

Institutional Review

Year-on Report

For Iceland University of the Arts

November 2023

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1. PREFACE

This short report is written to inform the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education about developments at the Iceland University of the Arts since the completion of the second phase Institution-Wide Review. The main focus here is to describe the progress and status of specific issues referred to in the External review report as areas for improvement, as well as presenting an overview of recent development with regard to IUA's operations.

We would like to use the opportunity to thank the Review committee of QEF2 IWR and the Quality Board for all their support and rewarding exchange on various aspects of quality assurance in higher education and embetterment of the framework. As the sole provider of higher education in the arts in Iceland we are most grateful for the understanding of the uniqueness of the education and research conducted at our institution in national context, and the importance of securing and maintaining high standards of quality in all aspects of the operations. It is the hope that the report manifests clearly the impact that IWR2 has already had on our conducts in the past year.

2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- New rector, Kristín Eysteinsdóttir, came into her position on August 1st 2023. Kristín was a professor in the Performing Arts Department at IUA and has a BA in Dramaturgy from Aarhus University and an MA in Theatre Directing from Goldsmiths, University of London. From 2014 to 2020, Eysteinsdóttir was Artistic Director / CEO at the Reykjavik City Theatre.
- Preparations for a architectural design competition for a new IUA campus in Reykjavik's city center are in the final stages. The competition, which will be open to participants from the entire European Economic Area, is scheduled to be launched in the first quarter of 2024. The new IUA campus will be partly located in a refurbished office building and partly in an attached expansion building. The location is in close proximity to several key arts and culture institutions. The total floor area will be 15.000 square metres, slightly more than IUA's current floor area. All IUA academic departments and all support units will be located at the new campus.
- Ministry's new incentive in fall 2022 and 2023 under the heading of *Universities Collaboration ('Samstarf háskólanna')*, has shaped academic development within and across the seven HEIs to a great extent. It has led to enhanced dialogues across universities with more concrete and positive results, while at the same time placed considerable more workload on the hands of leadership and support staff of the universities. The IUA participated in 11 applications to the collaborative fund in fall of 2022 and 18 in this fall of 2023. So far, this financial incentive of the ministry has resulted i.e. in a collaboration with the University of Reykjavik and development of IUA's first joint degree programme, a BA in Creative Technologies, to be launched in the fall of 2024.
- A new funding model for the universities was presented by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation in September 2023. The new model, under the heading of performance driven financing, will replace the previous model (since 1999) and is to be fully implemented in 2025. The main change is that financing will be calculated from academic units completed and numbers of graduations to a much greater extent than before, ensuring focus on quality of the education rather than quantity of students registered at any given time. Funding for research is more clearly defined, with links to accomplishments and quality of research outputs. The new model furthermore presents for the first time a performance based funding for societal engagement, accounting for 25% of the total funding, emphasising universities important role in society. It is clear that this new approach to funding will have considerable effects on the university prioritization, with regard to research in particular. Understanding of approaches and methods in artistic research and their platform of dissemination needs to be acknowledged within the funding model and the IUA needs to make effort to implement to the fullest a formal, quantifiable, assessment scale for quality of research outputs by academic staff. The IUA has had a strong visibility in society through teaching and research but a systematic collection of synchronized data in that regard is needed, as an important means to demonstrate the university's societal impact.

- Development of a new university strategy for 2024 – 2028 was started in late October, with preliminary preparations early last spring. The work was initiated with the participation of all staff, and students representatives across departments. The hope is that a new IUA strategy will be published in the early spring of 2024.

- At the time of the IWR2 roles of each of the three newly funded Schools were still being implemented, in particular at the 'cross-over' School of Academic Development (SAD) where a Dean came into position half a year after the implementation of the other two Schools (School of film, music and performing arts and School of architecture, design and fine art). Now, almost two and a half years later the results are beginning to manifest in a more enhanced synergy and coordination across departments and support services, disciplines and educational levels. The reorganisation has established a framework for the enhancement of research management as well as support for academic development of teaching and learning. The IUA research services, established in the fall of 2009*, had already introduced research in the arts (and definitions thereof) as a valuable component of academic staff members work and profile. Under the new SAD an even stronger emphasis has been placed on research work of staff and students, the enhancement of internal research culture and mediation of research outputs in the arts across the local HEIs research environment, towards the public as well as in enhanced dialogue and networking with international HEIs in the Arts. The incentive to place more focus on research activities has been further strengthened by the presentation of the new ministerial funding model for higher education in Iceland, divided between the three components of teaching, research and societal engagement.

*The external report on IUA's IWR 2022 incorrectly states the university's research services as 'recently established.' A correction was made by the IUA on the final draft of the report which has not been taken into account in the published version.

3. STATUS UPDATE OF SPECIFIC ISSUES FROM REPORT (Chapter 7.3. Summary of areas for improvement)

1. **From report:** *'The Iceland University of the Arts should urgently develop transparent and responsive mechanisms for resolving near unacceptable deficiencies in essential amenities, presently adversely impacting student experience (e.g., lack of chairs/desks), and for ensuring effective communication to staff and students of timelines and progress/remedy of such deficiencies.'*

Status: All departments have, as a minimum, two opportunities a year to parttake in IUA's capital planning, including the prioritization purchases of equipment, furniture etc. The capital plan and other key decisions regarding facilities are communicated to staff and students at annual meetings, staff meetings and student information sessions. Students and staff can also contact the managing director, head of facilities and service coordinators at any given time with ideas, suggestions and comments regarding facilities and amenities.

2. **From report:** *'The institution should create a transparent and effective internal communications plan to achieve a unified understanding of institutional purpose and change management, including enabling regular communication between senior management and students. This will help contextualise new areas of activity and ensure the effective embedding and explanation of the new structure, new roles (especially Deans), workloads and responsibilities for staff.'*

Status: Monthly meetings of rector (and student councillor) with representatives of the Students' Council were implemented in the academic year 2022 – 2023. As of fall 2023 the rector sends out regular e-news letters to all members of staff, highlighting the main topics and latest developments in the operations. The new rector has also introduced a plan for her 'mobile office' between the four main premisses of the university. Regular joint meetings across the university with participation of all staff and students' representatives is furthermore seen as a step towards further clarification and unified understanding of the institutional purpose and changes in the organization chart. Recent changes in rectorship have placed emphasis on the need to define the roles and responsibilities of leadership across the university, such as the organization and role of the academic council with the inclusion of students representatives.

3. **From report:** *'Ensure that the University Board is more connected to the Institution, its core purpose and operations, including at least bi-annual meetings with student council 118 representatives. At the same time, the Board should devise and implement a strong succession plan for the Rector position as soon as possible.'*

Status: Annual meeting of Board with representatives of the Students' Council was implemented in the academic year 2022 – 2023. A succession plan for the hiring of Rector

has been implemented, with a clearly defined process, and a new rector in office since August 1st 2023.

4. **From report:** *'The leadership of the Iceland University of the Arts should collect, review and systematise data on the institution's societal impact and engagement, and alumni successes, in partnership with stakeholder group members in order to form a collective voice of advocacy that is supported by evidence.'*

Status: Development of a dashboard for a synchronized collection of key statistics across the university are underway. The key figures will be compliant with the three focus areas of the ministry's new funding model for universities, societal engagement and impact thereof being one. For the successful implementation of the new funding model it will be important that all the universities agree on definitions and a set of key figures to secure comparability of information.

5. **From report:** *'The leadership should establish annual monitoring of programmes to include monitoring and review of performance indicators and student feedback on the quality of learning provision. This will provide the Academic Council with clearer 'touchpoints' to monitor enhancement in between Subject-Level Reviews.'*

Status: A more informal and frequent monitoring of learning provision has been added to the IUA internal quality assurance processes, accepted by the academic council in September 2022. An annual monitoring has been added to the previous processes of 5 year monitoring and revision of programmes, the 5 – 7 year interval of subject level reviews and the Institutional review taking place within each QEF cycle. The aim is to make sure that information on the quality of teaching and learning (i.e. teaching assessments) at any given time is analysed to the fullest and assessments reached on whether further actions or revisions are needed.

6. **From report:** *'An institutional assessment and feedback plan should be created by staff and students which achieves consistency of purpose across programmes in approaches to feedback in the pass/fail context.'*

Status: The project manager of teaching is working on coordinating assessment and feedback plans across the departments of the IUA. General guidelines have been published in the Teachers handbook, and further instructions are in development with each department's specialties in mind and in consultation with students.

7. **From report:** *'Programmes, Schools and Support Services should develop simple mechanisms for demonstrating to students that their feedback has been acted upon (for example 'you said, we did' posters), thereby 'closing the feedback loop).'*

Status: In the fall of 2022 the university implemented a new internal web, 'Ugla.' The portal facilitates information sharing and notifications between students and staff. Further strategic planning on the optimal use of the system, mapping of possibilities and editorial work is still needed. A students pulse survey was conducted in the fall of 2023. According to the results students recommend emails as the best way to convey important information regarding the university operations. Monthly meetings between the rector and student

council representatives has proven beneficial as a platform for feedback to students. As of November 2023 students will have a representative in the Academic council. They are already represented in other committees, such as the teaching committee and the research committee, and in the School councils, and they are also a part of the support committee to the jury for the architectural design competition of IUA future housing in downtown Reykjavík.

8. **From report:** *'The Iceland University of the Arts should formulate a common academic timetable to support its interdisciplinary ambition and prevent further frustration of student opportunity, and ensure that unavoidable changes are communicated in a timely manner.'*

Status: A specialized solution for timetables TermTime's has been put into use across the university. It is an assistive, smart scheduling support for planning, building, delivering, and operationalising timetables and schedules for everyone.

New programmes have a coordinated study structure, 5,10,15 ECTS courses with most elective courses at 5 ECTS allowing for more opportunities for interdisciplinary electives across programmes and departments. This is the case for both new MA programmes in Design and Performative Arts. The Music Department is undertaking a restructuring of the study programmes and a curriculum reform with the main aim of simplifying its structure. One of the goals for the reform is to offer more clarity of structure, flexibility, and more room for electives. Giving students the choice of broadening or deepening their skills and specialisation.

9. **From report:** *'Develop a Research Strategy that establishes an inclusive concept of artistic research, respectful of academic freedoms, and setting out how staff and possibly future doctoral students will be supported with appropriate time for research activity, and where appropriate, grant applications.'*

Status: In 2022 the research committee of the academic council revised and integrated the research strategies from various departments into one and the same IUA strategy for research, with overall aims, followed by guiding lights and substeps of actions. The IUA research strategy is to be implemented within each of the seven departments according to their focus and prioritisation of actions, presented in late 2023 with annual follow-up of their status.

10. **From report:** *'In the context of building a sustainable research culture, the Iceland University of the Arts should review its approach to fixed-term (e.g., 10 year 4+4+2) academic appointment contracts in consultation with staff, and evaluate the efficacy and wellbeing impacts of the process of (re-)appointment as a staff term approaches its contractual end date.'*

Status: To quote the reflection presented in the IUA IWR report: *'The arrangement of limited tenure of academic staff (4+4+2) continues to be debated within the institution. Where some see it as a way of positively renewing the composition of academic staff and ensure affective relationships with the professional field, others see it as a major hindrance in further development of research, research culture and long-term research projects in the arts.'*

As a way to bridge the two approaches the university has sought ways to establish possibilities for both; advertising academic positions open for applications every 10 years,

while maintaining the option for academic staff to re-apply for the position. Currently there are two examples of such re-employments within the institution. It is evident though that this issue needs to be revisited regularly by the academic council.

11. **From report:** *'The process for promotion should be transparent and, where external panels are used to evaluate applications, the panel should possess expertise in the relevant discipline and convey their reasoning for their outcome decisions clearly and constructively to staff.'*

Status: The IUA evaluation committee is comprised of three representatives, two standing members who are appointed for two years at a time, and one appointed for each evaluation process, a qualified expert in the relevant discipline. The working procedures call for at least two members of the committee to be experts within the IUA's field of instruction, but the third member may be external to the field. The evaluation committee shall hold at least two members who do not hold a permanent position at the IUA. As of spring 2023, assessment of teaching and academic experience has been added to the previous competency factors of education, artistic practise, research and administrative experience. Additional change to the rules on academic appointments entail that academic staff can now apply for promotion at any given time during their tenure, instead of previously being limited to the end of each appointment period (4+4+2) to do so.

12. **From report:** *'The Iceland University of the Arts should enable a sessional member of staff to become a representative of all sessional staff, to act as 'point person' for ensuring more effective communication to sessional staff, and their access to orientation and professional development opportunities.'*

Status: The project manager of teaching is the point person for sessional staff in co-operations with each department.

The project manager of teaching invites sessional staff to attend a special introduction at the start of each term to introduce them to the IUA. Sessional staff also receive a copy of the Teachers handbook that has all relevant information on the IUA staff, facilities, and resources. The department coordinators for each department invite sessional staff to attend a department meeting at the beginning of term. Sessional teachers can also attend regular educational talks within the university, called *the teachers coffee*, where the project manager of teaching invites all teachers to attend with various educational topics up for discussion. There is however not a particular 'point person.' Sessional teachers have a representative in the School council and are eligible to apply for a grant to the Academic staff development fund given that their teaching hours during the same term are at least 200 hours.

13. **From report:** *'The Iceland University of the Arts should address as a priority its language policy so that its stated commitment to bi-lingual institutional communication is effective and non-discriminatory in practice, and so that International Students' expectations are met both in general communications and in the classroom.'*

Status: A revised IUA language policy was implemented in late 2022.

14. **From report:** *'The Iceland University of the Arts should develop an equalities action plan detailing the proposed approach and timeline for prevention of racial stereotyping; creation of safe and confident space for students and staff in a post 'MeToo' learning environment; inclusive practice to enable students with additional support needs of all types to flourish in the institution; and communicate clearly the channels for report and support of violations.'*

Status: The IUA is currently in the final steps of revising its equity policy and action plan. In the new policy the university is taking more proactive steps towards promoting inclusion, diversity, and equity. Addressing these priorities can significantly contribute to creating an equitable and inclusive environment. The policy calls for individuals from marginalized groups to have equal opportunities to education in the arts. It entails actions such as active outreach encouraging a more diverse student enrolment and staff recruitment and educating staff on intersectionality of identities (such as race, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic statuses and disability) for better understanding and supporting individuals with multiple marginalized identities. Looking towards future housing in Tollhúsið the university intends to ensure that all facilities, including classrooms, library and recreational areas, are accessible to individuals with disabilities, as well as implementing accommodations and assistive technologies to support students and staff members with diverse needs. The IUA Equity Policy and action plan will be published in late 2023 and will adhere to the new IUA strategy for 2024 – 2028.