 November 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 for Icelandic Students) 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*, 2nd edition (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 paragraphs 73 and 74 of the *Handbook* on the source of optional advice available to institutions on a draft Reflective Analysis as part of their Institution-wide Review.

Guidance

Paragraph 74 states: “the Reflective Analysis (...) is entirely the responsibility of the institution. However, if the institution wishes, the Board Manager may be consulted in the process of compiling the Reflective Analysis and will offer limited advice on an early draft if so requested. Such advice, however, would be limited to the general structure, approach and style of the document. The Board Manager is not in a position to offer any detailed comments on content.”

It is important to be aware of a few specific points in this context:

- a. The Reflective Analysis is the responsibility solely of the institution. The decision to seek advice or not is entirely at the discretion of the institution. Further, the reaction (if any) to any advice offered is entirely at the discretion of the institution. The visiting IWR Team, including the chair, will not be aware of any of these informal exchanges. The sole author of the final Reflective Analysis is the institution.
- b. The optional advice available is from the Manager of the Quality Board and will not address the matter of specific content. Rather, advice will be on matters related to overall structure, style and approach and if there are any missing elements. However, the institution is free to consult any other colleague or external expert who is not a current member of the Quality Board or of the team assigned to review it. The current exception to this rule is to allow the Secretariat to remind universities that, in view of the Law on Equality, gender issues must be properly addressed in the Reflective analysis.

- c. For the avoidance of doubt, advice will not be available from the chair of the IWR Review Team. In the first round of the QEF, advice was offered by the member of the Board who was going to chair the Review Team. However, in the second round (as indicated in the 2nd Edition of the *Handbook*), an explicit development has been to underpin the objectivity of the Review Team by removing the IWR Team Chair from any involvement in the preparation of the institution's IWR Reflective Analysis.
- d. The chair of the IWR Review Team will visit the institution in the months leading up to the visit of the IWR Review Team and after the institution's submission of the Reflective Analysis. The purpose of that visit is not to provide feedback on the content of the Reflective Analysis, as should be evident from the points made above. Rather, it is to discuss details of the Review Team visit, including the visit schedule. At this meeting, the Chair of the IWR Review Team may request further information to be added in clearly demarcated supplementary annexes to the Reflective Analysis. However, the main text of the Reflective Analysis would not be altered.

Further Information

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

MP 08 – Guidance Note: *Handbook* paragraphs 86-88: Producing the IWR review report

Adopted: 4 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*, 2nd edition (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 paragraphs 86-88 and specifically 88 of the *Handbook*.

Guidance

Paragraphs 86 through 88 of the *Handbook* outline the processes gone through by the IWR Review Team in producing the final IWR Report, its conclusions, judgements and the associated Headline Letter (see *Handbook* paragraph 86). It is clear in this section of the *Handbook* that these processes and outcomes are entirely under the control of the IWR Team and will reflect the Team's views and judgements on the basis of the totality of the evidence it has gained throughout the entire IWR process. This absolute independence of the Team is imperative for the integrity of the process.

The process described in paragraph 88 can be formulated as a series of steps:

1. The Board receives and discusses the team report.
2. If the Board finds that evidence is lacking, it will go back to the Team Chair for clarification.
3. The Board validates and finalises this report, having ensured that the judgments provided are supported by robust evidence. There will be no further changes to the report after this step.
4. The Board invites the Rector to join the meeting to offer an institutional perspective on the efficiency, value and key findings and recommendations.

Note: As set out in the *Handbook* (paragraph 111), only limited or no confidence judgments can be appealed and only on grounds of procedural irregularity.

Further information

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

II. OPERATIONAL PROCESSES

OP 01 – The composition of the Institution-Wide Review Teams

Adopted: 22 January 2019

Preamble

This Note relates to paragraphs 58-63 of the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education*, 2nd edition (the *Handbook*) and provides further clarification to guide the Board in selecting and appointing experts and in assembling expert teams.

Selection and appointment of IWR Team members

Institution-Wide Reviews (IWR) are carried out by teams of independent experts.

Normally the Review Teams will comprise a Chair, three international experts, an Icelandic student and the secretariat. The secretariat will be provided by the Board secretariat. No Review Team will have fewer than two experts in addition to the Chair.

The Quality Board will identify appropriate Review Team members. As part of this process, the National Union for Icelandic Students and the university under review will be consulted as follows:

- The National Union for Icelandic Students will normally nominate students from among their membership. At least two names for every student place will be presented to the Quality Board who will make the final decision based on the students' background and the balance of the Team composition.
- The university will identify overseas peer institutions from which they think it would be appropriate for the Board to seek potential reviewers. These may be institutions against which the Icelandic institution tends to benchmark itself. Alternatively, in the spirit of enhancement, they could include overseas institutions that the Icelandic institution would wish to learn from. While the Board will be guided by such suggestions, it is not obliged to accept them.

The IWR Chair and Team members will be appointed by the Quality Board. All members will be independent of the institution under review and, with the exception of the secretariat and the student member, will be from outside Iceland.

The selection is made based on the following requirements:

1. *Review Team members who are academics or professionals* (i.e., not the student member):
 - Will be appointed on the basis of appropriate senior experience in managing quality of teaching & learning and management of research in higher education-level institutions outside Iceland.

- Will have the appropriate skills and competences to perform their tasks, including evaluation experience: They “should be people whose judgement is likely to command the respect of the higher education community across a range of disciplines”.⁴

2. *The student Review Team members:*

- Will normally be currently registered on undergraduate or postgraduate courses in an Icelandic university and have completed at least four semesters of studies at the university level prior to appointment. Students remain eligible to participate in reviews up to the first anniversary of their final graduation.
- Will have had some internal quality assurance experience (e.g., at the institutional or the unit level).

3. *The Chairs of the Review Teams:*

- Will be drawn from a small cadre of senior international peers experienced in quality reviews internationally, ideally with prior participation in an IWR in QEF1 or QEF2.
- Will have senior management experience in higher education.
- Will have the linguistic skills to write a review report in English.
- Will normally have knowledge of, but no conflicts of interest with, the Icelandic higher education system.

Assembling an IWR Team

Each IWR Team will be assembled with a view to provide a rich mix of backgrounds and experience:

- All IWR Teams should have at least 40% of members representing each gender.
- The academic background of some Team members will match some of the disciplines/faculties in the university under review, but it not necessary that all should do so.
- A balanced distribution of national origins and of prior evaluation experience in Iceland will provide a range of perspectives.

No conflict of interest and norms of conduct

All prospective reviewers will be required to certify that they have no conflict of interest with the institution being reviewed.

⁴ ESF/European Science Foundation. (2011). *European Peer Review Guide Integrating Policies and Practices. System*. Strasburg. Retrieved from http://archives.esf.org/fileadmin/Public_documents/Publications/European_Peer_Review_Guide_01.pdf

The student members will not participate in a review of their own institution or any other that they have previously attended or at which a close family member or partner is attending or is employed or had graduated from or been recently employed.

The institution will be asked to comment on the proposed membership of their team in relation to any potential conflict of interests. If there is an objection, the Board will consider the merits of the case.

Following this stage, the team members will be confirmed and formally invited to serve.

All Team members are expected to be familiar with the “QEF2 Handbook” and the “Guidelines to the Team Chair and Team Members”, which spell out the norms of conduct during a review.

All Team members are required to familiarise themselves with the quality-enhancement approach through the on-line video and on-site sessions arranged by the Board. All members are required to attend a special session introducing them to QEF and to their roles.

The Chair and student member will each receive additional, personalised preparation to their role.

General Data Protection Regulation

The Quality Board (QB) maintains a database of information on experts who have agreed to serve in Iceland. It is in conformity with the QB privacy policy⁵. Experts are asked to confirm that they agree with the policy and processes set up to protect their privacy.

⁵ www.qef.is/about/privacy-policy/

OP 02 – Annual Meetings and Mid-term Review meetings

Adopted: 11 November 2018 and 5 March 2019

Updated: 18 November 2019

All institutions have an annual meeting with one or more representatives of the Board. This meeting is designed to facilitate the free exchange and updating of information between the Board and each institution and allows the Board to maintain a current appreciation of the developments and challenges within each institution. The outcomes of SLRs are shared at these meetings together with discussions of progress made in taking forward the outcomes of previous IWRs.

The Annual Meetings usually occur around the late Spring meeting of the Quality Board. Normally, the group in attendance from the institution will include: the Rector; the senior member of staff responsible for managing the quality system; staff responsible for chairing key institutional committees and units; and student representatives. The Secretariat supplies note takers for each annual meeting.

Usually, the same member will attend annual meetings with the same institution(s) during the cycle. To avoid any conflict of interests, that Board member will not take part in confirming the judgements following that institution's IWR.

The meetings normally last up to half a day – but can be longer by mutual agreement.

Mid-term review meetings

The Annual Meeting to consider the Mid-term Progress Report lasts one full day, and a member of the IWR Team (normally the Chair) will join that meeting. For the institutions whose immediate past IWR took place in QEF1, the Team Chair (who was then a Board member) will not be invited to that meeting.

Agenda

The agenda for the Annual Meeting is agreed in advance. It is normally structured in two parts – the first, a relatively informal mutual updating, and the second, focused on the activities related to QEF that were undertaken in the previous 12 months (e.g. any SLR, mid-term review, etc.). A sample agenda includes the following points:

1. An overview of recent developments in the institution and discussion of current issues
2. A discussion of developments in Board matters
3. An update from student representatives on student-related quality matters
4. A discussion of each of the SLRs completed since the previous Annual Meeting
5. Additional possible agenda items can be agreed upon in advance through discussions between the Board Secretariat and the institution's Quality Manager

Beyond this, the specifics will depend on the timing of the meeting with respect to other activities related to QEF:

- In the year (or two) in advance of an institution’s IWR, discussion on planning for the IWR would be appropriate (although this can be an item for discussion at any Annual Meeting at the discretion of the institution).
- The Annual Meeting that takes place approximately one year after the publication of the most recent IWR will incorporate the Year-On Report in the agenda.
- The Annual Meeting in year three or four following the publication of the most recent IWR will incorporate the Mid-term Progress Report following up developments foreshadowed in the IWR process. A member of the IWR Team (normally the Chair) will join the meeting.

Documentation and records

Documents from the universities: there is no requirement to produce any documentation or papers for the Annual Meetings; although it may be that the institution would wish to share existing papers or documents for information with the Board representatives. Universities submit a Mid-term Progress Report and a ‘Year-on Report’, as requested. The Secretariat will remind the university about the deadline for this report).

The Secretariat can provide *ad hoc* translations of these documents if they are supplied in Icelandic only.

Reports from the Board: Following the Annual Meeting, a descriptive file note will be made by the Board member of the topics discussed. This is purely for Board information and to assist in planning the next annual discussion. These file notes will not form part of any formal record and will not be available to IWR Review Team members. The file note will be shared with the institution.

A report of the Board member on the Mid-term Progress report is shared with the university. Institutions are given a month to correct factual errors. These reports should refrain from being judgmental. Mid-Term Progress reports will be standardised in format. They will have the following structure: 1) Introduction (standard text for all reports), 2) Main findings (follow-up to review, any observations on special topics, reflections on what progress the university would like make before its next institutional review), and 3) Conclusion.

Student participation in Annual Meetings

The Icelandic student observer on the Board is part of the Annual meetings, but not in his or her university. To avoid any conflicts of interest, the university will be asked at the outset if they have any issues with the student’s presence. Students will be reminded about the strict observation of confidentiality in annual meetings.

Avoiding conflicts of interest

Paragraph 124 of the *Handbook* states the following: “From the Board, there will be one identified member who will be attached to each institution for the second cycle, to be involved in the Annual Meetings. To avoid any conflict of interests, that Board member will not take part in confirming the judgements following that institution’s IWR.” The Board agreed on 5 March 2019 that, to ensure consistency in the treatment of all IWR reports, the Chair will not be involved in Annual Meetings.

Practical considerations

- The meetings at the Agricultural University and at Bifröst University include the same Board members and are held back to back, usually at their main campuses in Hvanneyri and Bifröst.
- Usually the same Board member(s) attend back-to-back meetings with two of the three universities in Reykjavík (University of Iceland, Reykjavík University, and Icelandic University of the Arts).
- The Board member(s) meeting with University of Akureyri takes the first morning flight from Reykjavík domestic airport to Akureyri, and then takes a taxi to the meeting.
- The Board member(s) meeting with Hólar University College also takes the first flight from Reykjavík domestic airport to Akureyri, but the Secretariat arranges for a driver to take the member(s) to Hólar.
- Members visiting University of Akureyri and Hólar take a return flight from Akureyri to Reykjavík the same day, in the late afternoon or early evening.

OP 03 – Planning a new QEF cycle and monitoring the SLRs

Adopted: 5 March 2019

Updated: 18 November 2019

At the start of the cycle, the universities are asked to propose their SLR schedule. This is examined by the Board who decides on the optimal year of each universities' IWR. This decision is based on a careful consideration of the schedule and results of the previous cycle as well as any situation that warrants special consideration (for example, the strategic cycle of a university). Once the IWR schedule is adopted, the Board looks again at the SLR schedule and may, occasionally, ask a university to reschedule one or two SLRs in order to ensure that they are included in their IWR.

The Board's proposal goes to the universities for consultation and final approval.

The Secretariat will write to universities to remind them to send their reports if they have not done so at the expected time. The Secretariat, as required, will ask for an update on the delayed SLRs and the new deadlines. Occasionally, a university will ask the Board to agree to a change in the date of an SLR. This is granted by the Board based on the merits of the case. The Secretariat will also check that SLR summaries are posted on the universities' websites.

OP 04 – Managing the IWR processes

Adopted: 18 November 2018

Recruiting IWR experts and chairs

The Board will suggest to the Secretariat names of possible experts and chairs. The Secretariat will contact these persons to inquire about their interest and request a CV.

From time to time, the Secretariat will be contacted by potential experts directly. These requests will be examined by the Board.

With respect to the students on the IWR teams, the Secretariat will contact LÍS for possible student member nominees. Their CV should be translated into English for Board approval.

A colleague from Iceland will be chosen to act as a back-up and be on stand-by in case the Secretary of an IWR team is no longer available.

Setting a date with the university

The Secretariat will contact the appropriate University officer to ask for two possible dates for both the Chair's visit and the entire team's visit.

Assembling the team

- The Board will suggest to the Secretariat names of the potential chair and experts for a specific IWR.
- The Secretariat will contact the potential chair first to confirm the interest and ask for his or preference given the choice of dates.
- The rest of the team will be contacted next with the same request.
- Once the team is assembled, their CV should be sent to the university to probe any potential conflict of interest.
- In case the student is selected after this process is finished, his or her CV will go for approval to the Board, then the chair and finally the university. When the process is completed successfully, LÍS and the rest of the team should be informed of the decision to integrate the student.

Prior to the visit

The Secretariat will arrange online discussion or a video conference call with the Team to discuss the RA in advance of the Chair's visit.

The Secretariat will send the following documents to the team:

1. As soon as they are appointed: the *QEF Handbook*, the *Guidelines to the Team Chairs and Team members*, link to the instructional video on the Icelandic Higher Education Landscape (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpfA9Dq4pdM&feature=youtu.be>) and their contract and conflict of interest/GDPR forms.

2. As soon as they are available: the RA report and visit schedule.
3. A few weeks before the visit: the practical information (hotel, the travel agency's emergency number, the Board Manager's cell number), the training schedule and any other document as required. The Board manager will ask the Team to confirm receipt of that email and to share their cell phone number.

Headline Letter

Paragraph 83 of the Handbook states: "... within two weeks of the end of the visit the Chair of the Team will write to the Rector on behalf of the Team to provide the headline outcomes of the review together with the Team's provisional judgements." The Board Chair is copied in that email. Board members receive the letter from the Board Chair.

The teams will be provided with a sample, anonymised Headline Letter from a past review.

The Headline Letter does not need to state that it does not include a judgment on research management.

Headline letter and concluding sections should have bullets that are arranged thematically, to the extent possible (governance; teaching and learning; research; etc.)

The Headline letter is NOT on Board's letterhead since it is the Team letter and, that ultimately, the judgments' are the responsibility of the Board. It is signed by the Team Chair, on behalf of the Team.

IWR report

1. As a general rule, do not identify individual sources (persons or committees) for individual pieces of information.
2. Do not use "seem" or "appear" or similar verbs when describing observations. Rather, use phrases like "It was reported to the Team that.."
3. In writing recommendations, avoid lukewarm wording. For example, do not say "The institution may want to consider doing X". Rather say: "The institution should identify ways to do X/achieve Y".
4. Incorporate references to ESG into the text, as well as the ESG tables at the end of Sections 3 and 4.

For example:

In meetings with both Management and departmental lead staff there was an awareness of the need for more systematic or formal approaches to be developed in support of the full implementation of the Quality Policy, in line with ESG 1.1., as a key strategic and operational tool for the whole institution.

The term 'policy' was often felt by the Team to be synonymous with 'strategy' in some discussions, but the term 'regulation' was very rarely used in discussion with the various groups. This may again point to the informality of operation and the contextualisation of process at a Departmental level, but it was clear that defined processes for all quality areas such as

curriculum approval and review (ESG 1.2 and 1.9), admissions (ESG 1.4), mapping of learning outcomes to assessment (ESG 1.3) etc. are in place.

4. Each individual section should have the follow structure, to the extent possible:

- a) What the university already does
- b) What the university does not do yet
- c) Recommendations and benefits of following them
- d) Brief summary

For example:

It was apparent to the Review Team that strong stakeholder and industry engagement are very much part of the University's ethos, coupled with strong links to the surrounding communities. These elements support the University's research, curricular development and student learning experience. The Team found clear evidence during meetings of response to input in all Departments. Students in DES suggested changes in the Genetics and Horse breeding courses, as well as the addition of entrepreneurship and business management courses to the curriculum. In response to student feedback, DRT incorporated more project-based learning and the Department has benefited from the input of the many students who were already working in the industry. DAFB responded to industry and student concerns when they decided that students would visit a fish farm with re-circulation equipment in the West of Iceland when it was pointed out that this technology was the way of the future and that the University does not have these facilities.

However, there is a need to increase the use of strategic data in the day-to-day running of the University, for example through regularly updated dashboards. Information that grounds daily operations and strategic decision-making, for example, financials, enrolment data and research funding could be utilised effectively by various committees and Departments. The benefit of such tools was also identified by a member of the University Board. Similarly, there is a need for the development and utilisation of a full range of Key Performance Indicators related to student satisfaction and student learning experience/achievement more broadly.

The University is a supportive community that values personal relationships with students. A by-product of this close-knit environment and resultant informality appears to be a lack of uniformity in the day-to-day running of the University and its Departments, as well as in institutional oversight of the evaluation of compliance with regulations and the follow-up of action plans.

Additional items for Secretariat to attend to:

1. Is doctoral education/research degree education covered well in the RA? If not, ensure that additional information is sought.
2. Is equality covered well in the RA? If not, ensure that additional information is sought.
3. All reports should have a glossary

The factual inaccuracies identified by the institution are considered by the chair, who decides whether to consult the whole team.

The report goes to the full Board for a discussion (minus the Board member involved in the Annual meeting of that university for the past two years).

Once the report is endorsed by the Board, it goes to MESC for information. By law, MESC has two weeks to consider it before it is posted on the QEF website. This provides time for MESC to prepare in case of a negative outcome and, in all cases, to release a statement at the same time as the report is published.

Board manager's scheduled holidays

The Board Manager will avoid taking holidays during the active part of IWRs: chair's visit, team visit and report writing stage.

OP 05 – Template letter from chairs to team members

Adopted: 1 February 2019

This first message is provided to the Team chair as an example of the content of his/her first message to Team members. Chairs are encouraged to adapt it to their own style.

Dear **INITIALS OF UNIVERSITY** Team Members:

I am looking forward to meeting you in person on **DATE**. I am writing today in relation to the preliminary visit that I will be conducting at **NAME OF UNIVERSITY** on **DATE**, the outcome of which will be a proposal for our site visit programme which, as you know, is planned for **DATE**. There is also a planned training session on **DATE**, and a Team meeting on **DATE** to arrive at the conclusions for the review.

I am writing with some guidance in preparation for both the preliminary and the second visits. Let me begin by apologising if what follows is entirely obvious. Because our experience of reviewing may come from different systems, and we shall not meet one another until just before the review, I thought it best to err on the safe side.

I am assuming that each of you would have read the QEF2 *Handbook* and the *Guideline for Chairs and Team Members* so that you are acquainted with the approach in Iceland. Additional “Guidance Notes” have been issued to supplement these two documents. In addition, it would be good if each of you, individually, would do the following:

- Read the Reflective Analysis (RA) closely and familiarise yourself with the supporting documentation, including the case study.
- One of our major responsibilities is to assess whether the university’s own view of its effectiveness – in safeguarding standards, providing a high-quality student learning experience, responding to previous reviews, managing its research and drawing upon it for teaching, and having a strategy for enhancement – is justified by the evidence. In this perspective, it would be helpful if you would write a commentary on each of the main sections of the RA, including a list of key questions that we should be asking during the site visit.
- Email me your commentary by **DATE**. We will also discuss your observations during a conference call, to be scheduled before the site visit. This will allow me to produce a synthesis of your various observations and to contribute to drafting the schedule of meetings for our visit to the university.

There is no need to put your commentary into polished prose: notes will suffice as long as their meaning is clear. However, it is important that you scrutinise the RA, and the supporting evidence in detail. The *Guideline for Chairs and Team Members*, Annexes 10 and 11 in the QEF2 *Handbook* can be used as reference points when reflecting on the RA.

In addition to your commentary on the RA, what I most need to know from you is the following:

- Whom you think we should be asking to meet during our visit in order to explore these questions further.
- Whether you wish to suggest particular themes for one or more of our meetings at the university, to give the meeting(s) structure and focus.
- Whether we need to request additional documentation from the university, which would be included as supplementary annexes.

We will have a chance to meet as a team for an introduction to QEF2 by the Board on **DATE** in the morning; the afternoon will be spent discussing the upcoming site visit and your comments to the RA. Again, I am looking forward to meeting you then in person.

As ever, please let me know if anything is unclear or, indeed, contentious!

III. QUALITY MANAGEMENT

QM 01 IWR surveys

Adopted: 3 March 2020

To be included: types of surveys, how/when to administer the surveys, their analysis and the public information regarding same.

Starting in 2020, the survey results are a standing item of the Board agenda.

Timing

Surveys are sent to the following groups immediately after the publication of a report of an Institution-Wide Review: Review Team, University Management, Students. Surveys are sent from the QB account at www.sogosurvey.com

Analysis

Surveys are analysed by the three group of respondents. Likert-type questions are summarised in bar graphs, but open-ended questions are summarised qualitatively. If a low number of responses are received from a given group, then individual responses can be reported instead of summaries.

Public information

Summaries of survey results are posted on the Board's website in English. If fewer than 5 responses were received from a group of respondents, then those responses will not be published.

QM 02 Meeting with partners and stakeholders

Adopted: 18 November 2019

The Board is totally independent in operation. However, it consults stakeholders when it is developing external quality processes and it meets regularly with a range of stakeholders to ensure the quality of QEF and its continued relevance to Island.

The stakeholders include:

- **The sector:**
 - **The Quality Council.** Within the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) the Quality Council (QC) has been formed consisting of the senior staff responsible for quality assurance in each of the Icelandic universities. In addition, there are two student members appointed by LÍS (usually the Chairperson and Quality Officer). The Board secretariat and the senior quality officer from MESC attend meetings of the QC as observers.

A productive partnership between the Council and the Board is fundamental to the success and future development of the whole Quality Enhancement Framework. The Board secretariat serves as liaison to the Council. Council members provide feedback on relevant issues, such as progress with their Subject-Level Reviews and issues preparing for or following up their Institution-Wide Reviews. As appropriate, Board members are expected to support the work of the Council. From time to time there are joint meetings of the Board and Council. The QC Chair attends the Board meetings regularly but withdraws when the discussion is focused on particular universities.
 - **The Rectors' Council.** At least once a year, the Chair of the Board will meet with the Rectors' Conference either in full or with its Chair. These meetings are extremely useful in exchanging information on current developments and future plans on both sides.
 - **Individual institutions.** Each Board member is allocated to one or two universities in order to undertake Annual Meetings (See OP7).
 - **Students.** Given the student-centred nature of the QEF, the Board strives to maintain regular liaison with the student bodies. As indicated above, students are in membership of both the Council and the Board. LÍS will always be included in the programme for Annual Meetings. The Board will meet regularly with senior representatives of LÍS and will meet formally with them once a year. Student input is routinely sought to the programme for Board seminars and conferences.
- **MESC.** The Board meets with MESC to provide feedback on progress and to discuss matters of shared interest in relation to higher education policy. The Board chair meets on a fairly regular

basis with the principal senior MESC contact and, as required at least annually, there is a meeting between the full Board and MESC.

- **Employers.** The Board strives to maintain contact with employers and other representatives of local society. The Board has been meeting with representatives of employers to discuss the links between the universities and the world of work and ways in which the work of the Board might be steered to support these links. In addition, it is normal practice for the universities to include commentaries on their work with employers and local/national society as part of the Reflective Analysis for IWR. During IWR visits, at least one meeting would involve society representatives, including civic leaders.

Practical aspects

All these meetings require that the agenda and the subsequent minutes are agreed.

The meetings with employers vary from year to year to ensure that the Board is exposed to a range of employers and points of view. The Board relies on the Board Manager and Quality Council to suggest different employers and civic leaders to meet every year, to contact them to set up this meeting and to thank them for their participation.

Public information

In addition to these regular meetings, the Board keep the public informed by publishing a range of material (see AP 01), including an Annual Report which is shared with all stakeholders and is published on the Board website.

QM 03 Complaints and appeals

Adopted: 17 September 2019

Section 5 in the *Handbook* 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.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

AP 01: Public information

Adopted: 18 November 2019

Updating the Web

The website is updated after each Board meeting, with the approved minutes (minus the red parts that are confidential) and any adopted documents that should be in the public domain. This includes the IWR reports, the results of the IWR surveys and any Board document of interest to the general public such as the *Board Constitution*, the *Guidelines for Team Chairs and Team Members*, this Manual, etc.

Public information about the SLRs

Whenever the secretariat receives an SLR, the website of the university should be checked to ensure that a summary of results, in the format agreed with the Quality Council, is posted.

Should be completed with other contents on the website.

Web address to be included

AP 02: Organising the travel of Board members, team members and conference speakers

Adopted: 18 November 2019

Setting the itineraries

Board members are contacted approximately six weeks prior to each meeting to ask for preferred travel dates and airport(s) for both arrival to and departure from Iceland.

Booking the flights

Board member sends suggestions for preferred flights to Board Manager. Board Manager books flights in collaboration with MESC's travel coordinator. MESC's travel coordinator will book the flight through the Government's procurement agency. A staff member of the procurement agency will then send the tickets to the MESC travel coordinator, who forwards it to Board Manager, who then forwards to Board member

Booking the hotels

Board Manager books hotels for Board members. Hotel invoice is paid by the Board Manager. Board members themselves pay for any extra as well as any additional nights that are not required for Board business.

Taking care of meals and coffee/tea breaks

Board manager ensures that lunch, coffee/tea breaks are provided during meeting days. Manager makes dinner reservations at restaurants in consultation with Board members during breaks in the Board meeting schedule.

Booking taxis

Taxis are ordered through Hreyfill (+354-588-5522). Please keep all receipts for reimbursement for taxi rides.

Informing travellers about their arrangements

Board members receive an honorarium for each day of meetings and receive a *per diem* to cover expenses for each day of meetings in addition to days travelling to and from Iceland. Hotel and full travel expenses are paid to and from Iceland, and also for any internal travel involved in the course of undertaking Board duties.

Honoraria for Board members

Board members, including the international student, receive an honorarium for each full working day spent in Iceland. They will occasionally receive extra honorarium for significant Board-related work performed abroad.

The Icelandic student observer does not receive an honorarium.

Honoraria for Team members

The honorarium of Team Chairs and Team members will be paid upon completion of the review. As full members of their teams, students will receive the same honorarium as any Team Member. The payment of this honorarium will be made as soon as the visit ends.

About per diem

Board members and team members receive a *per diem* to cover expenses for each day of meetings in addition to days travelling to and from Iceland. Hotel and full travel expenses are paid to and from Iceland, and also for any internal travel involved in the course of undertaking Board duties

Per diem is meant to cover the cost of the dinners. When a dinner is paid by the Board Secretariat, Board members will not receive the per diem for that day.

Students do not receive a per diem. The cost of their dinner is paid by the Board Manager or the Board Chair to avoid students having to advance the money.

Settling expenses

All travellers should be urged to minimise expenses. Acceptable expenses include:

- Economy travel (any exception must be approved by the Board Chair)
- Taxis if required (travellers will be informed of the cost of taxi between Keflavik and Reykjavík)
- Parking fees at airport
- Train tickets to airport in home country
- Automobile travel in home country, paid by distance travelled in kilometres

The expenses of any accompanying guests of a Board member and any extra cannot be covered by Board budget.

AP 03: Managing the files

Adopted: 18 November 2019

The IWR files

For each QEF cycle, each university has its own folder under its name, which contains the following folders/files for:

- Historic overview of IWR: IWR dates and expert teams in QEF1 and 2 and in any special review
- SLR schedule
- SLR reports
- Reflective analysis
- Preliminary activities (organisation of the chair's visit, conference call with the team, etc.)
- Main visit (programme of the visit and any other pertinent arrangement)
- IWR Reports
- Mid-term Progress report
- Annual meeting reports
- Any formal correspondence, plus team contracts, signed conflict of interest and GDPR forms, etc.

Each year, the secretariat develops a month-by-month schedule which indicates major milestones by university: dates and type of annual meetings, SLR schedule, any relevant date for the IWR (date of RA, dates of visits, IWR report due date, etc.)

The database

The Secretariat maintain the following files:

- "All evaluations" provides an overview of all reviews (IWR and special reviews). This is updated routinely.
- "Team contact details" provides an overview of all team members. The Team contact details need to be maintained in accordance with GDPR.
- Board contact details
- Database of potential reviewers

The key documents

The Secretariat maintains the following files:

- All Board minutes
- All finalised documents such as the *Handbook*, the *Board Constitution*, etc.
- Boards accounts
- Formal communication with universities

Factsheet AP 01 explains what information should be posted on the QEF website.

AP 04: Refreshing the Board

Adopted: 18 November 2019

From time to time, the Board will seek to replace a member and will set up an ad hoc nomination committee, chaired by the Vice Chair.

After the Board has decided on a ranked list of candidates, the Secretariat will be asked to write, on the Board's behalf, to the top candidate first informing him/her that the Board is looking for a new board member.

The Board Manager would provide information about QEF and who else is on the Board as well as information about the interview process and the nomination committee.

The message would conclude by asking the candidate if s/he would entertain the notion of having a videoconference with the nomination committee of the Board.

The secretariat would set up a Doodle for the Skype meeting and test the equipment with everyone involved.

The nomination committee would conduct the interview and report back to the full Board.

AP 05: Managing the Board meetings

Adopted: 18 November 2019

Setting the agenda

The agenda will be proposed to the full Board for adoption, following consultation among the Chair, Vice Chair and the Board Manager. Care will be taken to consolidate all the private discussion items in order to ensure that the QC Chair does not need to step out of the room but would arrive and leave at a specific time.

The Chair of REAC will be invited to send the minutes of the last meeting and the agenda of the next meeting and any other documents as required.

Sending the documents

Documents should be sent to the Board at least ten days before a meeting.

Ad hoc members of the Board (Icelandic student and QC chair) receive a special package that excludes any document pertaining to a specific university. In addition, they receive the minutes without the confidential parts in red. The Board Manager confirms the package of information with the Board Chair before every meeting.

Taking minutes

Board Manager takes minutes during Board meetings.

After the Board meeting

Board Manager will solicit receipts for any expenses from Board Members. After receiving those, the Manager will reimburse allowed expenses and pay honorarium in one bank transfer. Members will also receive a breakdown of their payment in a spreadsheet by email as well as an annual summary of the fees received.

Board manager will send minutes to Chair for initial approval before they are sent to other Board Members for approval prior to the next meeting.

AP 06: Organising the annual conferences

Adopted: 18 November 2019

The Annual conference take place generally in the spring of each year. They are hosted by one of the universities and co-organised with the Quality Council (and occasionally with MESC).

Planning stage

The Board will agree on the theme of the conference a year in advance, based on a proposal from the Board Chair and the Board Manager. The Quality Council and LÍS will be consulted on the theme.

A proposal for the format of the conference will be developed by the Board Chair and the Board Manager, in consultation with the Quality Council and LÍS.

The Board Manager will secure the agreement of a Reykjavík university to host the event. An auditorium of about 100 seats should be made available, as well as an area for coffee break and registration.

Before the event

Once the programme theme and format are stabilised, the Board Manager will:

- invite prospective speakers;
- develop a briefing note for keynote speakers and check with them that the description of their session is appropriate;
- send information to the Icelandic sector to save the date;
- organise travel and hotel accommodation for any international guests;
- organise catering during the event;
- send them this information along with a reimbursement form;
- organise a welcome dinner for the international guests and the Board on the eve of the event.

After the event

- The Board Chair will send a “thank you” note to all speakers and to the rector of the hosting university;
- The Board Manager will send a link for the evaluation of the conference and analyse the data;
- The Board Manager will collect the reimbursement forms and reimburse speakers for their expenses.