INSTITUTION-WIDE REVIEW

University of Iceland

September 2021

Quality Board
for Icelandic Higher Education

Preface

This is the report of an Institution-Wide Review of the University of Iceland undertaken at the behest of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education under the authority of the Icelandic Government.

The review was carried out by an independent Team of senior international higher education experts together with a student from the higher education sector in Iceland. The Team was appointed by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education.

Institution-Wide Review is one component of the second cycle of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF2) established by the Icelandic Government in 2017. The main elements of the QEF are:

- Quality Board-led Institution-Wide Reviews (IWRs);

- University-led Subject-Level Reviews (SLRs);

- University-led Year-on and Mid-Term Progress reports;

- Annual meetings between universities and Quality Board members to discuss institutional developments, including quality assurance;

- Quality Council-led enhancement workshops and conferences;

- Quality Board-led Special Reviews.

Further information on the QEF is available on the website of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (www.qef.is).

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Chair   Manager

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Glossary and List of Abbreviations

CSS. Central Support Services,

DQM. Director of Quality Management.

ES. Evaluation system of the Icelandic public universities.

ESG. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education

Area, 2015 edition. Also known as European Standards and Guidelines.

EUA. European University Association.

IWR. Institution-Wide Review. Board-led review of institution, based on QEF.

LAT. Learning Aptitude Test.

MoR. Management of Research.

QEF. Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education.

QEF2. Second cycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education,

scheduled for 2017-2022.

QESTL. The Quality Enhancement Strategy for Teaching and Learning.

RA. Reflective Analysis produced by the University of Iceland in preparation for the IWR**.**

SENS. The School of Engineering and Natural Sciences.

SOE. The School of Education.

SOH. The School of Humanities.

SOHS. The School of Health Sciences.

SOSS. The School of Social Sciences.

SLR. Subject-Level Review. Institution-led review of an individual faculty, based on QEF.

UC. University Council.

UISCCC. University of Iceland Student Counselling and Career Centre.

Team

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1. Introduction: the review in context

1.1. Overview of review process

In the second cycle of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF2), the University of Iceland's Institution-Wide Review (IWR) visit took place virtually in May of 2021, with the report published on 30 September, 2021. The review visit was originally scheduled to take place in the spring of 2020, but was delayed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The University of Iceland (the University) submitted its Reflective Analysis (RA) for purposes of this review on December 16, 2019 and submitted an update to the RA on January 21, 2021 in anticipation of the May 2021 virtual visit. The University also gave the Review Team (the Team) access to supporting documentation via an online file storage system.

At the time of the online review visit, the University had submitted 23 (of 28) QEF2 faculty-level Subject-Level Reviews (SLRs) scheduled for the QEF2 cycle. The University submitted two School-level Subject-Level Reviews of the management of research out of the five such reviews scheduled for the QEF2 cycle. Finally, the University submitted a review of its Central Support Services in QEF2. In the previous QEF cycle (QEF1), the University participated in IWR in 2015, and implemented SLRs during the period 2012-2015.

The present review followed procedures outlined in the 2nd edition of the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education*. As part of the review, the Team undertook a systematic evaluation of evidence of the University's procedures with reference to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area,2015* (ESG), and the commentary on ESG provided in Annex 11 of the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education*. The full programme of the

virtual visit is in Annex 1. The Team's conclusions are included in the summaries for Sections 3, 4 and 6, as well as in Section 7.

1.2. About the institution

The University of Iceland was founded on 17 June 1911, formed through the merger of the Theological Seminary, the School of Medicine, and the School of Law, and the creation of a Faculty of Philosophy. Since its establishment, the University has developed a comprehensive programme of degrees, both undergraduate and postgraduate, across most subject areas. In 2008, the University merged with the Iceland University of Education, thereby adding teacher training and continuing professional development for teachers to its provision. The University is accredited for PhD provision in all its fields of study. Throughout most of the 20th century, the University was the only university in Iceland and its current student count of approximately 15,000 makes it by far the largest and most comprehensive higher education institution in the country, enrolling some two-thirds of the total student population of Iceland.

In common with the other public higher education institutions, the University operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (the Ministry) and is subject to the same laws and regulations that apply to all Icelandic public institutions. However, the RA indicates that the University enjoys full autonomy in its activities and has self-determination in internal affairs. The University operates within the terms of contracts agreed with the Ministry.

The Rector of the University is formally appointed by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture following an election within the University community. The Rector is also the Chair

of the University Council, which is the University's highest governing authority. The Rector is supported in the senior management of the University by the Pro-Rector of Science, the Pro-Rector of Academic Affairs and Development, and the Director of Central Administration.

Since 2008, the University has been structured into five schools headed by deans: the School of Education (SOE); the School of Engineering and Natural Sciences (SENS); the School of Health Sciences (SOHS); the School of Humanities (SOH); and, the School of Social Sciences (SOSS). Each school is subdivided into faculties (a total of 26 over the five schools) and research institutes. In addition, some of the 26 faculties are also further sub-divided into "departments". Furthermore, there are several interdisciplinary graduate programs offered.

The school deans are appointed by the Rector for a period of five years and they in turn appoint faculty heads for a two year period in accordance with nominations from faculty meetings. In total, the University offers 352 study programmes, 105 at the undergraduate level, 175 at masters level and 72 at doctoral level. Sitting alongside the five schools, the University Graduate School has formal responsibility for the quality and standards in doctoral education. At present, the Graduate School does not oversee masters studies at the University.

Because of its size, age and history, the breadth and depth of its curriculum offerings and its research profile, the University plays a vital national role in the country. The Rector of the University is the Chair of the Icelandic Rectors' Conference, which illustrates the important role of the University within the Icelandic higher education system. The University operates and collaborates widely with other research bodies in the country such as the National

University Hospital of Iceland, the National Museum of Iceland and the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. The University also plays important roles, both formal and informal, in the development and execution of national education policy through, for example, its initiatives to widen and deepen access to university level education for all parts of the Icelandic community.

The vision of the University is to strengthen its position as a leading university, based on the values of academic freedom, equality and professionalism. At the time of the Review, the University was in the final stages of reviewing the outcomes of its current strategic cycle, set to end in June 2021 (UI21). The four focus areas of this strategy centred on a progressive vision for teaching and learning that prepares students to participate in society and industry; a strong research infrastructure that supports the creation of knowledge and international collaboration; the University having a wide impact and addressing the challenges of the 21st century; and the University being a great place to work.

The University's RA contained multiple examples of successful implementation of priorities identified in the current strategy and staff satisfaction with progress on areas of emphasis was generally positive. Overall, the University deems the outcomes of this cycle to be very positive and cited for example that 64% of action items for this cycle had been completed. During this cycle, considerable effort has been put into defining performance indicators that reflect the progress achieved in the quality of the University operations. A total of 20 indicators were defined for the four core functions of the University noted above. At the same time, the University has been developing a new internal data management portal that will give access to all key University data and generate custom made reports at different levels of aggregation.

The University's development of a new strategy for the period of 2021-2026 (UI26) was in its concluding stages at the time of the online review visit and had involved multiple opportunities for stakeholder input and feedback. The new strategy is titled "A Better University for a Better Society", with four strategic focus areas and 16 associated goals, 10 work programmes and 20 measures. The four focus areas are "open and international", "sustainability and diversity", "strength based on quality" and "a great place to work". The guiding principles of this new strategy are to be "agility", "quality" and "trust".

In addition to its national role, the University's mission emphasises the importance of its role on the international stage. According to the statutes of the Rectors' Conference in Iceland, the Rector of the University of Iceland is its chair. The Rectors' Conference is a member of the European University Association (EUA) and the Association of Nordic University Rectors Conferences. The University participates in the EUA Council on Doctoral Education, the Council of Graduate Schools in the US, and the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe. In 2016, the University was a founding member of the Aurora Universities Network, a collaborative agreement between eleven European universities described as "research-intensive universities with high research impact; united by a shared commitment to social relevance and a diverse student body." Since 2020, the Rector of the University of Iceland is serving as the President of the Aurora University Network. In 2020, Aurora was selected as one of the European Universities Alliances and received a grant of seven million Euros to fund its work for three years.

The University language policy dictates that its written and spoken language is to be Icelandic, whether in teaching, research or administration. At the same time, it emphasises

that information on the University and its operations should be made available in English in a number of fora.

The University works closely with institutions in the fields of health care, social issues, environmental sciences, education and culture; in 2019 it had over 300 active collaborative research projects with industry. The University is currently supporting development of the emerging knowledge-based economy at the 57,000 m^2 University of Iceland Science Park on campus, and numerous start-ups and patents result from University research every year.

1.3. Funding/resourcing

Public funding comes to the University through the Ministry, based in part on the number of students (full-time equivalents) registered in programmes in various price bands. In addition, an allowance is provided for research and other projects. From non-governmental sources the University receives funding through national and international competitive research contracts, student registrations and from the University of Iceland Lottery, the latter being dedicated to university buildings and maintenance. Between 2015 and 2019, the total income of the University (both governmental and non-governmental) increased by 18%. The proportion of non-government income (including student registrations and lottery funding) has remained steady between 2015 and 2019, averaging approximately 34% of total income. Between 2014 and 2019, the University secured 32 grants on average from the Icelandic Research Fund, which is the largest competitive fund for research in Iceland. Within that same timeframe, projects based at the University have represented 70% of all funded projects in this grant mechanism. The University is also active in seeking grants from common pots at the European level. In 2019, for example, the University secured over 5

million EUR in competitive funding from the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and from Horizon 2020, which was its highest ever annual total.

The University disburses funding to its individual schools based on research activities, teaching activities and "other factors". In 2019 the distribution across all five schools was: 67% through the teaching funding model, 30% through the research funding model, and 3% dependent on other factors.

The relative funding of Icelandic higher education institutions is slightly below the OECD average for 2020 and well below the Nordic average for that year. This financial position impacts significantly on a number of aspects of university operations, including the proportion of teaching carried out by part-time sessional teachers (currently 30% of all teaching). However, the ratio of students to academic staff has been steadily improving in recent years and was 14.6:1 in 2019, as compared to 16.1 in 2014.

1.4. Staff

In 2019 the full-time equivalent (FTEs) number of academic staff was 552, up from 525 in 2014. Academic staff included 274 FTE full professors, 121 FTE associate and 113 FTE assistant professors, respectively, as well as 43 FTEs designated as specialists and researchers. Since 2014, there has been an increase of almost 50 FTEs amongst the rank of professors, and a reduction of 10 FTEs in both associate and assistant professors.

Other teaching and research staff totalled 484 FTEs in 2019 and this category of staff includes postdoctoral fellows and other research staff. FTEs of postdoctoral fellows and other research staff have increased steadily since 2014. Sessional lecturers totalled 142 FTEs in 2019 and it is noteworthy that 2,476 sessional staff contributed to 138 FTEs in 2018,

which is the most recent date for which "head counts" of staff were available. In the RA, the point is made that the teaching contribution of sessional staff is equal to the teaching contribution of 250 assistant professors. Administration, support services and technical staff totalled 427 FTEs in 2019, and their numbers have steadily increased from 2014, when this category of staff numbered 382 FTEs. Approximately 48 FTEs are contributed annually from employees in various short-term appointments.

In 2020, approximately two-thirds of professors were male. However, that proportion is reversed for other types of academic staff (assistant professors, associate professors and adjuncts), with two-thirds female representation in each of these three groups. The University achieved Equal Pay Certification from the Icelandic government in 2019, which is recognised as an important milestone in progress towards equality.

1.5. Students

Students who graduate successfully from upper secondary school in Iceland are entitled to enter any of the public higher education institutions, including the University of Iceland. Since 2014, the total number of students at the University has ranged from between 12,500 to a little over 15,000 in 2020. A recent increase between 2019 and 2020 in the number of students at all cycles is likely explained by the impact of COVID-19 on the job market with recently unemployed workers entering the University. SOSS is the largest in terms of student numbers with 27% of the student population. SOHS and SOE each house approximately 20% of the student body, whereas the SOH and SENS each house approximately 15%. The remaining 3% of students is classified as belonging to interdisciplinary programmes.

In 2020, 59% of students were studying at the undergraduate level, 36% at the masters level, and around 5% at the PhD level. There has been a relatively steady growth in the number of postgraduate students at the University since 2014, which continues a trend between 2009 and 2013 noted in the QEF1 IWR report.

At the time of the visit, females constituted 67% of the total student population, although the balance is reversed in SENS with 60% of students being male. In the SOE, 82% of the students are female. The overall proportion of males (31%) is somewhat less than the proportion of males graduating from upper secondary school (40%). The gender imbalance is not unique to the University of Iceland and is pervasive throughout the sector in Iceland.

The age profile of undergraduates at the University is higher than OECD averages, as is normal in Icelandic universities. This is due, at least in part, to the higher graduation age in Icelandic upper secondary school, which is 1-2 years beyond most OECD countries. In 2018, 57% of undergraduate students were under 24, and 21% between 24- 29. In 2018, 59% of masters students and 78% of doctoral students were over 30. In relation to graduation, the largest group of undergraduate students graduating fall into the 20-29 age category (43%), but 25% of those graduating with an undergraduate degree are 30 or older. It is noteworthy in this context that the University does not currently recognise part-time students as a distinct category, except for doctoral students.

In 2018, approximately 1,500 international students were studying at the University, up from 1,100 in 2015. In addition, the University participates in a number of exchange programmes such as Erasmus+. In 2019-2020, the University exported 239 students through such arrangements and imported 331. The University operates a student mentoring scheme

for incoming international students and a notable addition to services provided to international students was the development in 2019 of an International Officer position dedicated to the support of international students.

There is a very active Student Council and students are well represented throughout the academic and managerial committee structure of the University. Both the University and the Student Council are conscious of the importance of providing training and support for students to contribute effectively and confidently within the committee structure.

1.6. Key committee and managerial structures

The University Council (UC) is the senior decision-making authority of the University. The Rector and the UC are the highest authorities at the University and are ultimately responsible for the quality of operations. The constitution of the UC is laid down in law as comprising the Rector (President of the UC), three representatives of the academic community, two representatives of the students, two representatives appointed by the Ministry, and three members appointed by the UC itself.

To take forward its business, the UC has a variety of advisory sub-committees, including: the Academic Affairs Committee, the Equal Rights Committee, the Quality Committee (QC), the Science Committee, all of which have students as full members. In addition to this University-wide committee structure, there is the University Forum, a consultative forum for the University community as a whole. The Rector, Pro-Rectors, deans, heads of faculties and the chair of the Student Council are members. The Forum also includes wide representation from teaching staff, researchers, members of university-affiliated institutes, the Union of University Teachers, university administrative personnel, and all members of the UC who

are not otherwise in membership (in a non-voting capacity). The Rector chairs the Forum which meets at least once each semester.

The QC consists of seven members, appointed for a three-year period, one from each school, a student selected among graduate students and the Chair appointed directly by the Rector. The Director of Quality Management (DQM) is the secretary to the QC. The QC has a special role to ensure the quality of teaching and learning, research and governance at the University and is responsible for the implementation of QEF within the University. The QC drove the development of a new Quality Assurance Policy and a framework for the Quality Assurance System. The Quality Enhancement Strategy for Teaching and Learning (QESTL), which came into effect in 2018 and focuses on policy, implementation, responsibility, supervision and follow-up for internal quality reviews was the responsibility of the Committee for Academic Affairs chaired by the Pro-Rector of Academic Affairs and Development.

Currently, there are three job titles at the University level associated with quality management: "Manager of the Quality Assurance System", "Director of Quality Management", and a "Project Manager, Quality Team." The DQM is responsible for the operation of the Quality Assurance System within the University under the authority of the Rector, including overseeing the organization and implementation of the QEF on a day-to-day basis, as well as any internal and external reviews. The Manager of the Quality Assurance System, on the other hand, is responsible for formalising the Quality Assurance system in the spirit of the quality control circle to support effective implementation of the QEF.

Article 11 of the Rules for the University of Iceland (no. 569/2009), developed by and for the University, states that schools are its "primary organisational units". Each school is in turn divided into faculties, which are termed the "basic units of the University." Article 15 of the Rules states unequivocally that it is in fact the faculties that are "responsible for teaching, studies and the conferral of degrees upon the completion of study." Although the individual school deans, school boards and academic affairs committees have designated responsibilities for the quality of teaching, research and service delivery within each school, the ultimate responsibility for standards hence resides within each of the 26 individual faculties. The implications of these arrangements are discussed below.

1.7. The Reflective Analysis

The RA editorial team was comprised of the chair of the QC, the DQM , the Director of Central Administration, the Pro-Rector of Academic Affairs and Development, the Pro-Rector of Science, the Director of the Division of Science and Innovation, the Director of the Division of Academic Affairs, and a student representative nominated by the Student Council.

The Rector states in his introduction to the Reflective Analysis (RA) that the production of the RA: "has brought together the community within the University, both staff and students, in reflection on where we stand and how we can enhance our role even further in the development of Iceland as a knowledge-based society." The Chair of the Student Council, in her introduction to the RA, states further that: "Students not only participate in reflective work, but they also take initiatives for improving quality […] The reflective analysis is a tool to be used in the continuous enhancement of quality in the university operations, with a focus on providing a positive student experience. It gives us a chance to set goals and put in

action measures to achieve them. The work of everyone behind this analysis is of great importance and much appreciated." The statements of the Rector and the Chair of the Student Council were borne out in discussions with both staff and students during review meetings.

The RA itself was a comprehensive document of almost 100 pages, giving extensive sources of evidence and making reference to a wide range of source material. Direct links to the further evidence and source material were built in to the electronic version of the RA. Due to the long delay between the submission of the RA in 2019 and the online review visit, the University submitted numerous annexes and updates to the RA in the interim. All this material was well structured, produced on a timely basis and shared in a very open and free manner.

The Team is of the opinion that the RA appears to have been the product of comprehensive consultation across the entire university community. For example, the University Forum contributed to the drafting of the RA through discussions in a Forum meeting and an online follow-up consultation. In general, the Team found the RA to be an excellent open, evidence-based and self-critical document that drew on past history to analyse the present in order to begin to construct the future.

1.8. Summary

The University is commended for the RA and its comprehensive collection and systematic presentation of evidence, together with the engagement of the entire University community in its production. The University is also to be commended for producing relevant and to-the-point updates to the original RA before the online review visit.

It is important also to note the quality of the discussions with the Team during the review visit. In addition to the RA being appropriately self-critical, all staff and students were very open in expressing their analyses of the past together with the threats and opportunities being faced in the future. The University community is to be commended for the willingness of such a large number of staff and students to engage with the Team in open and frank discussions.

2. Learning from previous reviews

2.1. Approach to learning from previous reviews

Creating an institutional quality culture that embraces ongoing quality enhancement is a complex, multifaceted undertaking. A quality enhancement culture evolves and should become a natural part of the institution's identity. The process is continuous, and learning from prior reviews is an essential element. It is important to recognize that the present review is only the second that UI has undergone, making their exposure and response to previous reviews limited. It was clear to the Team that UI values the input of external reviewers and is committed to the quality enhancement process.

The University of Iceland is by no means review-averse. The QEF1 RA from 2014 identified 29 fairly major reviews over the past decade or so by a variety of bodies for a variety of purposes. In its 2015 QEF1 report, the Team observed: "Managing this complexity of reviews and, importantly, learning from them, is very demanding." (p. 18) It was noted that significant learning points from these reviews had been taken forward constructively. Next to this type of review (external, onetime and targeted) quality enhancement at the University as a matter of course makes extensive use of recurrent self-reviews, sometimes

non-formatted and case-specific, sometimes following institution-wide templates. Therefore, it makes sense to take a closer look at each of the different categories of reviews and see how they contribute to quality enhancement.

2.2. Learning from SLRs

The 2019 QEF2 RA refers to 28 institution-led reviews at subject level (SLRs) in QEF2, of which 23 were completed at the time of the present review. These were undertaken in the wake of the stimulating and positive effects of similar reviews in QEF1, which had "raised awareness for safeguarding standards and enhancing the quality of the student experience" (p. 3). A number of weaknesses that had become apparent were identified and addressed. An improved organization, with the involvement of the Centre for Teaching and Learning as well as the DQM, the inclusion of a self-review of student support services, and the use of more consistent procedures for the self-reviews are mentioned as lessons learned. Student participation in these SLRs was enhanced as well as that of external experts. It was also noted that these reviews resulted in action plans to be followed up and reported-on to faculty heads and to deans of schools, and supported by the expanded Academic Affairs Fund. Deans will report to the QC and the Rector. Once SLRs are completed, a survey about the whole process is conducted among the self-review teams. This way, lessons learned during QEF1 and 2 should easily feed into QEF3.

From this summary overview, it is clear that the University is not only using SLRs well in the interest of enhancing quality in teaching and learning, but also is continuously learning how to best organize SLRs and maximize their impact.

On this last point, the QEF2 RA emphatically identifies an important current issue. It describes the work on SLRs in QEF2 as a good step forward from the first cycle. Yet it is noted that they have been very time-consuming and that it would be good to simplify the process "and make it part of everyday work at the University instead of this rather big effort every seven years. The design of such continuous processes must be in place as soon as possible if they are to effectively replace the existing seven-year cycle process" (p. 19). This is another positive example of learning from feedback on the quality enhancement process itself. Further, building a process of ongoing analysis and evaluation will facilitate the writing of future RAs and make that process more accurate and efficient.

2.3. Learning from Reviews of Management of Research at School Level

In 2019 it was decided that reviews of management of research were to take place once SLRs of the QEF2 cycle had been completed for each faculty in a given School. A specific template for this was prepared. At the time of the present review, two Schools had submitted reviews of management of research. This clearly is work in progress, and more information on the submitted reviews is to be found in 5.10, below.

2.4. Learning from QEF1 Review

The recommendations of the QEF1 review were included in full in the UI21 Strategy, including. "to refine the University's practice in the management of quality and standards", further clarified in a follow-up report in 2017 (p. 6). Yet, in some cases, implementation of recommended actions is still due.

2.5. Learning from other reviews

The QEF2 RA refers to numerous internal reviews on a wide variety of subjects. These include, for example, case-specific reviews on the University's language policy and on research grants; and structural reviews on study programmes by faculties and schools. During the writing of RA 2019, the Graduate School Board was reviewing the standards and requirements documents for both the master's and doctoral programmes. In some cases, it is evident that these reviews are undertaken in response to recommendations arising from another review, such as for example the review on the University's language policy in response to recommendations in the QEF1 IWR report.

A review of organizational structure and administration was commenced in 2015 and reported on in 2018. Several recommended changes have been implemented since as the present organizational chart shows.

A Mid-Term Strategy Review concluding in January 2019 involved hiring an external evaluator "to assess the extent to which the leadership, governance and management processes in place to deliver UI21 would require any adjustment in light of experience so far". The external evaluator identified eight areas for improvement. As a follow-up to this report, the UI21 implementation plan was reviewed and updated, the UI21 programme governance adjusted and a communications and engagement coordinator appointed. A self-review of Central Support Services (CSS) was undertaken for the very first time in 2019 and the QEF2 RA reports a number of follow-up actions and improvements at various points. Other recommendations of the Mid-Term Strategy Review are under consideration.

A review of the Evaluation System of the Public Universities in Iceland[1] (ES) was already identified as an urgent need in the QEF1 RA. An internal self-review and an external system review were undertaken in 2015-2017. A reform of the ES was recommended by external reviewers, yet no substantial changes have so far been made to ES. Reviewing this system is outside the immediate remit of the University, although it is directly affecting the primary processes of the University and its HR policies. This case clearly demonstrates that quality enhancement extends beyond the internal organisation of a university.

2.6. A multitude of action items

Throughout the QEF1 RA, references are made to points for further action which the University has noted for itself ("a list of measures"). The QEF1 IWR report noted this and added pertinent recommendations: "the Team was aware that there are many action points – some 75 in total. It would be helpful for the University to now give these measures further consideration, decide on relative priorities and timescales, and allocate responsibilities for action" (p. 21) and "the utility of the RA in strategic planning would be further enhanced through the creation of an action plan based on the 75 Measures in the Reflective Analysis and linking them to performance indicators in the University Policy." (p. 22). The QEF2 RA reports that UI21 indeed prioritizes one set of measures over another, couples them with rigorous implementation plans and assigns them to leaders and managers responsible and accountable for delivery, which is another example of adequate follow-up and lessons learned well.

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[1] The Evaluation System of the Public Universities in Iceland is used for evaluating staff performance at the individual level in each of the five public universities and Iceland (and Bifröst University), with financial incentives linked to point totals.

2.7. Lasting issues

The large and diverse number of reviews and the multitude of action items resulting from them demonstrate that the University is constantly working on development and enhancement. Nevertheless, some lasting issues fail to be solved, even though they have been identified as in need of intervention and improvement. Two examples may illustrate that these are by no means matters of negligible detail.

The most important example has to do with the University's devolved organizational identity. As is acknowledged in the QEF1 IWR report, "Faculties and schools at the University of Iceland (...) have substantial autonomy and, within these units, academic staff are largely responsible for the quality of their teaching. In practice, this means that academic standards of the courses and programmes rely heavily on the staff that deliver them, with few routine or systemic safeguards." (p. 25; see also pp. 37-38). The report then goes on to list a number of topics where consistency is largely patchy: learning outcomes, ECTS allocation, benchmark statements, follow-up of SLR advice, assessment practices, training supervisors of doctoral students.

This observation by the 2015 Team links organizational fragmentation with inconsistency in practice. This poses a common problem for relatively large and devolved organizations: shall one try to repair issues of inconsistency one by one by specific interventions, or shall one rather solve the root problem of fragmentation and lack of organizational cohesion? The University has opted for the first option and has thereby underestimated the analysis offered by the reviewers. In terms of learning from prior reviews it is certainly worthwhile to look beyond the surface and beyond the individual defect or inconsistency.

3. Managing Standards

3.1. Institutional approach to the management of standards

The University of Iceland enjoys a high level of public trust and the University Council's (UC) work on reputational and external matters is excellent. The RA submitted in preparation for the review described the governance and management structure in detail including the QA System (see also Section 1.6, above).

The University is appropriately self-reflective throughout its RA in identifying areas for improvement; deans, for example expressed a desire for greater consistency in standards. There is also a strong commitment to developing action plans in response to identified areas for improvement. The QC is responsible for the implementation of the Quality Assurance (QA) system and works closely with other elements of the University focused on QA management such as the University Council Academic Affairs Committee, University Council Science Committee and other offices within the central administration. The DQM oversees operational aspects of the QA system and acts as secretary to the QC and the Pro-Rector of Academic Affairs and Development leads the implementation of the University strategy and change, including the results of the QEF, on behalf of the Rector. At present, the authority held by these positions to effect significant change is undermined by the independence of the faculties. Assignment of clearer authority for these two positions would facilitate learning and speed up implementation of cross-cutting changes recommended in SLRs and the present review and better align with ESG 1.1. This is likely to result in greater consistency in standards, including the use of learning outcomes, and more equal treatment of students across the University.

A new Quality Assurance Policy and a framework for the QA System were approved by the UC in June 2018. It is anchored on three main components: UI21, Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework 2017-2023 (QEF2), and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).

The use of Learning Outcomes at the course and programme levels was introduced in connection with accreditation in 2007-2009. The RA is appropriately candid in concluding that defining Learning Outcomes for programmes and courses is not a guarantee that they will be used. The inconsistent utilization of Learning Outcomes was raised with the Team multiple times during the review. The Graduate School publishes the UC-approved quality documents that apply to the doctoral programmes that state the minimum requirements needed for faculties to secure the adequate quality of their graduate programmes.

Significant issues exist regarding the management of doctoral programmes and strengthening the structure of doctoral programmes was identified as a high priority action in the RA. Increasing support for doctoral studies and standardization of supervision were identified as cross-cutting themes in the SLRs completed in SOH and SOHS. Doctoral programmes across the University would benefit from the establishment of comprehensive policies that provide basic rights and standards that would be uniformly applied and enforced across the institution. Particular attention must be paid to provisions addressing supervision irregularities and the processes for providing feedback or filing a complaint, given the inherent power imbalance between supervisor and supervisee. Making formal training of PhD supervisors mandatory was deliberated but not pursued, despite evidence of variation in the quality of supervision. The creation of an ombudsman system was raised during meetings between the Team and University representatives. Such a system would

allow students to file criticisms, complaints and concerns without having to address them to their doctoral supervisor. Significant steps need to be taken for the institution to be in alignment with ESG 1.3 regarding clear, fair and accessible policies and procedures on complaints and appeals in doctoral programmes.

The addition of a PhD coordinator for each School is a positive development, as is the creation of a toolbox for doctoral students and supervisors. The appointment of educational developers, who work closely with the Centre for Teaching and Learning, for each school from the ranks of academic staff is to be applauded.

Additionally, the University should take immediate steps to clarify the profile, roles and, functions of masters programmes across the University. Included in this effort should be an analysis of the role of the Graduate School and the development of general policies and procedures which would frame the operation of every programme. The Internal Audit of 2018 suggested numerous actions needed to strengthen the masters studies framework, including strengthening the Graduate School to enable it to support both masters and doctoral programmes. A decision was made, with quality in mind, to strengthen the development of masters education by increasing the support for masters programmes within the Schools, rather than strengthening that specific role of the Graduate School. At the time of the review, that work had not appeared to result in consistent application of procedures and standards for masters degrees across the University.

The RA describes the Graduate School as belonging to the central administration, but its position within the governance structure is somewhat unclear. The problems described above may be further influenced by confusion regarding the governance authority of the

Graduate School. The University should take immediate steps to establish a coherent Graduate School governance structure, develop uniform policies and provide the appropriate services and support to better align its graduate education efforts with ESG 1.6.

3.2. Admissions, progression and graduation

The Division of Academic Affairs is responsible for admissions and registration. Prospective students use the website to access readily available study programme information. The minimum admission requirement is an Icelandic matriculation examination or an equivalent level of study, although admission requirements vary between faculties. The University is also developing an admission strategy in response to changes in the University Act No. 63/2006, which requires universities to admit students who have alternative qualifications to the matriculation. The use of entrance examinations, e.g. the Learning Aptitude Test (LAT) for Higher Education has been shown to reduce drop-out rates, but most faculties are not supportive of its use since the funding model used by the Ministry is based on the number of students, and the LAT has been shown to discourage prospective applicants.

The University is strongly focused on improving retention and graduation rates. Data from 2016-2019 show slow improvement, with differing approaches across the five schools, such as improved orientation sessions, revised handbooks and individual meetings with students at risk of dropping out. The Student Counselling and Career Centre provides holistic counselling services for all its students, from the time individuals consider enrolling for studies, during their studies, and finally for the transition period when they enter the labour market. Additionally, students will benefit from the new strategy for Teaching and Learning 2018-2021 (QESTL) that includes four projects that relate to the enhancement of the student learning environment, viz. Learning management systems, digital exam platform,

facility analyses, and improved utilization of IT in teaching. These efforts align well with ESG 1.4 and ESG 1.6.

3.3. External reference points and benchmarks

The University displays a desire for open, honest input and a commitment to learning from external reference points and international networks. This is exemplified by a concerted effort to grow extensive international research collaborations. A commitment to internationalisation and growing collaborations could be drivers for significant change.

The RA states that formal agreements with international universities on collaborative teaching arrangements are not common. Most faculties have agreements on exchange programmes for students and staff with international universities, as well as joint masters or doctoral programmes. International scholars are commonly recruited for membership in doctoral committees or as externals at defences. Independent international experts also participate in the SLR process. Useful comparator information is obtained through involvement in the Bologna Process, participation in international associations such as the EUA, the Council of Graduate Schools and the Aurora Universities Network. Although the QEF1 IWR emphasized the importance of increasing externality in setting and maintaining standards by obtaining input from external subject matter experts, the RA states that little effort has been put into addressing this issue. The comment is therefore still valid and should be seriously considered.

Discussions during the review suggested that there is variability across the University in terms of stakeholder engagement. The University would benefit from a more formalized approach to stakeholder engagement, including the creation of more advisory boards and

committees specific to particular fields, with specific goals and remits, as well as an advisory board for each school. Input from stakeholders can be valuable in judging the effectiveness of the curriculum and preparedness of students for particular employment sectors, in formalizing arrangements for student internships, and in setting the stage for more extensive research collaborations. Additionally, greater breadth of external expertise would assist in setting strategic direction and assessing societal impact. Greater stakeholder engagement would also help align the University's QA processes better with ESG 1.1, 1.2 and 1.9.

The International Office manages international affairs and is responsible for the administration of international student exchange agreements. This office utilizes multiple avenues of communication to ensure connectivity to the student community. Although UI21 references a strategy on international collaboration to be completed by spring 2020, there is no evidence that it is being finalised. Internationalisation is further hampered by difficulties faced by international students for whom Icelandic is a second language, for example in accessing mental health services and variability across faculties in other provisions, such as dictionary usage in examinations.

The University's language policy describes Icelandic as the written and spoken language of the University in teaching, research and, administration. However, the RA notes that the basic principle of the language policy is not being fully respected across the University and there are units in which English has become the *de facto* operating language. The RA goes on to state that it is not clear which governing body has the responsibility for ensuring that the language policy is implemented across the University. Since 2020, the International office has been a formal part of the Central Support Services. Although there is appropriate

hesitancy around changing the informality that generally works well, there is a need for policy and procedural infrastructure that would support the professionalism of central administration in this respect.

3.4. Resources for safeguarding standards

The management of quality is described in the new Quality Assurance Policy and framework for the QA System approved in June 2018 and updated in 2019, illustrating the totality of policies feeding into the overall QA System. The holistic approach incorporates requirements directly stipulated by QEF2 and ESG 2015, in addition to others related to equal wages, information security, occupational health and, environmental safety.

Whereas the Rector is responsible for the implementation of the University's QA system, the DQM oversees the QA system on a day-to-day basis under the authority of the Rector. Additionally, the school deans, faculty heads, and directors are responsible for the quality of operations within their respective units. It is clear that the University has a well-developed Quality Assurance Policy, and that a high value is placed on interpersonal communication and a collegial, academic community with short lines of communication. Downsides of this informal approach, coupled with the high level of autonomy afforded to the faculties, are inconsistencies and a siloed approach to teaching, learning and research across the university landscape. A well-developed, rigorous infrastructure of common academic standards and policies should be created and enforced across the University, providing a uniform academic infrastructure to the QA System that would work for all. Issues such as the role and function of the Graduate School, the inconsistent utilisation of Learning Outcomes, inconsistent involvement of students in the QA system and the lack of transparency regarding changes made in response to course evaluations will only be

remedied by a changed approach to management that is appropriate for a large institution such as the University of Iceland. It is highly unlikely that the goals of "agility" and "quality" in the new UI26 strategy will be realised without comprehensively revising the University rules (no. 569/2009), investing more authority centrally in the University, for example at the school-level, and engaging in the accompanying cultural change.

3.5. Design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes

All the University's academic programmes have been accredited by the Ministry. The RA references clear procedures for the preparation and organization of new programmes that were approved by the UC in 2010 and were recently revised with further reference to ESG 2015 Standard 1.2. Faculties are the principal academic units and are responsible for the curriculum. Proposals for new programmes emanate from faculties and go through review by the relevant faculty council, school board and, ultimately the UC for final approval.

Descriptive elements and details regarding study programmes are further specified in the course catalogue, which is under the jurisdiction of the Division of Academic Affairs. However, it was reported to the Team that the presentation of information in the course catalogue often did not facilitate students taking classes outside their home faculties.

The RA and supporting documentation reference the procedures schools and faculties follow to establish new study programmes. These guidelines are intended to ensure that preparation for a new degree is carried out in conformity with Article 53 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009 and Article 8 of the Higher Education Institution Act no. 63/2006. A review of any new programme occurs four years after its establishment. The review covers any changes made during the four-year period, such as enrolment,

academic performance and progress of students. The report goes to the school-level board, quality committee and, the Academic Affairs Committee of the UC.

There is recognition in the RA of the high number of programmes, some with very low enrolments, and that reducing their number may provide advantages in teaching and administration. It was further stated that any suggestions of mergers (formal) or enhanced collaboration (less formal) were largely opposed by the faculties. The University has approximately 350 programmes and about 550 academic staff and this high degree of compartmentalization is likely impeding productivity in research, teaching and societal impact. Streamlining the portfolio would very likely reduce teaching demands, open up avenues of collaboration benefitting students and staff, and reduce the high dependence on sessional staff.

The University is to be commended for making progress on SLR completions despite Covid-19. The addendum to the RA shows that progress has been made in the past year (at the time of the visit only SOE faculties and the Centre for Public Health had not completed their SLRs). Additionally, a work process for regularizing follow-up to action plans resulting from SLRs in QEF2 has been implemented in SOH as a test case.

Systematizing stakeholder engagement in the design and approval of new programmes and cyclical programme reviews was a stated goal of UI21. The RA describes stakeholder involvement in programme design and review as varying between faculties, both in magnitude and formality. Although some programmes are embedded in a particular job sector and are more attuned to capturing the needs of the sector in programme design and review, stakeholder involvement has not been systematically captured in the design and

approval of new programmes, although the University has enacted recent changes for the evaluation of new programmes. Improvement in this area would not only help the goals outlined in UI21, but would also bring practice in line with ESG 1.1, 1.2 and 1.9.

It is also recommended that equality has a more central place in the substantive development and delivery of teaching and to better align with ESG 1.1. This is consistent with the Equality Action Plan and the University value of equality. It also reflects the evolving (though at times controversial) developments across the sector towards exploring more diverse approaches to curricula and delivery.

3.6 Assessment policies and regulations

The University has published policies approved by the UC in 2014, that outline the organisation of course material, teaching methods and assessment to be presented in the course catalogue. Further details regarding assessment and examinations for a given course are to be included in the syllabus and the course website. Reviewers received comments regarding inconsistencies regarding the utilisation of student learning outcomes, course evaluations and the degree of (or lack of) formative feedback across programmes. There were also reports of examination practices and end-of-term projects being changed or announced at the last minute, perhaps as a result of Covid-19, but still having a negative impact on students. The lack of feedback has been raised in the Student Satisfaction Survey and the finding was embedded into QESTL declaring that current practices will be assessed and followed up with further strategies.

3.7 Consistency of grading and assigning of ECTS

Teaching is organized in courses evaluated in ECTS credits with each course, as a general rule, worth a minimum of 5 credits and a full-time study programme normally consisting of 60 ECTS per year. According to Act 85/2008, as referenced in the University rules no. 569/2009, decisions regarding study programmes and courses offered are made by school boards.

The document *Rules of procedure on good working practice in teaching and examination*, approved by the UC in 2014, outlines information to be included in the course catalogue and further developed in the course syllabus. Modes of assessment and examination are to be included in both documents. The weighting of course components, e.g. essays, oral examinations, practical evaluations relating to the calculation of final grades is to be included. Students have the right to receive an explanation of the evaluation of their written work and the rules document previously referenced contains information regarding the procedures for student complaints and appeals.

According to the RA, results from the Student Satisfaction Survey SSS (second year; third year since 2020) demonstrate that although students find the information on assessment and grading to be clear, they find feedback lacking. This reflection was borne out by discussions with students during the Review process.

3.8. Staff induction, appraisal and development

The RA states that 30% of all teaching is conducted by sessional staff. The size and scope of the University, as well as its location in a country with a small population, provides a partial explanation for the extent of teaching provided by the sessional staff. Given this reality, the

University is strongly encouraged to develop more robust and systematic quality processes and procedures to ensure the adequate integration of sessional staff as a critical teaching resource; to attend to the quality and continuous enhancement of the teaching delivered by sessional staff; and to support sessional staff in developing their pedagogical and IT skills, including working with new learning platforms such as CANVAS. The issue of very low salaries for sessional staff must also be addressed to retain the engagement and commitment of this integral component of the University's teaching delivery capacity. QESTL was adopted by the UC in 2018 and calls for increased support for sessional teachers are echoed therein.

The ES is not designed to provide a holistic review of academic staff, being almost entirely focused on the assessment of research. The University has made strides to rectify this to the extent it can and is encouraged to maintain that focus, and at the same time disseminate information on system changes as they are made. As is noted in 2.6 above, the ES has been debated and reviewed both internally and externally between 2015-2017. The main conclusion of the visiting group of evaluators was that "the system needs reform in itself in order to serve as a proper tool for promoting both quality and quantity in publishing". It went on to conclude that it would be "highly advisable to eliminate the use of the current ES for career development and add other systems for incentivizing work related to the other two pillars of academic activities, teaching and interaction within and outside of the academic community." At the time of the review, the University was developing new rules on promotion and permanent employment that would apply a more holistic evaluation of academic staff performance. In the current (2019) SLR process, international experts

commented on the dominant role of research over teaching and that it clearly affected the attitudes of academic staff toward their roles as educators.

The RA states that analyses had begun to determine whether the regulations for promotion should be detached from the ES and a broader portfolio approach adopted to allow for greater focus on a successful teaching record. The RA Addendum described work leading to a simplified organizational structure for the ES that was approved in December 2020, which is to be followed by more substantive revisions in 2021. UI should be commended for the establishment of the Teaching Academy of the Public Universities which received support from the Ministry. The main goal of the Academy is to strengthen the dialogue about teaching and teaching development within and between universities. Admission to the Academy is competitive and those who are selected receive additional monetary compensation.

In summary, multiple reviews have provided ample rationale for the development of an evaluation system that takes a holistic approach to the assessment of the work of academic staff. The current ES is heavily weighted toward research performance with little value placed on teaching and societal impact. A greater emphasis on achievement and innovation in teaching and societal impact will benefit students, faculty and enhance the overall reputation of the University.

3.9. Using SLRs to safeguard standards

The University has developed a methodological approach to conducting SLRs resulting in a uniform approach to these reviews. Unfortunately, as reported in the RA, more than half of staff surveyed said that the work associated with the SLRs was more than they anticipated,

that most of the work fell on the shoulders of a few people and that some faculty members were not willing to participate in the process at all. This is worrying in the light of the importance of the whole quality enhancement mission, and an obvious hindrance to its implementation. Improving this situation should therefore be a priority.

Follow-up monitoring of implementation plans is a weakness in almost every institution. The RA references the faculties' belief that follow-up could have been more focused and supportive, and that measures were developed to formalize the process in QEF2.

In the spirit of continuous enhancement, a system/workflow has been designed to ensure and facilitate a regular review of the action plans laid out following the SLRs, the self-review of management of research and, the self-review of CSS. This allows for a rigorous follow-up of improvement projects. The most important tool of this system is a dynamic MS Sharepoint/Teams™ list where actions, deliverables, deadlines and responsibilities are defined. The action plan is reviewed annually, and a status report is generated. At the time of each QEF cycle, the annual status reports are compiled and used as supportive material for the Reflective Analysis report. This system, which is designed to ensure that the action plans are attended to continuously between QEF cycles, is under constant development and gradually being implemented.

Stakeholders were represented on all SLR self-evaluation committees in QEF2 to ensure that an external voice (including former students) was incorporated in the review process. This is laudable and should be extended systematically to other QA processes, as noted above in Sections 3.3 and 3.5.

3.10. Summary evaluation of security of standards

The University of Iceland is entrusted with a complex mission as the research university for the entire country and the University offering the broadest array of programmes to both Icelandic and international students. Its strategic vision is compelling and has been enthusiastically received by the faculties.

The open and inclusive working style of the Rector, the school deans' genuine desire to work together, and the UC's good reputation set the stage for significant, positive change. The UC in partnership with the school deans should create implementation plans with strict timelines to address some of the most pressing issues identified in this review, such as critical analyses and restructuring of the number of faculties and programmes; establishment of common academic standards and policies with a mechanism for uniform monitoring and follow-up across the University directed at, but not limited to, doctoral programmes. Going forward, the Team suggests that the UC use its influence as the University's governing entity to seek changes in the law to permit a re-ordering of university governance and finance to provide for more centralized decision-making and greater authority vested in the School structure.

The University has many reasons to celebrate; enrolment is increasing, research productivity has grown, there is a sense of ownership around the updated Equality Plan and the University enjoys a high degree of public trust. The eLearning response to COVID-19 was a success and demonstrated agility and flexibility, and removed barriers that appeared insurmountable before COVID-19. The RA was candidly self-reflective and asked that the Team assess whether the governance structure was appropriately fit-for-purpose. At the same time, the Team also observed that the high level of autonomy afforded to the faculties

leads to inconsistencies in the treatment of staff and students, and in the administration of common standards and policies.

UI26 has bold initiatives and envisions significant accomplishments and reputational enhancement which will only be possible if significant, fundamental change within the University governance and management operations occur. Now at the end of IWR 2021, the Team sees the need for a general high-level strategic dialogue on the University's current state and future direction. This must include analysis of the challenges imposed by the present University structure that results in significant compartmentalisation, impedes productivity, and limits capacity for wide-reaching enhancements in research, teaching, and societal impact. This characterization is reflected in the number of items identified as recommendations in the QEF1 IWR that are largely unchanged despite development of multiple plans with numerous action items.

Overall, the Team judgment is confident in the standards of degrees and awards.

The text box below relates the linkages between ESG and the evidence of secure management of standards of degrees and awards, which underpins the confidence judgment.

As part of the review, the Team undertook a systematic evaluation of evidence of the University's procedures with reference to the ESG, and the commentary on ESG provided in Annex 11 of the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education*. The Team concluded that the University's procedures relating to managing standards are generally aligned to the ESG.

- The QA system relies on clear strategy and evaluation founded on reliable data. UI's research policy is aligned with the QA policy and framework for the QA System, in line with ESG 1.1: *Policy for Quality Assurance*. However, the Director of Quality Management needs to be better positioned in the management structure of the University, and the position of the Graduate School in the governance structure is unclear.

- Appropriate mechanisms are in place for general alignment with ESG 1.2 *Design and approval of Programmes.* Admission requirements, workload, and learning outcomes are defined for each degree qualification and there is documentation outlining procedures School and Faculties follow to establish new study programmes. Stakeholder involvement in these processes varies.

- In relation to ESG 1.3: *Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment*, the team found that students are active participants in SLRs but their engagement in other QA processes is inconsistent, perhaps due to lack of training from the University. The Centre for Teaching and Learning assists in the analysis and revision of LOs across Schools and Faculties but implementation is not uniform. Students find information on assessment and grading to be clear, yet find feedback often lacking. The most pressing concern to address in this area pertains to developing clear, fair, and accessible policies and procedures for complaints and appeals in doctoral programmes.

- Admissions policies and procedures are well-developed and publicized on the website and in print materials, which is in line with ESG 1.4: *Student Admissions, Progression, Recognition and Certification*. The University's focus on improving retention is showing slow improvement, with different strategies being employed across schools.

- There are established rules and processes for the appointment and promotion of academic staff that align with ESG 1.5: *Teaching Staff.* There is a tension between the UI26 strategy, with its balanced emphasis on research, teaching and societal engagement and the focus on research in the ES. The establishment of the Teaching Academy of the Public Universities was a step towards addressing this imbalance. Sessional staff makes a sizable contribution to the University's teaching mission but their induction and professional development, as well as the quality management of their teaching, need attention.

- Resources provided by the University to enhance the student learning experience are well aligned with ESG 1.6. *Learning Resources and Student Support* and the University is commended for its excellent library services. The University's commitment of resources to student mental health services is also commendable.

- The University has invested in and is making increased use of new IT systems, which will facilitate the use of key data for evidence- based QA in accordance with ESG: 1.7 *Information Manag*ement. In particular the University's participation in the Aurora Universities Network promises to provide it with ample and structured opportunities for benchmarking.

- A large amount of quantitative and qualitative data are collected in an ongoing fashion. The new data portal will facilitate utilisation of data in generating custom-made reports. There has been further development of Mímir, the data warehouse Ugla and a dashboard for performance indicators in education, research, social participation and, human resources. All of these steps resonate well with ESG 1.8: *Public Information*.

- Stakeholder involvement in programme review varies between faculties both in magnitude and formality but stakeholders have been represented in all QEF2 SLRs so far. It is important that the University implement its proposed transition from periodic review to a continuous enhancement process. The SLR follow-up process has been strengthened but further work is needed to fully align with the intent of ESG 1.9: *On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes.*

4. Student Learning Experience

4.1. Overview: Management of quality of student learning experience

The University is ambitious to deliver a high-quality student learning experience. This approach has continued since IWR1 with a new strategy "A Better University for a Better Society" that was in draft form at the time of the review. The University has clear quality structures (such as quality and academic affairs committees) and centrally provided support services. The University encourages interdisciplinary courses, engagement with research and international experiences. Aligning with ESG 1.3, the University has frameworks for gathering student feedback on teaching, learning and the wider student experience (such as regarding support), and for making complaints, building on the QEF1 IWR report.

Evidence gathered suggests a variety of approaches in responding to feedback, to making students aware that there will be action (and if not, why not), and to creating an environment in which students feel it is worthwhile to raise points (see also Sections 4.5 and 4.6, below).

Overall, the University manages the student learning experience in an acceptable manner, however more consistency and constructive and sensitive intervention is recommended.

4.2. Relevance of Case Study to enhancing student learning experience

The University selected student psychological services as its case study. These are of great relevance to the student learning experience, especially in light of results from EUROSTUDENT polls suggesting a high prevalence of mental health problems among Icelandic university students. This topic also aligns well with ESGs 1.3 and 1.6. The

University's commitment of resources to student mental health services at no charge via UISCCC is commendable and demonstrates significant dedication to student support.

UISCCC staff commented that as a result of the pandemic psychological services and other services offered were moved online, with "part-time" and distance learning students now able to enjoy greater access. Students expressed great satisfaction with the psychological services offered by the UISCCC, but not all students are aware of these services and they could be better advertised. Some additional funding was made available in 2021 to meet increased demand and other solutions are also being explored, such as providing these services through software applications.

In summary, it is highly commendable that the University offers free-of-charge psychological services to its students. To fulfil its mission, it should put greater resources into the UISCCC and engage in a communication plan to raise awareness of the service.

4.3. Resources for enhancing student learning experience

Students generally agreed that facilities and resources available to them were sufficient and supported them in their studies but this was variable across subject areas. In some cases, students noted laboratories having old IT equipment and testing devices being out of order. Library services were praised for accommodating students with special needs but students noted a lack of study spaces on campus. Students commented that older university buildings tend to have poor accessibility for people with disabilities, insufficient WC facilities and/or poor air quality and it is recommended that to the extent possible, these problems be addressed in close cooperation with the student body.

The shift to digital teaching in response to COVID-19 and increased use of online resources and platforms such as Canvas™ and Inspera™, has helped with meeting diverse student needs. COVID-19 has resulted in a loss of community and it is recommended that energy and resources are focused on restoring on-campus activities after the pandemic has receded.

4.4. Recruitment, admissions and induction

The University enjoys being the largest, oldest and best known university in the country, giving it an advantage over other universities in terms of student recruitment. The website is the main recruiting tool of the University but it markets itself to upper secondary students at various events, including the University Day. As noted in Section.3.2, above, debate continues regarding the approaches taken to admissions tariffs.

The diversity of the student body in terms of race and immigrant members does not reflect that seen across Iceland as a whole. Retention rates and student progression continue to be issues of concern although the University is commended for changes brought about building on the QESTL.

Students interviewed agreed that induction at the start of the autumn semester was helpful in getting to know the University, their programme and other students, and its online welcome (consistent with ESG 1.1), which was accelerated through COVID-19 has been valuable particularly for international students. The QESTL highlights the importance of encouraging student participation in social activities and student feedback suggests that more focus on this would be valuable. This should enable students to become more closely invested in and linked with the community, which is likely to increase further the prospect

of their choosing to remain (see ESG 1.4). There are also suggestions that non-Icelandic members of the University society, both staff and students, face challenges related to their background. More emphasis on inclusion and diversity is therefore warranted in the processes of recruitment, admission and induction. This would promote an inclusive and diverse experience for students, consistent with ESG 1.1.

4.5. The student voice and engagement of students in QA

The Student Union of the University is very active and its leadership is proactive in advancing students' interests. The Student Union has representatives in the University Council and the Governing Board of all five schools, and a student representative was included in the Editorial team of the RA.

The QESTL states that: "students are full and active participants in the University learning community", and that "teaching methods…are designed to encourage teamwork and positive communication between students and staff." Consistent with this, overall, students interviewed agreed with this sentiment and felt their voices were listened to and that they were taken seriously. The Student Union noted that it has easy access to the Rector's office and that they could easily engage in informal conversation with the University's administration in general. In more formal settings, students feel their voice is not heard as much, and commented that there is a lack of opportunity for proper debate. It is therefore recommended that the University allow students to have more of a visible, formal voice in proposing and preparing matters to go for discussion in senior committees and councils.

Student representatives interviewed noted that students were not overly interested in quality assurance and that it has been a problem to engage students with the enhancement

process; similar points were made by the RA editorial team. Student representatives also noted, however, that they do not receive any formal training to prepare for these roles. It is recommended that such training be provided, perhaps through collaboration between the Student Union, the University and the National Union of Icelandic Students (LÍS), to support students and to increase engagement, consistent with ESG 1.1. The Student Union may also consider electing their own quality manager, like LÍS has done for many years, to work in collaboration with the University's quality manager.

Student feedback is collected through three types of surveys: the SSS, administered annually for undergraduate students and biannually for postgraduate students, a mid-semester Course Evaluation for each course, and the final Course Evaluation Survey. Participation in the SSS has been high, at around 67% at undergraduate level. Student satisfaction is therefore monitored regularly, as per ESG 1.3.

The SSS does not include questions on diversity and equality is only probed to a limited extent (one survey question). It is recommended that more such items be included, aligned with ESG 1.1, and this may also be useful in work towards the University's Equality Action Plan.

Students whom the team met noted repeatedly that it is unclear how feedback from these surveys is utilised. It is recommended that the results are shared in an appropriate and sensitive manner, for example in a summary email to all students, to better align with ESG 1.7. More awareness of survey results and how results are acted upon is likely to increase engagement in quality assurance.

Overall, students feel that they are active participants in creating their learning process. Students' easy access to the Rector and administration are generally commended, with the exceptions noted above. However, it is recommended that the feedback loop be made more transparent (to align further with ESG 1.3 and 1.9) and that students are involved in the co-creation of surveys, as indicated in ESG 1.1.

4.6. Student support services, including serving needs of different student populations

The University operates extensive student support services via the CSS (see also Section. 4.2, above) and the University of Iceland Student Counselling and Career Centre (UISCCC) which are committed to meeting the needs of the diverse group of students. CSS has benefitted from a central review which has reduced the siloed approach that previously dominated in this unit. Support is provided for students with disabilities, learning impairments or special needs. Some services, notably counselling, are still only offered in Icelandic (see also Sections 4.9 and 4.10, below), although services for students with Icelandic as a second language have improved greatly. The University operates a Mentoring/Buddy scheme for exchange and international students, which is commended.

UISCCC staff have access to student analytics, with which they can identify students that are falling behind and may need more help. Engagement with student analytics can support students and aid retention (in line with ESG 1.1. and 1.4), and the UISCCC staff is urged to continue to balance privacy and needs in individual cases.

The University of Iceland Student Counselling and Career Centre (UISCCC) provides career advice and QESTL includes an increased focus on professional development in cooperation

with future employers. The student and career counselling services are appreciated by Icelandic students, although alumni suggest that there is opportunity for further engagement with this group in relation to career development, as the alumni network has been largely inactive.

The view was frequently expressed that CSS services should be better advertised and that there was increasing demand. Support for part-time and distance students has improved since services were moved online due to the pandemic, and CSS staff were enthusiastic about continuing this. Overall, students agreed that if a problem arose, they would know where to seek help.

The University has an Equality Action Plan (see also Section 4.5, above) and the Team observed noticeable commitment to equality in terms of gender and the LGBTQ+ community. The student body is diverse to a degree, with a high percentage of older students, who may have families and have previously been (or still are) in full- or part-time work. Many students are also effectively part-time, although University data systems do not have a special category for this status. However, the number of students at the University with immigrant backgrounds is low and not reflective of the general population. That is likely largely explained by dropouts at earlier stages of education, but still warrants attention from the University.

 To align further with ESG 1.1, it is recommended that more attention and resources should be devoted to Equality action on issues pertaining to race and immigration (see also Section 4.4, above), as well as physical access inequalities, and the inability of part-time students to enrol in on-campus courses.

It is recommended that the University's Equality Committee should have representation from more non-majority groups in order to increase its credibility. This appears particularly pressing for members of the University community who do not have Icelandic as a first language.

It is also recommended that the University build on successes in response to COVID-19 by considering investment in providing additional staff resources and in offering CSS services in the evening for working students or those who have caring responsibilities. This investment, in line with ESG 1.4, would potentially increase retention and wellbeing and reduce the time involved by academic and specialist support staff in addressing situations if they escalate.

It is recommended that the University consider ways to augment career guidance services, aligning with a growing global sector focus on employability and to increase equity for students who may lack their own networks.

Overall there are some strong services provided, but the Team recommends more flexibility in provision, as well as a continued focus on careers and employability.

4.7. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

The University aims to deliver high quality learning, teaching and assessment with a student focus, as reflected in its goal of creating a student-empowering learning environment. The impression gained from the written evidence and from meetings with staff is of strong commitment to students. We commend the establishment of the Teaching Academy and the proposed steps to better recognise teaching in the revision of the ES (see also Section 3.9, above).

It was a recurring theme in the RA and in interviews that the independence afforded to faculties often translates into a lack of central oversight, as noted in Section 3.1, above. The Team observed the implementation of learning outcomes to be inconsistent, a point also raised in the RA, and this needs careful consideration and correction to align more with ESGs 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. Some students reported variety in the weight of credits (ECTS) and actual workload, and the Team noted different experiences from students on how staff react to feedback.

It is recommended that the University review the quality culture among staff in a constructive and supportive manner, to ensure that all students benefit from a high standard student-centred experience. It is recommended that the University leadership, including Deans, take more of an active role in identifying and managing the workload of teaching staff to ensure that they have appropriate time to respond sensitively and in an agile way to student feedback (see also Section 3.5, above). This reflection should also include the priority accorded to distance learning and varied forms of study, building on QESTL and ESG 1.3.

There have been some successes in delivery of collaboration across faculties, schools, and with industry to bring about a student-centred experience. The Science Park is an example of best practice in enterprise engagement, which includes teaching, research and innovation strands, and the redesign of the curriculum, based on a workshop across industries and through an employability analysis.

There are some opportunities for students to undertake formal and informal internships to spend a period in a different country and to work with students on exchange from other

countries. However, exchange is very difficult to near impossible in some programmes. It is recommended that developments on these opportunities continue and that there are formal structures (advisory boards and partnership agreements) to support stronger enterprise collaboration (see also Section 3.3, above).

4.8. Use of sessional/adjunct teachers

The University makes use of approximately 2,500 sessional staff in a given academic year who deliver approximately 30% of all teaching. The QEF1 IWR noted this high number, as well as the importance of better monitoring their contribution and improving training and support for these staff. Some notable improvements have been made during UI21, such as new handbooks. Sessional staff are also recognised by students for the quality and relevance of their teaching.

The Team made special note that the sessional teachers it met were committed staff members who enjoy their work and feel they are making a difference. Sessional staff feel listened to and able, at least to an extent, to influence the content and design of their courses, feel well connected, appreciated and supported. However, sessional staff felt that they are not involved in quality enhancement processes and get little feedback on their teaching from permanent staff.

Sessional staff bring in expertise and make a valuable contribution to teaching and mentoring at the University. At the same time, it is recommended that procedures be developed to ensure consistent integration of the significant number of sessional staff and to ensure the quality and continuous enhancement of the important teaching they deliver.

For example, more pedagogical or teacher training could be offered and other upgrading of skills, in alignment with ESG 1.5 on staff development.

Overall, sessional staff make valuable and, in most cases, effective contributions. It is recommended that the University continues developing support for sessional staff, while more streamlining of programmes should also reduce the high reliance on this group (see also Section 3.5, above).

4.9. Internationalisation and the language experience

The University is committed to preserving the Icelandic language, reflecting its historical and cultural position in Iceland and Iceland's commitment to the language. The RA states that the University is in the process of clarifying the responsibility for implementation of its language policy to address recommendations related to language policy in the QEF1 IWR. Students with Icelandic as a second language or non-speakers of the language expressed problems, for example regarding inconsistent policies on dictionary use and a lack of support services and events in English. To this extent, the University could do better in fulfilling ESG 1.6, which includes accommodating the needs of a diverse student body. Some commendable innovative projects, such as *Sprettur*, have been put in place to support students with immigrant backgrounds. However, it was reported to the Team that there are instances of students who are unable to transfer credits earned on an international exchange.

The University is a committed member of international networks and offers its students international experiences while welcoming international students to seek degrees or on exchange visits. In 2018 the total enrolment was approximately 12,700 and 10% were

international students. Students are provided with rich experiences, but questions regarding the language policy and the provision of support remain as noted above, and the Team commends the recognition that it is now timely for a more strategic approach.

The Team recommends that there be greater focus on the induction process for international students, including assisting with language, and raising awareness of, and engagement in co-curricular opportunities, and for students who come for full degrees, by offering a more comprehensive orientation to Iceland, student finance and housing benefits. More training in Icelandic is recommended, as well as a review to promote equity in the provision of courses and support services in Icelandic, English or both. This would further contribute to the sustainability of the language and to a welcoming and inclusive experience for students who do not have it as their first language.

It is recommended that the University address possible problems with the transfer of credits in the specific programmes where this occurs. Overall, the international experience is a real strength (both incoming and outgoing) and it is recommended that the University develops its systems, notably regarding language, to support and enhance this.

4.10. Links between research and teaching

It has been a goal of the University to secure the relationship between teaching and research, especially for undergraduates. Some students have opportunities to link their education with research although there is understandable variety across subjects. Students generally agree that they can be involved with staff research if they are interested, and staff referred to initiatives to strengthen these links, such as through the Science Park and Icelandic Start-ups. There are however programmes in which students may have to finish

without a final research final project or thesis. Culminating projects within degree programmes provide opportunities to help students develop transferable skills and can be a key factor in gaining admission to postgraduate studies. It is recommended that increasing opportunities for final projects should therefore be a priority. If this is not possible, the University should be clear and consistent under what conditions students are not to be offered these opportunities. Programmes with increasing enrolment need to create meaningful culminating experiences within their programmes if thesis projects are not made available to all.

The variety of courses offered reflect opportunities for staff to deliver research-led teaching and for students to benefit from this. The recommended review of courses and programmes set out in Sections 3.4, 3.5, and 3.8 (above), to streamline the range of courses at masters level including through collaboration (see also Section 4.12, below), should enable further research-led teaching and opportunities for student research and further alignment with ESGs 1.5 and 1.9.

Overall, there is some excellent practice linking research and teaching and it is recommended that there be more consistency and complementary changes to enable this to grow.

4.11. Postgraduate programmes

The University offers taught and research masters and doctoral programmes, and there are examples of successful collaboration across faculties at the doctoral level (see also Sections 3.1. 3.12 and 3.13, above). Significant longstanding issues still exist regarding the management and standards of doctoral programmes, as noted in Section 3.1, above.

Establishing an Ombudsman system to allow students to file grievances, complaints and concerns to a neutral person would be a critical improvement towards meeting ESG 1.3 and is highly recommended.

It is recommended that a supervisor training programme be introduced. The development of a cross-institution programme which is then refined and delivered by respected professors in schools, including some "master classes" by and for those with more experience, may address previous difficulties regarding the possibility of this. This training would enhance the student experience and be consistent with the approach of other members of the international networks of which the University is part. Another path would be for training to be delivered collaboratively with international research partners, which would enable good practice from the University to be shared. It is also recommended that the University takes immediate steps to clarify the profile, roles and functions of masters programmes across the University (see also Section 3.1, above).

Although there have been some valuable improvements for the PhD programmes, it is essential that further improvements occur. Development and implementation of peer training for supervisors is highly recommended. Additionally, action directed at masters level programmes is highly recommended as outlined in Section 3.1, above.

4.12. Management of information

The University has invested in, and is making increased use of new IT systems: Canvas™, Inspera™, a data management portal Mímir (which will give access to key data and generate custom reports) and the intraweb Ugla (see also Sections 3.8 and 4.3, above). This will be a major improvement of the data administration system at the University and will facilitate

the use of key data for evidence-based QA, and is aligned with ESG 1.7. It is recommended that the University continue to develop its information management systems in a considered and integrated manner, such as through a dashboard system, to enable the best use of existing data by staff and students, building on work already under way. Section 4.5 (above) also contains a discussion of how the University utilises survey data.

Overall, there are some excellent systems and practices at the University. It is recommended that there is more linking and use of data, and reflections on how it is used.

4.13. Public information

Students reported that information on the website about their programmes was accurate and consistent with their experiences once enrolled in the programme. Most information is available in both Icelandic and English. The University annually publishes "Facts and figures", which contain useful information on HR, students, graduations, research and collaboration, finances, comparison with other Nordic universities, and the University's green economy. These efforts align well with ESG 1.8.

4.14. Using SLRs to enhance student learning experience

The University has completed many SLRs at faculty level and is commended for its commitment and diligence to this process (see also Sections 3.3 and 3.5, above). The Team is concerned, however, that the focus on the detail and data of the SLRs may limit high level and strategic focus.

It is recommended that the University provides more central support to the faculties for executing their action plans arising from SLRs. The central and upper administration should

also use SLRs to identify recurring themes across faculties to inform and shape quality enhancement leading to resolution of issues that have repeatedly arisen. Examples include: significant issues in PhD programmes generally; inconsistent usage of Learning Outcomes; lack of consistency in approach to issues across schools; student retention; and academic staff workload and collaboration issues. This is especially concerning, given similar points made in the QEF1 IWR.

Overall, there is excellent practice in carrying out of SLRs and it is recommended that there be more focus on prioritising, implementation of policy and enabling change, with support from upper and central administration, aligned with ESGs 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, and 1.9.

4.15. Summary on the student learning experience

The University of Iceland provides its students with ample opportunities to have a positive student learning experience. This is exemplified in high quality support services, increased access to mental health care and good library facilities. The student voice is embraced by the University administration, and student representatives have a close relationship with the University's leadership.

Main drawbacks identified in the Team's visit included frequent reports of inconsistent application of learning outcomes, shortcomings in postgraduate programmes (especially at the doctoral level), and problems arising when Icelandic is a second language. The Team is confident that these problems can be addressed in the next cycle of the QEF.

Overall, the Team judgement is of confidence in the quality of the student learning experience.

The text box below relates the linkages between ESG and the evidence of secure

management of the quality of student learning experience, which underpins the confidence

judgment.

As part of the review, the Team undertook a systematic evaluation of evidence of the University's procedures with reference to the ESG, and the commentary on ESG provided in Annex 11 of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education. The Team concluded that the University's procedures relating to student learning experience are aligned to the ESG.

- ESG Standard 1.1: *Policy for Quality Assurance*. The University recently approved a comprehensive framework for Quality Assurance. It is recommended that equality matters have a more central place in the substantive development and delivery of teaching and there be more consistent engagement with policies and processes across the institution.
- ESG Standard 1.2: *Design and Approval of Programmes*. There are clear processes for programme approval and these are used in some innovative ways, as seen in a Case Study submitted as part of the RA. A review across programmes is recommended to ensure appropriate allocation of staff time, consideration of interdisciplinary teaching and ongoing consistency regarding use of Learning Outcomes.
- ESG Standard 1.3: *Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment*. There is a policy on assessment; there are tools, mainly through surveys, for student engagement; and there are complaints systems. It is recommended that there be more consistency across the University in following processes for engaging students in feedback processes, responding to feedback and communicating back to students actions taken in response to their feedback. There is limited flexibility for individual learning paths, for example, to formally study part time and inconsistencies exist regarding distance learning.
- ESG Standard 1.4: *Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification*. There are admissions processes, which are also under review, and the University is commended for steps taken to improve retention. Students were satisfied with induction to their programmes. It is recommended that there be a continuing focus on student experience, co-curricular activities and providing feedback to enhance further retention and success.
- ESG Standard 1.5: *Teaching Staff*. There are staff and student surveys, a Teaching Academy and early developments towards staff evaluation that will include more links to teaching. A more systematic approach to managing sessional staff is recommended and a sharper focus on enabling interdisciplinary and collaborative teaching.
- ESG Standard 1.6: *Learning Resources and Student Support*. There is an excellent library, enhanced IT systems (fully supporting responses to COVID-19) and support for counselling and careers. It is recommended that increased resources be focused on student support and that a more strategic approach be taken to careers support.
- ESG Standard 1.7: *Information Management*. There are strong data collection systems and plans in place to enhance linking of information and responding to it. It is recommended that there be increased transparency on data gathering and sharing, particularly when it comes to closing feedback loops to students.
- ESG Standard 1.8: *Public Information*. The University shares information on its website and students reported that information on their study programme was accurate and consistent.
- ESG Standard 1.9: *On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes*. The University has strong review systems for its programmes and these are carried out methodically and with student involvement. It is recommended that the University take a new approach to prioritising action items and delivering change.

5. Management of Research

5.1. Research policy and strategy

In its current strategy, UI21, the University establishes that its overall mission and policy regarding research is to further strengthen its position as Iceland's "leading scientific institution, conducting research in all academic fields' and its 'strong position in the international scientific community". To deliver on this policy, the University's particular strategic focus during 2016-2021 has been to invest in "a solid infrastructure and support system, support for international collaboration, and enhancing quality and technical transfer of research," as noted in the RA.

In order to achieve these goals, the five schools were tasked with conducting a self-evaluation of their management of research, the so-called school-wide SLRs of management of research (see also Section 5.10, above).

The University's research policy and strategy are aligned with its QA Policy and framework for its QA System, which lay out the guiding principles that underpin QA work related to research. Specific QA policies include the University's Code of Ethics; Code of Research Ethics; Data Protection Policy; Equality and Diversity; Standards and requirements for the quality of doctoral programmes; the ES; and Employment Duties.

The Pro-Rector for Science oversees research-related initiatives, activities and development, including quality assurance and development related to research. The Pro-Rector is the Chair of the University Council Science Committee, a standing committee of the University Council, which serves the purpose of strengthening research activities and encouraging discussion on the nature and function of research in the various fields of study. The Science

Committee works closely together with the Division of Science and Innovation, a central administrative unit charged with supporting and monitoring joint university matters relating to research, such as consultancy for academic staff and institutes; and strengthening cooperation between faculties and institutes in the field of research. The main projects of the Division involve management of research-related funds, evaluating the performance of academic staff, the work of evaluation committees (recruitment and promotion), and managing university statistics.

At the school level, research related initiatives, activities and development, including quality assurance and development related to research, are coordinated by a Science Committee with members from the school's faculties and a student and/or PhD student representative. The Chair of each school's Science Committee represents the school in the University-wide Science Committee. Moreover, over the last five years, all schools have appointed a Director of Research and established a central research office that, together with the school level Science Committee, assist the dean with strategic research issues. Some schools have appointed a Head of Quality Administration. Key elements in monitoring the strategy at the school level are typically: funding applications and tracking the outcomes; annual scores of research points; progress of PhD students and PhD graduations; and staff and student satisfaction surveys.

Innovation did not play a major role in the UI21 strategy. The University now declares its intention to more clearly incorporate innovation into the UI26 strategy. These aspirations build on the University's many connections in industry, on the Science Park and on the new Innovation and Business Growth Centre (a collaborative initiative for universities and businesses being built near the University campus; see also Section 5.7, below). Further,

participation in the Aurora Alliance, which was selected for EU funding in 2020, constitutes a promising platform for innovation, interdisciplinary research and benchmarking that will be important for the UI26 (see also Section 5.6, below).

The University's internal system for distributing research resources is not specifically structured to promote Blue-Skies Research, for example, but is more about deciding the distribution between schools and faculties, and resources come with no strings attached to them. The focus is on ensuring academic freedom but also on the limitations associated with being, by international standards, a small university in a small country. Discussions about how to stimulate Blue-Skies Research have however been initiated at the national level. During the lifetime of the UI21, the University has used a number of key performance indicators to monitor developments in research quality (league table ranking; research impact factors), innovation (innovation projects), collaboration (publications through international collaboration), infrastructure (research grant income per academic staff); and allocation of in-house funds dedicated to support research.

The Team finds that, overall, the University's research policy and strategy, supported by relevant QA policies and processes, have served it well in terms of enhancing the management and development of its research, as evidenced by the key indicators of research quality and productivity during UI21 (details in the following sections).

The Team finds that improvements are required in the areas of doctoral education and interdisciplinary research. Since 2015 several initiatives have been developed to enhance doctoral studies (see also Section 3.1, above). The current structure that assigns responsibility for graduate programmes to individual faculties is a deficiency reflecting the

lack of a comprehensive governance structure with common standards, processes and procedures for all programs. Doctoral education continues to face major issues of critical mass in terms of the number of students, courses and, supervisor capacity to match the current 72 doctoral programmes (2020 figures). Additionally, there is considerable variability in the quality of supervision across the University. The initiative to establish required training for all PhD supervisors should be reconsidered.

Moreover, all schools now have a school-level PhD Coordinator, which has proved helpful in terms of better liaison with the Graduate School, with school-level activities and in terms of supporting the schools' efforts at coordinating doctoral education internally across their respective units. Finally, in 2021, the establishment of a University Ombudsman function has been proposed in response to the absence of effective processes for handling PhD students' feedback, concerns and critique and the Team, as noted before, is supportive of that proposal.

When it comes to interdisciplinary research and mobilising the University's research to address broader societal challenges, the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that the University has successfully engaged in a number of research projects addressing the nature and impact of the pandemic. While this is encouraging, reports also state that, in less urgent times, interdisciplinarity is impeded by a pronounced reluctance in many faculties to 'overstep' boundaries and because some faculties are either 'too small or too weak', as acknowledged in the RA.

In the view of the Team, the challenges identified with the University's doctoral education and interdisciplinary research are tightly connected to the University's complex internal

organisation. The opaque division of power and responsibilities between central bodies, the five schools and the 26 faculties hinders adequate and consistent standards and support systems; and it slows down progress towards honouring the University strategic goal of increasing the quality and level of interdisciplinary research activities. The Team recommends that the role and mandate of the deans be strengthened in order for progress to happen in this area; also the role, mandate and number of faculties and departments need to be critically reviewed.

5.2. Monitoring of scientific quality of outputs

The annual performance reviews of the research activities of the academic staff constitute one of the pillars in the University's monitoring of the scientific quality of its research outputs. These reviews are in turn based on the ES. The main component in the ES is research, carrying by far the most weight. While these reviews are systematic and inform promotion and rewards, the RA states that the system is in need of reform in order to measure quality rather than quantity; to measure impact; and, more generally, to provide a more holistic appraisal of academic performance across "research, teaching and active participation in society and industry". As the ES is operating for all four public universities in Iceland, there are limitations to what the University of Iceland alone can do. The Team commends that the University has committed to revising aspects of the ES to address these critiques, which will take effect as of November 2021. There are indications, though, that the proposed changes are not yet well known amongst staff, so the Team recommends that the adjustments be effectively communicated to all staff.

Close monitoring of the University's position in international university rankings (such as the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities and Times Higher Education World

University Rankings) provides it with valuable indications of the scientific quality of its research and thus also of the academic uptake and impact of its research. Another closely monitored indicator is the percentage and number of peer-reviewed papers produced with international partners, which reflects the University's integration in the international research community. The annual number of peer-reviewed papers and the annual number of citations of papers by university researchers have increased steadily since 2015.

Overall, the Team finds that the University's quality assurance system for monitoring the quality of its research outputs is adequate and effective.

5.3. External support

As mentioned earlier, during UI21, the University's research-related focus has been to enhance pre-award support, and more recently also post-award support. The total amount of research money awarded to the University by the Iceland Research Fund, and by FP7 and H2020 fluctuates, but overall it has increased (not least the money awarded by the FP7 and H2020).

The University is also prominently featured in Iceland's recent Research Infrastructure Roadmap, where it participates in all 6 large-scale facilities that resulted from its first phase, leading 5 of them. This will inform the UI26 strategy.

5.4. Impact

UI21 establishes as future goals that "the creation of knowledge should have a wide impact and that the University is a responsible participant in a society that promotes equality, diversity and sustainability". When it comes to academic impact, the RA and data provided

by key indicators during UI21 provide evidence of growing academic impact (see also Section 5.2, above).

When it comes to societal impact, the picture is less clear. During UI21, a new grant system that supports active participation of academic staff in society through their research and expertise has been introduced. Still, the University's own account of the societal impact of its research, which was presented to the Team during the University Showcase, reflected the view that this impact had reduced during the lifetime of UI21. Importantly, according to the University, part of the reason for the decline in impact is the quality and relevance of the metrics used for capturing societal impact.

The Team commends the University's intent to address this difficult but critical task for universities in today's world, in part by developing metrics fit for purpose. One resource in this respect is the University's partners in the Aurora Universities Network.

5.5. Institutional enhancement of research management

A key focus in UI21 has been to strengthen its pre- and post-award support. In addition to this, the University has appointed a Research Director at each school (see also Section 5.1, above), and increased in-house funds dedicated to enhancing research during 2015-2020 in a number of areas through project grants and doctoral student grants. These efforts have been recognised by staff and have reinforced the interconnectedness of the University-wide research strategy and research efforts at the school level. Increases in the non-governmental income per FTE also suggest that the University's efforts in the area so far have been effective.

In the view of the Team, clear roles and mandates are critical for further institutional enhancement of research management, and this is particularly important for the deans. In its RA, the University stated that it intends to develop quality across the university, with special emphasis on strengthening communication and leadership. UI21 refers to a plan to clarify and strengthen the duties of a head of faculty through longer terms of employment and increased support (the term is two years according to law). The University has worked on requesting faculty heads to serve two consecutive terms and indeed many of them do so. The Review Team recommends that the University continues this effort. The only initiative addressing leadership is to offer academic university leaders various types of training. The Team finds training is welcome but insufficient and recommends that the University take the necessary steps to ensure that the deans use the power they already have to manage research within their schools.

5.6. Collaboration and benchmarks

The University is well connected internationally, as evidenced by the percentage of peer-reviewed publications co-published with international partners, and it monitors which universities its researchers collaborate with most frequently. The University is an active institutional partner in several international networks and associations working to enhance academic excellence and relevance, such as the EUA, the Association of Nordic University Rectors Conference, the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe, the Aurora Universities Network and through its exchange agreements with more than 400 universities.

In particular, the University's participation in the EU-financed (as of 2020) Aurora Universities Network promises to provide it with ample (and structured) opportunities for benchmarking, as well as sharing and co-developing innovative practices. The Aurora

Universities Network was selected by the European Commission "as one of the 41 European University Initiatives supported through the Erasmus+ programme to lead the way to a European Higher Education and Research sector that contributes to a Europe of prosperity and well-being". The Aurora Universities Network is a network of nine "research-intensive universities deeply committed to the social impact of our activities and with a history of engagement with our communities[2]."

In most cases, the schools have not developed formal mechanisms for benchmarking their research activities apart from looking towards the international ranking lists (see also Section 5.2, above) and relevant research institutions in their respective fields for benchmarking.

When it comes to the University's collaboration with business and industry, its capacity and track record vary across schools and specific research environments. On the one hand, the University's embeddedness in a small, close-knit society like Iceland means that external stakeholders in Iceland see it as a natural partner and indeed a key player in joint efforts to advance different knowledge fields and sectors, notably in the technical areas, as well as in health care and health sciences. Many researchers have personal connections into Iceland's major companies. Further, the Science Park has so far generated several partnerships and start-ups. The Innovation & Business Growth Centre is also seen as an opportunity for further developing the University's collaborative potential.

On the other hand, the University's many internal organisational boundaries limit the appetite for trespassing on the "turf" of other units and more effort is needed to draw all

[2] https://aurora-network.global/aurora-european-university-alliance-programme-accepted/

disciplines into these endeavours, including those that relate to leveraging the potential of the Science Park. The current, largely informal, dialogue with Icelandic stakeholders can also be strengthened by systematically exploring more links between the University's research and expertise and developments on the one hand, and needs in business and society on the other, to facilitate further synergy. Moreover, the University is aware of the need to enhance the information flow to society through its website, to publicise the work of its researchers more visibly and, in part through this, generate more external support for collaborative research activities.

The Team commends the University's many excellent links to its Icelandic stakeholders. Here, also, however, the Team finds that the University's many small units are a barrier to developing systematic collaborative and innovation efforts with Icelandic business and society , as well as a barrier to scaling up the mobilisation of relevant research environments around this type of collaboration.

5.7. Teaching-research balance

The employment duties of academic staff are specified by a university regulation stipulating that teaching, research and academic services make up 48%, 40% and 12% of staff effort, respectively. The teaching obligation of newly hired academic staff is 50% of the regular percentage during their first year in office.

Indicators, however, suggest that the level of job-related stress remains high and reducing stress, in particular for academic staff, is a focus area in the emerging UI26. Until now, the University has sought to remedy the lack of teaching by research faculty doing overtime and through sessional teachers. A new rule means that professors will no longer be allowed to

take on overtime teaching, which is expected to further increase reliance on sessional teachers.

In the view of the Team, research is indirectly and negatively impacted by the workload that flows from academic staff running and teaching in the University's 285 programmes at the bachelor and master levels, in addition to its 72 PhD programmes, thus spreading themselves very thinly over multiple teaching-related tasks and responsibilities. For this reason, also, the Team recommends that the University review its programme portfolio with a view to reducing and merging programmes.

5.8. Support for grant-getting activities and grant management

As previously mentioned, the University has focused during UI21, on improving its research infrastructure, notably by developing its pre-award support for researchers seeking external funding and introducing a research manager plus a central research office at each school. These initiatives have improved pre-award support although there is still room for improvement, and there is now a focus on enhancing post-award support services.

5.9 Using SLRs to manage research on an institutional level

At the time of the IWR QEF2, SOH and SOSS had finalised their SLRs of MoR. The last SLR of MoR has been scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2022. Therefore, the Team finds that it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the SLRs to manage research on the institutional level. The evidence from the completed SLR MoRs, however, suggests that some schools consider post-award support for PhD students and support of interdisciplinary research areas in need of further enhancement. Moreover, the SLR MoR has been a welcome opportunity to review the school research strategy and to get input from external

experts. Some schools note that the SLRs in general have helped each school to understand that in many cases the other schools face similar issues.

The University has developed a system/workflow designed to ensure a regular review of the action plans laid out as a result of not only the SLRs and the self-review of the central support services, but also the SLR MoRs. The Team recommends that this function be well monitored and supported by upper management.

5.10. General comments on the management of research

The Team finds that the University's management of research has been effective at reaching institutional goals, as evidenced by initiatives since QEF1 to strengthen its research infrastructure and by the growth in research outputs during the period since the IWR in QEF1. This is confirmed by the percentage of publications co-authored with international partners, increased non-governmental external funding and increased recognition in external rankings of its current performance.

The Team, however, recommends that the University's management of doctoral education, as an integrated aspect of managing the university's research, be enhanced, in particular to ensure consistency of quality and standards across schools, faculties and PhD programmes. Another area of enhancement is to develop internal structures so as to better accommodate interdisciplinary research collaboration between the University's many units.

In UI26, to be implemented from Autumn 2021, the overall research focus continues to be further enhancement of research infrastructure and then more specifically the establishment of a project management office supporting researchers. Other research-related areas that the emerging strategy identifies as important include the need to develop

metrics, in particular for monitoring the University's societal impact; to maintain its international research in a competitive environment; and to work towards a more holistic evaluation system better suited to reward all of research, outreach/public engagement and teaching. The Team is of the opinion that the focus areas of enhancement listed in the emerging new strategy are appropriate.

However, the Team also finds that the University's plans for how to further enhance its research to a much larger degree have to reflect and engage two of the emerging strategy's overall guiding principles, namely a) quality and b) agility. As for quality, the Team recommends that more coordinated work go into implementing a robust quality assurance system, including shared quality assurance processes, procedures and standards across key aspects of its research operation. As for agility, the Team finds that such an aspiration requires very specific work on how to scale up and enhance the University's capacity to bear on complex societal challenges, in Iceland and internationally, research and teaching wise. For both "quality" and "agility", the Team finds that the complexity of the University's current organisational structure must be addressed to reach the intended strategic goals.

6. Managing enhancement

6.1. General enhancement context

The University has a unique position in the Icelandic higher education system as the national comprehensive university, accounting for approximately two-thirds of national enrolments. The history, heritage and scale of the institution is a source of great strength, and comes with particular responsibilities to support research and teaching from bachelors to doctoral level across a very wide range of subject areas.

There have been very significant strategic developments at the University over the last 15 years, with a commendable focus on strengthening research and the international connectedness of the University with important achievements in these domains.

There is a commendable commitment to strategic planning, action planning and quality enhancement at all levels of the institution, with staff, students and stakeholders sharing an ambitious vision for the development of the University underpinned by a clear strategy and a culture of continuous improvement.

The University strategy, reflective analysis and quality assurance policy clearly express this commitment to a quality culture, based on the principles of academic freedom and professionalism and the values of the University, and characterised by continuous reform and learning from international trends and policies.

The quality culture at the University is based on genuine engagement by staff, students and stakeholders. Morale within the University is good, with a genuine interest in the strategic enhancement of quality, though workloads are high and this limits the time available for staff to become involved in strategic and quality enhancement initiatives. Students and their leaders are clear and articulate, and their voice is heard in setting institutional strategy and policy, though it remains challenging to connect fully with a very diverse student body. External stakeholders are very positive about the quality of the University's research; its approach to innovation; the knowledge, skills and attributes of its graduates; and they are keen for a greater level of ongoing involvement and the development of advisory boards and structured partnerships with each of the Schools of the University.

A collegial organisational culture, good relationships and short lines of communication make for cohesive formulation of strategy and support (but do not guarantee) effective implementation. It is important to create, within this positive environment, forums and spaces for critical reflection and constructive dialogue, where difficult questions and issues can be raised and addressed and internal siloes can be broken down; those charged with leadership at university, school and faculty level should be supported and empowered to challenge the status quo and lead effective change.

The quality culture of a university will be influenced by its systems of incentives, recognition and reward. The ES is dominated by performance in research, and as a result research is the decisive factor for promotion and determination of salaries. Furthermore, the outcomes of the ES also influence the internal allocation of research funds and grants, sabbaticals, workload allocation and the distribution of funding between schools and faculties. Despite the dominance of research in the formal system of incentives, the Team saw evidence of a real commitment to quality enhancement and innovation in teaching and learning. The valuable role of the Centre for Teaching and Learning in facilitating this was highlighted in a number of meetings

Quality enhancement is core to the work and the professional identity of the managerial and administrative staff of the University. Their leadership and contribution has been essential to the success of the University, and strategic academic initiatives have been more successful when underpinned by teams working in partnership between central administrative units and schools.

It is clear to the University community that quality enhancement works: for instance, the initiative to introduce Canvas™ and Inspera™ to support blended and distance learning meant the University was better prepared than it otherwise might have been for remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The approach to quality enhancement is rooted in international best practice through strong connections to the EUA and more recently the Aurora Universities Network.

Quality enhancement informs and is driven by strategic planning, and the University has developed a compelling and visionary strategy for its future in UI26 titled *A Better University for a Better Society*. The strategy has broad support, is built on key principles of agility, quality and trust, and highlights the need for greater interdisciplinarity, internationalisation and broad societal engagement. There is a clear motivation to learn from the experience to date of quality review and enhancement, and to move from periodic review and enhancement action plans to a process and culture of continuous improvement and reform.

This forms a very strong basis for ongoing quality enhancement. However, the Team also identified important obstacles to strategic development and quality improvement which, if not addressed, will make it difficult for the University to achieve its ambitious objectives and systematically enhance the quality of its research, teaching and engagement.

The organisational structure of schools, faculties and departments is too complex, and neither fit for the purpose of delivering strategic change quickly and efficiently, nor sufficiently supporting common standards, innovation and continuous quality improvement. The key strategic objectives of quality, agility and interdisciplinarity will not be achieved without a simplification of this structure, and a change in emphasis. There is a critical need

for better alignment, co-ordination and effective use of resources across faculties. The School is the ideal locus for strategic planning and quality enhancement, and the Schools should be empowered to lead strategic initiatives and set common quality standards across the constituent faculties.

The manner in which academic programmes are designed and delivered, as a large number of separate programme pathways within faculties and departments, is a significant obstacle to collaboration, interdisciplinarity and curricular innovation. A systematic approach is required at the level of the school to strengthen and streamline course and programme provision to ensure effective co-operation, optimal use of staff time and capabilities, support for a diversity of disciplines and genuine interdisciplinarity, and an enhanced learner experience.

The implementation of the financial and resource allocation model further reinforces boundaries between faculties and schools, and deans need to be supported to, individually and collectively, invest and allocate funding and resources in support of the University's strategic goals.

There is a tension between the UI26 strategy, with its balanced emphasis on research, teaching and societal engagement, and the focus on research in the ES. The latter represents a risk to the motivation of staff to innovate in teaching, become involved in reform, or engage with external partners. The University should continue to work to change the system to better recognise, reward and incentivise the full spectrum of academic activity and support the broad strategic goals of the University.

Finally, leadership at school and faculty level needs to be further professionalised and empowered.

6.2. Strategic planning and action planning

The University has a mature and sophisticated approach to the formulation of its strategic plan, refined over several cycles of planning, which has led to the development of UI26. There is a clear and commendable commitment to implementing strategy and enhancing quality through action planning. The staff and students of the University see value in the strategic planning and quality review processes, in that they align colleagues to common purpose and create a sense of team.

However, the complexity of the organisational structure, combined with a tendency to take a quality management approach, has led to a large number of separate excessively detailed action plans across schools and faculties (and even departments within faculties). The RA speaks about "simplifying the procedure and introducing continuous enhancement plans, particularly for the regular revision of programmes" but no clear plan is provided; rather, the Team saw evidence that the burden of work associated with periodic review, and the generation of a large number of separate action plans may reduce staff engagement, make the process and progress less visible, and lead to recommendations being lost and actions not being implemented.

The Team recommends that the University implement its proposal on "simplifying the procedure and introducing continuous enhancement plans, particularly for the regular revision of programmes" (p. 4). The University needs to simplify and strengthen its approach, both to implementation plans for the strategy and action plans for quality

enhancement. The school is the ideal primary unit for strategic and action planning, taking an integrated view across the faculties within the school, to developing shorter action plans focused on strategic priorities, to be implemented collaboratively across those. These plans should be clearly visible across the schools, with regular updates, so that colleagues can see progress.

Equally, the need for one strategy and action plan for the development of central services is acknowledged and it is recommended that the University take this approach.

The move to conduct SLRs simultaneously across a number of faculties is a step in the right direction. It is clear from the reflective analysis and a review of SLRs that the follow-up process has been strengthened but it is not obvious that "cross-cutting enhancement themes of relevance to the School" (p. 17) lead to action.

It is recommended that the transition from periodic review to continuous enhancement be achieved in two ways. First, by simplifying the process of periodic review leading to one action plan across the faculties within a school. The emphasis in quality enhancement should be to empower colleagues to achieve meaningful change, rather than to manage quality through detailed action plans. There is a danger that a large number of action plans diffuses implementation and makes it harder to see the big picture. Action plans should continue to be a core component of strategic planning and quality enhancement, but integrated into a smaller, more manageable number of plans across schools and administrative units. Second, by complementing this with thematic review and enhancement projects, at faculty, school or university level, to address important challenges and opportunities in a focused and time-bound manner. An area where thematic review and

enhancement would work well is to develop and improve masters provision which is seen as an opportunity to collaborate across faculties and schools.

6.3 Committee Structure

The UCQC is a standing committee of the University Council with clear terms of reference to guarantee and enhance the quality of teaching and learning, research and administration by reinforcing the formal University quality assurance system and enhancing quality culture within the University. The UCQC is, on behalf of University Council, responsible for the design and oversight of the QA system for the University, recently updated in 2018. The UCQC consists of seven members, appointed for a three-year period, one from each school, and a graduate student representative. The Committee meets at least once per month.

The UCQC offers clear and insightful leadership in quality assurance and quality enhancement with able and energetic support by the DQM. The DQM was hired in 2017 and a new manager of the University QA System in June 2019.

This is a robust and effective governance structure, which functions well. It is important that these structures be empowered to ensure that common themes emerging across quality enhancement processes at school and faculty level are identified and appropriate actions taken; in particular the Team recommends that the University Council support the Pro-Rector of Academic Affairs and Development and the DQM and, as well as the UCQC and other university committees, in establishing and enforcing common standards, policies and approaches across faculties and schools where quality processes identify the need for these, and in ensuring the QA framework is fully and effectively implemented throughout the University. The Team recognises the work of University Council and UCQC can be dominated

by regular governance and oversight matters. It is important that University Council and UCQC set aside time to discuss strategic quality enhancement, and to have critical and reflective discussion about priority enhancement projects, as these will be areas that require significant and perhaps challenging cultural and organisational change. It is important that University Council and UCQC discuss these issues and set clear directions, as the authority and endorsement of Council are essential if change is to be achieved, and it empowers those within the University leading and managing change.

Given the contribution of administrative staff and sessional teaching staff to the teaching and research mission of the University, it should consider whether the UCQC should be expanded to include representatives of these categories of staff.

6.4. Evidence Base

An appropriate range of evidence is used to support the quality enhancement process. There have been important advances in recent years in the use of key performance indicators and a pilot of a new data management portal, which will allow strategic and key performance indicators to be reported upon at different levels of the University. The use of these key performance indicators to inform judgements on strategy, progress and quality was evidenced during the review.

The University relies on student surveys, conducted under the auspices of the Social Science Research Institute, to understand the student experience and how it might be improved. This rigorous approach, grounded in social science methodology, is an example of best practice, and it was clear in the course of the review that these surveys are widely used as

an enhancement tool. The student voice is clearly heard both through these survey instruments and through student involvement in governance at all levels of the University.

The Team recommends the wider use of focus groups and student meetings to contextualise and enrich the evidence for quality from survey instruments. The Team saw evidence of best practice in some faculties and schools where there were regular open meetings of students with the dean and school leadership.

The evidence base to assess quality and performance in research is good, though over-reliant on the ES. The University should continue to show leadership in reforming the ES to recognise and support a more diverse range of contributions and achievements across research, teaching, engagement and service. Similarly, the University should continue to develop its own internal mechanisms on recognition and reward. This should also support balanced excellence. When it comes to the evaluation of research, both internal and external, the Team supports the reforms to place an even greater emphasis on evaluating the quality and importance of the research output as well as the volume of published work.

It is difficult for any university to assess and measure its wider impact on society. Given the direction of the new University strategy, and its concern with engagement and social gain, there is an interest in gathering better evidence and indicators of impact. The Team recommends the approach being taken by the University: to establish what is best practice across peer networks in assessing knowledge exchange, innovation and societal impact, and implement the most appropriate of those.

There is an opportunity also for each school to formalise and structure its relationship with key external stakeholders in an advisory board, which could provide an important source of evidence to assist the University and its schools in assessing the societal value of their work.

6.5. Benchmarks and internal sharing of best practices

The University is an outward-looking university that actively seeks out international networks, partnerships and best practice to enhance its work. The EUA, EUA Council for Doctoral Education, the Council of Graduate Schools in the US, the Nordic Association of University Administrators, and the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe were all cited as important sources of best practice and benchmarking. The EUA and the Aurora Universities Network are particularly important to the University, and the value of these international links was evidenced during the review, including specific reference to benchmarking the University's performance in areas such as research and innovation.

The Team recommends that the University build on the progress made and use international benchmarking in a more systematic way to enhance quality. This could include identifying a small number of peer universities of similar scale and scope to provide benchmark data for the University key performance indicators; identifying exemplar or benchmark institutions for major quality enhancement projects and to partner with for benchmarking exercises; and supporting each school to identify a small number of comparable high-performing schools to provide benchmarking data and share good practice.

The Division of Academic Affairs – in particular, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Department of e-Learning and Examination Office – is the primary means by which the

University identifies and disseminates examples of best practice in teaching learning and assessment within the University. There is an opportunity for the University to further stimulate the internal circulation of good practice and innovative approaches: school-wide conferences, research showcases and teaching showcases are valued by staff and can promote co-operation and a sense of shared purpose and identity within a school. It is recommended that such school-wide conferences and showcases be maintained and developed with clear objectives to share good practice and stimulate collaboration and innovation across faculties. The Teaching Academy is an important and welcome initiative in this regard.

6.6. Drawing on international experiences and domestic cooperation

The University of Iceland, as the national university, offers leadership in domestic co-operation, driving the establishment of the Rectors' Conference and chairing that body. The DQM, within this framework, collaborates closely with the heads of QA in other Icelandic universities.

The University approach to quality enhancement is also firmly rooted in international experience, and the input of peer universities through the EUA was formative as it developed its quality assurance and quality enhancement approach. International networks and good practice continue to be a key component of quality enhancement, which is commendable. It is recommended that the University continue this, with an eye to adopting a more formal process for benchmarking.

The University has a very good relationship with external stakeholders; the University and its graduates are held in high regard; and public trust in the University is high. It is

recommended that the University formalise its relationship with key groups of external

stakeholders by forming advisory boards, which could advise on the strategic direction and

societal impact of the university and provide a structure that better involves external

stakeholders in quality enhancement. The University should also consider establishing an

external advisory board for each of its schools.

6.7. Evaluation

The University has a commendable dedication to quality enhancement aligned to a clear

and ambitious strategic plan. Subject-level and institution-wide reviews are reflective

processes, bringing people together to consider how quality might be improved, current

strategic objectives might best be achieved, and what strategic objectives should be set for

the future, and creating a sense of teamwork and cohesion. Quality enhancement is

overseen by a strong committee and governance structure; uses an appropriate evidence

base including benchmarking; and draws extensively on international best practice.

However, there is no doubt that staff and students perceive implementation of important

quality enhancement initiatives (such as the use of learning outcomes, the structured

doctorate, the language policy, equality policy) to be incomplete, and variable across

faculties. It is evident to the Team that the organisational structure of the University makes

it difficult for the University to achieve its strategic and quality enhancement goals. The

Team make a set of recommendations designed to support the University and its leadership

in achieving those goals. These recommendations are broad, and go beyond managing

enhancement, but in the considered view of the Team are required for the successful

management of quality enhancement.

The school is the ideal unit for strategic planning, quality enhancement, implementation and action planning. Deans and school boards should be empowered to drive strategic change, require common standards, stimulate interdisciplinarity, and promote a collective and collaborative approach to quality across faculties.

A systematic approach is required at the level of the school to strengthen and streamline course and programme provision to ensure effective co-operation, optimal use of staff time and capabilities, support for a diversity of disciplines and genuine interdisciplinarity, and an enhanced learner experience.

Leadership at school and faculty level needs to be further professionalised, and the term of office of the Dean of School and Head of Faculty need to be long enough to achieve strategic and quality enhancement objectives: 3-5 years would be the international norm. Furthermore, leaders in academic and administrative units require adequate time and support for leadership training and development.

The financial and resource allocation model and processes need to be adjusted so that deans are supported to, individually and collectively, invest and allocate funding and resources in support of the University's strategic goals.

The University should continue to work to change the system to better recognise, reward and incentivise the full spectrum of academic activity and support the broad strategic goals of the University.

6.8. Summary on managing enhancement

The overall approach to managing enhancement at the University is commendable, with a well-developed process for periodic review and action plans for quality improvement. This approach has yielded important achievements in recent years. The University is moving to further refine its approach, simplifying the procedure and fostering continuous enhancement plans, including the regular revision of programmes. The Team endorses this direction, and makes a set of recommendations to support a more uniform and comprehensive approach to quality enhancement across the University. The most important recommendation is to simplify the organisational structure so that the school becomes the primary unit for strategic planning, quality enhancement, and academic programme planning. In this model, deans and school boards drive strategic change, require common standards, stimulate interdisciplinarity, consolidate academic programme provision, and promote a collective and collaborative approach to quality across faculties.

7. Conclusion

7.1. General summary, including overview of management of research

The Team is very grateful to the Rector, University Council, staff and students for the warm virtual welcome to the University. The Team acknowledges how constructive and helpful all who met with the Team were. Without exception, all contributed in meetings with positivity, candour, and were genuinely concerned to give their views of the University's approach to standards, quality and research. These included very helpful examples and instances from their own practice and experience.

The RA presented a picture of a university that is outward-looking and self-reflective, as well as committed to having a positive impact on it students and society. In several areas there has been considerable progress in development since the IWR in QEF1 and various other reports. The Team found sufficient evidence to confirm the RA and to enable the Team to make the confidence judgements noted in 7.4 and 7.5 below.

In relation to management of research, the Institutional Team wishes to highlight that the University's management of research is effective as evidenced by initiatives, since QEF1, to strengthen its research infrastructure, and by the growth in research performance during the period since the IWR in QEF1. This is confirmed by the percentage of publications co-authored with international partners and increased non-governmental external funding, and there is recognition of its current performance in external rankings. The University of Iceland's management of doctoral education, as an integrated aspect of managing the university's research, should however be enhanced, in particular with regard to ensuring consistency of quality and standards across schools, faculties, departments and doctoral programmes. Another area of enhancement is to develop the University's internal structures so as to better accommodate interdisciplinary research collaboration between its many units (schools, faculties and departments).

7.2. Summary of strengths

- The University's strategic vision is compelling and has been enthusiastically received by the faculties.
- There is effective communication across the institution, characterised by short communication lines and accessibility to the Rector and upper management.
- There is a desire for open, honest input and a commitment to learning from international networks, exemplified by a concerted effort to grow extensive international research

collaborations. This commitment to internationalisation and the growing collaborations could be drivers for change.

- The University is appropriately self-reflective in identifying areas for improvement, and deans, for example, express a desire for greater consistency in standards. There is also a strong commitment to developing action plans in response to identified areas for improvement.

- A methodological approach to conducting SLRs has been developed, resulting in a uniform approach to these reviews.

- The University has a high level of public trust. The University Council's work on reputational and external matters is excellent but could be complemented by a more visible focus on teaching and research.

- The Central Support Services review is seen as positive in reducing the siloed approach that previously dominated.

- The addition of a PhD coordinator for each school is a positive development, as is the creation of a toolbox for doctoral students and supervisors. In a similar vein, the appointment of teaching developers for each school from the ranks of academic staff is to be applauded.

- Student and career counselling services are appreciated by Icelandic students.

- The Student Union is well connected to the Rector and the students feel that they are being engaged and heard.

- The updated Equality Plan has clear indicators of ownership and investment of human resources. There is a strong focus on gender and queer issues that works well across the whole institution.

- The eLearning response to COVID-19 was a success and demonstrated agility and flexibility. The response to COVID-19 removed barriers that appeared insurmountable before COVID-19.

7.3. Summary of areas for improvement

Areas for further development that the University will need to consider include:

- There is a need for general high-level strategic dialogue on the University's current state and future direction, including an analysis of the challenges imposed by the present University structure that results in significant compartmentalisation, impedes productivity and limits capacity for wide-reaching enhancements in research, teaching, and societal impact.

- The high level of autonomy afforded to the faculties leads to inconsistencies in treatment of staff and students. Common academic standards and policies must be created and enforced across the University to address issues such as inconsistent treatment of doctoral students, inconsistent utilisation of Learning Outcomes and the lack of transparency regarding changes made in response to course evaluations.

- It is highly unlikely that the goals of "agility" and "quality" in the new UI26 strategy will be realised without comprehensively revising the University rules (no. 569/2009), investing more authority centrally in the University, for example at the school-level, and engaging in the accompanying cultural change.

- As numerous items identified as recommendations in the IWR in the previous cycle are largely unchanged despite development of multiple plans and action items, it is incumbent on the University to create an implementation plan with strict timelines to address a limited number of its most pressing issues.

- The Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs and Development and the Director of Quality Management need to be further empowered to effect change across the University in conjunction with the relevant committees. This would aid the University in learning from and implementing change in response to SLRs and other reviews, for example.

- The University should streamline its portfolio of over 350 programmes in order to reduce teaching demands, and in turn the high dependence on sessional staff.

- Significant issues exist with regards to the management of doctoral programmes. The University needs to establish comprehensive policies that provide basic rights and standards and are uniformly applied and enforced across the institution. Particular attention must be paid to provisions addressing supervision irregularities and the processes for providing feedback or filing a complaint given the inherent power imbalance.

- The University should take immediate steps to clarify the profile, roles and functions of masters programmes across the University. Included in this effort should be an analysis of the role of the Graduate School and the development of general policies and procedures which would frame the operation of every programme.

- The Evaluation System for Public Higher Education Institutions in Iceland does not provide a holistic review of academic staff. The University has made strides to rectify this to the extent it can, and is encouraged to maintain that focus and at the same time disseminate information on system changes as they are made.

- Robust and systematic quality processes and procedures must be developed to ensure the consistent integration of the significant number of sessional staff and to ensure the quality and continuous enhancement of the important teaching delivered by sessional staff.

- The Equality Plan needs to address the inability of part-time students to enrol in courses if not provided through eLearning, and the difficulties faced by international students for whom Icelandic is a second language, for example in accessing mental health services.

- The Equality Committee should have representation from more non-majority groups in order to increase its credibility. This appears particularly pressing for members of the University community who do not have Icelandic as a first language.

7.4. Judgment on managing standards of degrees and awards

Overall, the Team concluded that confidence can be placed in the soundness of University of Iceland's present and likely future arrangements to secure the academic standards of its degrees and awards.

7.5. Judgment on managing quality of student learning experience

Overall, the Team concluded that confidence can be placed in the soundness of University of Iceland's present and likely future arrangements to secure the quality of the student learning experience.

Annex 1: Visit Schedule

Time	Meeting	Attendees
10:00-10:30	**Briefing with Rector**	Dr. Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector and President
10:30-12:00	**University Showcase**	Dr. Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector and President Dr. Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector for Science Dr. Guðmundur R. Jónsson, Managing Director of Central Administration Dr. Róbert H. Haraldsson, Head of Division of Academic Affairs Halldór Jónsson, Head of Division of Science and Innovation Dr. Áslaug Helgadóttir, Director of Quality Management
13:00-13:25	**Self-Evaluation Team**	Dr. Jón Ólafsson, Chair of the UC Quality Committee Dr. Áslaug Helgadóttir, Director of Quality Management, Chief Editor Dr. Eiríkur Stephensen, Project Manager, Quality Team Sigurður Ingi Árnason, Project Manager, Division of Academic Affairs
13:30-14:30	**Management Team**	Dr. Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector and President Dr. Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector for Science Dr. Guðmundur R. Jónsson, Managing Director of Central Administration
14:50-15:50	**Senior management of QA**	Dr. Róbert H. Haraldsson, Head of Division of Academic Affairs Dr. Áslaug Helgadóttir, Director of Quality Management Guðný Benediktsdóttir, Manager of the UI Quality System Dr. Eiríkur Stephensen, Project Manager, Quality Team

Tuesday May 4

Time	Meeting	
10:00-10:50	**Deans of Schools**	Dr. Stefán Hrafn Jónsson, Dean of SOSS Dr. Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, Dean of SOH Dr. Inga Þórsdóttir, Dean of SOHS Dr. Kolbrún Þorbjörg Pálsdóttir, Dean of SOE Dr. Sigurður Magnús Garðarsson, Dean of SENS
11:00-12:00	**Senior staff of support units/services**	Dr. Róbert H. Haraldsson, Head of Division of Academic Affairs Anna Birna Halldórsdóttir, Director of the Student Service Desk Kristín Jónasdóttir, Director of the Student Registry María Dóra Björnsdóttir, Dir. Student Councelling and Career Service Páll Ásgeir Torfason, Head of Department e-Learning Dr. Guðrún Geirsdóttir, Associate Professor at SOE and Director of the CTL Sveinn Klausen, Course Catalogue Editor Sigurður Ingi Árnason, Project Manager, Division of Academic Affairs
11:00-12:00	**Administrative heads of support units/services**	Ragnhildur Ísaksdóttir, Head of Division of Human Resources Dr. Friðrika Harðardóttir, Head of the UI International Office Guðmundur Kjærnested, Head of Division of Information Technology Jón Örn Guðbjartsson, Head of Marketing and Communication Halldór Jónsson, Head of Division of Science and Innovation Ingibjörg Steinunn Sverrisdóttir, National Librarian
13:00-13:30	**Student Union Representatives**	Rebekka Karlsdóttir, President of Teaching Matters Committee Hjördís Sveinsdóttir, Managing director Sara Þöll Finnbogadóttir, Student loan representative Emily Reise, International officer
13:00-13:30	**Doctoral Student Union Representatives**	Katrín Ólafsdóttir, Chairperson Drífa Jónasdóttir, Board member Auður Magndís Auðardóttir, Board member Ole Sandberg, Board member Pontus Järvsted, Board member
13:30-14:20	**SENS Students**	Not disclosed. N = 5
13:30-14:20	**SENS Staff**	Dr. Guðmundur Valur Oddsson, SENS representative in Quality Committee Dr. Magnús Örn Úlfarsson, Head of Electrical and Computer Engineering Dr. Guðmundur Freyr Úlfarsson, Head of Civil and Environmental Engineering Dr. Einar Örn Sveinbjörnsson, Head of Physical Sciences Dr. Freysteinn Sigmundsson, Earth Sciences Dr. Arnar Pálsson, Deputy Head of Life and Environmental Sciences Dr. Edda Ruth Hlín Waage, SENS representative in Academic Affairs Committee Dr. Rúnar Unnþórsson, Head of Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science Dr. Sveinn Agnarsson, Chair of the Board of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Programme of Environment and Natural Resources

14:40-15:20	**SOE Students**	Not disclosed. N = 2
14:40-15:20	**SOE Staff**	Dr. Auður Pálsdóttir, SOE representative in Quality Committee Dr. Ragný Þóra Guðjohnsen, SOE representative in Academic Affairs Dr. Committee Dr. Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson, Head of Education and Diversity Dr. Kristín Jónsdóttir, Head of Education and Pedagogy Dr. Ársæll Már Arnarsson, Head of Health Promotion, Sport and Leisure Studies Dr. Freyja Hreinsdóttir, Head of Subject Teacher Education
15:20-16:10	**SOHS Students**	Not disclosed. N = 5
15:20-16:10	**SOHS Staff**	Dr. María Guðjónsdóttir, Head of Food Science and Nutrition Dr. Engilbert Sigurðsson, Head of Medicine Dr. Ellen Flosadóttir, Odontology Dr. Urður Njarðvík, Head of Psychology Dr. Elín Soffía Ólafsdóttir, Head of Pharaceutical Sciences Dr. Herdís Sveinsdóttir, Head of Nursing Dr. Hákon Hrafn Sigurðsson, SOHS representative in Quality Committee Dr. Þórdís Katrín Þorsteinsdóttir, SOHS representative in Academic Affairs Committee Dr. Arna Hauksdóttir, Head of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Programme of Public Health

Wednesday May 5

Time	Meeting	
10:00-10:50	**SOSS Students**	Not disclosed. N = 5
10:00-10:50	**SOSS Staff**	Dr. Gylfi Magnússon, Head of Business Administration Dr. Birgir Þór Runólfsson, Head of Economics Dr. Trausti Fannar Valsson, Head of Law Dr. Maximilian Conrad, Head of Political Science Dr. Jónína Einarsdóttir, Head of Sociology, Anthropology and Folkloristics Dr. Guðný Björk Eydal, Head of Social Work Dr. Jóhanna Gunnlaugsdóttir, SOSS representative in Quality Committee Dr. Marías Halldór Gestsson, SOSS representative in Academic Affairs Committee
11:00-11:50	**SOH Students**	Not disclosed. N = 6
11:00-11:50	**SOH Staff**	Dr. Geir Sigurðsson, on behalf of Languages and Cultures Dr. Sólveig Anna Bóasdóttir, Head of Theology and Religious Studies Dr. Steinunn J. Kristjánsdóttir, Head of History and Philosophy Dr. Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir, SOH representative in Quality Committee Dr. Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, SOH representative in Academic Affairs Committee Dr. Torfi H. Tulinius, Head of Icelandic and Comparative Studies
13:00-13:45	**On staff and student surveys**	Dr. Guðbjörg Andrea Jónsdóttir, Director, Social Science Research Institute Dr. Róbert H. Haraldsson, Head of Division of Academic Affairs Ragnhildur Ísaksdóttir. Head of Division of Human Resources
13:00-13:45	**On equality**	Dr. Brynja Elísabet Halldórsdóttir, Chair of UC Equality Committee Arnar Gíslason, Equal Opportunity Officer Sveinn Guðmundsson, Equal Opportunity Officer Rakel Ósk Reynisdóttir, Diversity Officer Dr. Snæfríður Þóra Egilson, Professor in Disability Studies Dr. Þorgerður Einarsdóttir, Professor of Gender Studies Mars Proppé, Equality Officer, Student Union
13:45-14:30	**Open meeting – students**	Not disclosed. N = 1
13:45-14:30	**Open meeting – staff and larger community**	Not disclosed. N = 2
15:00-16:00	**Alumni**	Not disclosed. N = 4
15:00-16:00	**Stakeholders**	Not disclosed. N = 6

Thursday May 6

Time	Meeting	
10:00-11:15	**Research administration**	Dr. Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector for Science Dr. Eiríkur Smári Sigurðsson, Director of Research, SOH Hulda Proppé, Director of Research, SOSS Halldór Jónsson, Head of Division of Science and Innovation Baldvin Zarioh, Head of Department, Division of Science and Innovation Úlfar Kristinn Gíslason, Project Manager, Division of Science and Innovation Dr. Guðrún Kristjánsdóttir, SOHS representative in Science Committee Dr. Rajesh Rupakhety, SENS representative in Science Committee
11:30-12:30	**Graduate School**	Dr. Guðlaug Þóra Kristjánsdóttir, Office Director of the Graduate School Dr. Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector for Science Dr. Eiríkur Smári Sigurðsson, Director of Research, SOH Dr. Þorgerður J. Einarsdóttir, SOSS rep on Graduate School Board and chair of SOSS Doctoral Committee Dr. Atli Harðarson, SOE rep on Graduate School Board and chair of SOE Doctoral Committee
13:30-14:30	**University Council**	Dr. Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector and President, chair Vigdís Jakobsdóttir, Artistic Director of the Reykjavík Arts Festival Jessý Jónsdóttir, student representative Isabel Alejandra Díaz, president of the Student Council Ásthildur Margrét Othardsóttir, Consultant and Chair of the Board of Directors of Marel hf, nominated by the University Council Einar Sveinbjörnsson, Meteorologist and CEO of Veðurvaktin, representative of the Minister of Education, Science and Culture Dr. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, Research Professor at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, nominated by the University Council Dr. Ingibjörg Gunnarsdóttir, Professor at the Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition, School of Health Sciences, representative of the University community and vice-chair of the Council Dr. Jón Ólafsson, Professor at the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies, representative of the University community Dr. Ólafur Pétur Pálsson, Professor at the Faculty of Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science, School of Engineering and Natural Sciences, representative of the University community Siv Friðleifsdóttir, Deputy Director General at Ministry of Social Affairs, representative of Minister of Education, Science and Culture
15:00-15:45	**Sessional staff**	Ágúst Arnórsson, Faculty of Economics Auður Ketilsdóttir, Faculty of Nursing Hörn Hrafnsdóttir, Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering Vanessa Monika Isenmann, Faculty of Languages and Cultures Hildur Bettý Kristjánsdóttir, Faculty of Education and Diversity
15:00-15:45	**Support staff for sessional staff**	Jónína Helga Ólafsdóttir, Project Manager, Division of Human Resources Thorana Elín Dietz, HR Manager, School of Health Sciences Dr. Herdís Sveinsdóttir, Head, Faculty of Nursing Dr. Einar Örn Sveinbjörnsson, Head, Faculty of Physical Sciences

Friday May 7

Time	Meeting	
10:00-10:30	**Follow-up with Deans of Schools (individual meetings)**	Dr. Stefán Hrafn Jónsson, Dean of SOSS Dr. Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, Dean of SOH Dr. Inga Þórsdóttir, Dean of SOHS Dr. Kolbrún Þorbjörg Pálsdóttir, Dean of SOE Dr. Sigurður Magnús Garðarsson, Dean of SENS
10:30-11:15	**Follow-up with Pro-Rector**	Dr. Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector for Science
11:30-12:15	**Follow-up with Rector**	Dr. Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector and President
12:15-13:00	**Follow-up with Chair of Quality Committee**	Dr. Jón Ólafsson, Chair of the Quality Committee
13:00-13:45	**Follow-up with Deans of Schools (group meeting)**	Dr. Stefán Hrafn Jónsson, Dean of SOSS Dr. Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, Dean of SOH Dr. Inga Þórsdóttir, Dean of SOHS Dr. Kolbrún Þorbjörg Pálsdóttir, Dean of SOE Dr. Sigurður Magnús Garðarsson, Dean of SENS
14:00-14:30	**Debriefing with Rector**	Dr. Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector and President Dr. Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector for Science Dr. Áslaug Helgadóttir, Director of Quality Management