

Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

Annual Report 2018

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Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

Mission and principles

Mission

Safeguarding the standards and enhancing the quality of Icelandic higher education and research.

Six Principles

- 1.** Acknowledging the primary role of autonomous higher education institutions in managing and enhancing the quality of their core activities.
- 2.** Committing to the continuous enhancement of the learning experience for all students in an inclusive way.
- 3.** Involving students as partners in the learning process and as active participants in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning.
- 4.** Anchoring QEF in the Icelandic context while maintaining an international perspective.
- 5.** Promoting a partnership with all Icelandic stakeholders while retaining the independence of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education.
- 6.** Embracing transparency as an explicit value of an open consultative processes.

Introduction

This annual report for 2018 presents the main activities that the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education undertook during the year.

As the responsible body for the overall design and operation of the Quality Enhancement Framework in Iceland, the Quality Board organised the launch of the second round of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF2) in 2017.

QEF2 introduced a number of changes that had been agreed with the sector and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC) in 2016. This entailed the development of new processes and the production of new documents to guide the work of the Board and that of the experts it retained for the Institution-Wide Reviews.

At the same time, the Quality Board began preparation toward the full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as agreed with the universities and MESC. Therefore, the Board ensured that all those new processes are compliant with the 2015 edition of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).

During the year, the Quality Board met on four occasions in order to advance this agenda. The outcomes of its discussions are available on its web page and summarised in this report.

In the context of a future ENQA membership, the Quality Board welcomed a consultation that MESC opened on a new regulation aimed at strengthening the Quality Board's official position as the body responsible for quality assurance in Iceland. The new regulation was published in early 2019.

2018 was marked by another important new development. The Research Evaluation Advisory Committee (REAC) was launched on 28 February 2018 and held four meetings during the year to discuss how research management can be evaluated in QEF2 and ways to move toward evaluating research in QEF3.

Although the Quality Board's membership was refreshed in 2017 and QEF2 is slightly different from QEF1, the Quality Board continues to uphold a quality assurance approach that is enhancement-led and based on a dialogue with all its partners. The Quality Board looks forward to this continued dialogue and to the full deployment of QEF2 in 2019. Most importantly, the Board is committed to ensuring that QEF2 supports the further development of Icelandic universities.

Andrée Sursock
Chair, Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

Launching QEF2

Four main components of QEF2 are the Quality Council, the Subject-Level Reviews (SLR), the Institution-Wide Reviews (IWR) and the Annual Meetings.

Quality Council

The Quality Council is a fundamental partner of the Quality Board and plays a prominent role in the success of the Quality Enhancement Framework. Its membership includes the senior staff with responsibility for quality and standards from all Icelandic universities, as well as two Icelandic students.

The Chair of the Quality Council has attended all meetings of the Board as an observer (withdrawing when individual universities were discussed). The Quality Council met nine times in 2018. It organised a workshop in November on the Quality Assurance of Distance Education and co-organised with the Quality Board the Annual Conference on research and teaching.

2018 SLR

The Subject-Level Reviews (SLR) are the responsibility of the universities. The *Quality Enhancement Handbook*¹ defines their focus as “all forms of provision, including, for example, taught, research, full-time, part-time, distance learning and work- based provision... any provision for which the institution is responsible that is undertaken in collaboration with any other institution or partner, either national or international... (and) cover the main areas related to the management of research”. The *Handbook* notes “The Board monitors whether reviews at the subject level are carried out, if they are robust (i.e. use an evidence-based methodology that stands up to scrutiny), constructive, in line with the HEI’s strategy and lead to enhancement.” (2017, p. 12)

The following Self-review Reports were completed in 2018:

- Bifröst University: Department of Business
- Icelandic University of the Arts:
 - Department of Fine Arts
 - Department of Music
- University of Iceland:
 - Faculty of History and Philosophy
 - Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies
 - Faculty of Language and Culture
 - Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies

2018 IWR

The Institution-Wide Reviews (IWR) are organised under the direct responsibility of the Quality Board; the plan is to carry out one to two IWR every year, until the end of the cycle, which will conclude with a year of reflection in 2023. Reykjavík University volunteered to pilot the first IWR in QEF2 and started the preparation of its Reflective Analysis for an on-site visit that will take place in May 2019.

¹ <https://en.rannis.is/media/gaedarad/Final-for-publication-14-3-2017.pdf>

Because of the seven-year duration of the QEF2 cycle, the universities are asked to produce a Mid-term Progress report three or four years after the production of their IWR. In 2018, the University of Akureyri delivered its Mid-term Progress report, following its 2014 IWR in the QEF1 cycle.

2018 Annual meetings

Annual meetings are organised in all seven universities, generally in the spring, and are attended by one or two Quality Board members. Agendas are agreed in advance with the universities. They include their current QEF-related activities such as the outcomes of the previous IWR, the Mid-term Progress Report and any SLRs undertaken during the year or planned for the following year. The Annual meetings provide also an opportunity for the universities and the Quality Board members to exchange information and ensure that the Board remains current and knowledgeable about developments in Icelandic higher education.

Attendance of the Quality Board members at the Annual meetings in 2018

Agricultural University of Iceland	Ellen Hazelkorn and Robert Henthorn
Bifröst University	Ellen Hazelkorn
Hólar University College	Barbara Brittingham
Icelandic University of the Arts	Philip Winn, Andrée Surssock and Erna Sigurðardóttir
Reykjavík University	Norman Sharp
University of Akureyri	Norman Sharp and Erna Sigurðardóttir
University of Iceland	Philip Winn

Launching the Research Evaluation Advisory Committee (REAC)

The Research Evaluation Advisory Committee is an advisory committee of the Quality Board. It has seven members who represent interests of the Icelandic higher education sector (see p. 10).

The inaugural meeting of the Research Evaluation Advisory Committee (REAC) took place in February 2018 and got the Committee off to an excellent start. It was followed by three other meetings that were very productive. REAC discussed such general issues as how to define and measure the impact of research, international models for measuring impact, and how to find the appropriate balance between external and internal understanding of the concept. The issue of a common data set for Iceland has been a recurrent topic. REAC agreed that it would be useful to develop a Guidance Note for the evaluation of research management in the SLR. A draft was produced and distributed to the Quality Council and MESC for consultation.

Communicating with the sector and partners in Iceland and abroad

One of the Quality Board's most important responsibilities is to maintain a dialogue with the sector and its partners and stakeholders. This has resulted in a number of activities.

Reaching out to Icelandic partners

The Quality Board met with its Icelandic partners to discuss issues of mutual interest and to update the sector on the work undertaken during the year. The Board met with:

- The Conference of Rectors and its president: February and May.
- The Quality Council: May and September. In addition, the Quality Council president sits on the Board meetings and the Board manager on the Council meetings.
- The National Union for Icelandic Students (LÍS): September and November
- The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture: Meeting with Minister Lilja D. Alfreðsdóttir (September) and with Una Strand Viðarsdóttir (February and May).

In addition, the Quality Board produced two flyers for university students, and academic and administrative staff who will be involved in the IWR and in the review that ENQA will conduct when the Quality Board will request full membership. The two flyers were produced to present these two processes and what to expect during the reviews.

One of the highlights of the academic year is the Annual Conference co-organised with the Quality Council – the closest partner of the Quality Board. The 2018 edition was hosted by Reykjavík University and attended by around 65 participants. The event was also live-streamed online. The conference explored how research can be integrated into and support undergraduate learning. Inspirational international and Icelandic examples of different approaches to this issue were presented. The Quality Council organised a call to identify Icelandic case-studies. The response to the call was very successful; the conference featured seven pairs of teachers and their students who developed research projects together. The two international examples included the Centre of Excellence in Biology Education, bioCEED, presented by Prof. Vigdis Vandvik, University of Bergen; and the concept of the Vertically Integrated Projects (VIPs), presented by Prof. Ed Coyle, Georgia Institute of Technology.

Reaching out to Icelandic society

Because the Quality Board wished to extend its reach beyond the higher education sector, it invited Salóme Guðmundsdóttir (CEO of *Icelandic Startups*[®], former Board member at Reykjavík University) to chair the Icelandic panel of teachers and students at the Annual Conference.

In the same spirit of reaching out beyond higher education, the Board decided to organise a yearly meeting with stakeholders and to vary the composition of the stakeholder group from year to year in order to reach as many stakeholders as possible. The first meeting gathered the “job-market stakeholders” who sit on the boards of the seven universities. They included a representative each from West-Iceland Tourism Alliance, The Icelandic Agricultural Advisory Centre, and Síminn (telecommunications); a farmer and a consultant to fishing and fish farming companies also attended. The discussion focused on their perceptions of the labour market readiness of Icelandic students in the specific context of Iceland’s economy.

Reaching out internationally

Reaching out internationally is essential to a quality assurance body. It provides invaluable opportunities to benchmark and learn from others, and to lend the Quality Board’s unique expertise. To this end, the Quality Board became an affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) on 19 April 2018. ENQA is the body that

represents quality assurance organisations from the European Higher Education Area (www.enqa.eu). It promotes European cooperation in the field of quality assurance by disseminating information and expertise. The ENQA affiliation provides the Board Manager with invaluable professional development opportunities by networking with peer agencies and attending workshops and conferences. Furthermore, the membership represents also an opportunity to showcase the Icelandic quality assurance approach and inform European peers that Icelandic higher education is quality assured in a trustworthy manner.

In parallel, the Quality Board is preparing for the ENQA full membership, which is much more demanding than the affiliate status. The Quality Board must undergo a review to be accepted as a full ENQA member. This review verifies the Quality Board's compliance with Parts 2 and 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) (<https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>). The major value of the ENQA full membership is to certify that Icelandic universities are quality assured by a body that is recognised in Europe and internationally. This is of benefit to Icelandic universities and their students as well as to Icelandic society at large.

The Quality Board continued to maintain links with Greenland, which started in 2016 with visits to Greenland by the Quality Board Chair and the Board Manager. In 2018, a Greenlandic delegation came to Reykjavík to observe two meetings: part of a Quality Board meeting and the meeting of the Quality Board with LÍS and the Quality Council. This provided the Greenlandic delegation with an opportunity to grasp concretely the scope of the Board's work and how it relates to its partners.

The Board Manager represented the Board in the steering team for the *Annual Conference* of the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA). The theme of the 2018 conference was *Research and Quality Assurance*. The Board Manager was also invited for a study visit to its Finnish counterpart, the Higher Education and Liberal Adult Education Unit of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC); he participated in a number of Nordic and European events (see p. 10).

Supporting the QEF2 process

QB developed a number of documents to solidify both QEF2 and the functioning of the Quality Board as a quality assurance body. The documents are fully in line with the ESG and Icelandic legislation.

Related to IWR	Related to administrative processes
1. Guidelines for Team Chairs and Team Members	5. Addressing Conflicts of Interests and GDPR
2. Development of training material: video and face-to-face training	6. Board Handbook
3. Guidance notes to clarify expectations and consistency of practice	7. Board Constitution
4. IWR satisfaction surveys	8. Statement on commissioned work
	9. Appointing IWR review teams

Quality Board Membership

Andrée Sursock, Chair, Senior Adviser, European University Association (EUA)
Barbara Brittingham, President of New England Commission on Higher Education
Robert Henthorn, Membership Coordinator, European Students' Union (ESU), representative of the National Union for Icelandic Students
Ellen Hazelkorn, Director of the Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU), Dublin Institute of Technology
Frank Quinault, former Director of Learning & Teaching Quality, University of St Andrews
Norman Sharp, former Director of QAA Scotland
Philip Winn, Research Professor, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
Erna Sigurðardóttir, student, representative of the National Union for Icelandic Students (observer)

Quality Council Membership

Áslaug Helgadóttir, Chair, Quality Manager, University of Iceland
Aldís Mjöll Geirsdóttir, Quality Officer of the National Union for Icelandic Students
Brita Berglund, Director of Teaching and Quality Affairs, Agricultural University of Iceland
Einar Hreinsson, Director of Teaching affairs and Registry, Reykjavík University
Elsa María Guðlaugs Drífudóttir, Chair of the National Union for Icelandic Students
Hulda Stefánsdóttir, Acting Dir. of Quality Enhancement, Teaching and Research, Icelandic University of the Arts
Signý Óskarsdóttir, Quality Manager, Bifröst University
Sigrún Magnúsdóttir, Director of Quality Management, University of Akureyri
Skúli Skúlason, Director of Division of Research, Hólar University College

Research Evaluation Advisory Committee Membership

Philip Winn, Chair, Research Professor, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
Tove Bull, Professor Emerita and former Rector, Tromsø University
Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Professor of Law, Reykjavík University, and Chair of the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council
Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of Research and Information Technology, Reykjavík University.
Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Pro-Rector of Science, University of Iceland
Ólöf Gerður Sigurðardóttir, Director of Quality Enhancement, Teaching and Research, The Icelandic University of the Arts
Skúli Skúlason, Director of Division of Research, Hólar University College
Sæmundur Rögnvaldsson, doctoral student of medicine, University of Iceland

Secretariat

Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson, Board Manager

Calendar of meetings and events

February	Board meeting, Reykjavík
	REAC meeting, Reykjavík
	Meeting of the Board with Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Reykjavík
	Meeting of the Board Chair with Chair of National Rectors' Conference, Reykjavík
	Meeting of REAC Chair with university research directors, Reykjavík
	Meeting of the Board with National Union for Icelandic Students, Reykjavík
March	Meeting of Board Manager with Working Group of Equality Officers at Icelandic universities, Reykjavík
	QEF2 Presentation by Board Manager, Bifröst University, Bifröst
April	NOQA planning meeting, Helsinki, Finland, attended by Board Manager
	QEF2 Presentation by Board Manager, University of Akureyri, Akureyri
May	QEF2 Presentation by Board Manager, Hólar University College, Hólar í Hjaltadal
	QEF2 Presentation by Board Manager, Reykjavík University, Reykjavík
June	Board meeting, Reykjavík
	REAC meeting, Reykjavík
	Annual meetings of Board members with Icelandic universities
	Meeting of the Board with Minister of Education, Science and Culture, Reykjavík
	Quality Board and Quality Council Annual conference, Reykjavík
	Meeting of the Board with Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Reykjavík
	QEF2 Presentation by Board Manager, University of Akureyri, Akureyri
	Eurostudent Conference, Reykjavík, attended by Board Manager
	Meeting of the Board with working life stakeholders from university councils, Reykjavík
	Meeting of Board Chair with Icelandic National Rectors' Conference, Reykjavík
August	Nordic Council of Ministers' Annual Conference on Quality in Higher Education, Stockholm, Sweden, attended by Board Manager
	QEF2 Presentation by Board Manager, University of Akureyri, Akureyri
September	Board meeting, Reykjavík
	Board and Council meeting, Reykjavík
	Board and meeting with LÍS, Reykjavík
	REAC meeting, Reykjavík
	Annual meetings of Board members with Icelandic universities
	Meeting of the Board with Minister of Education, Science and Culture, Reykjavík
	NOQA Annual Conference, Porvoo, Finland, attended by Board Manager
	ENQA seminar for agencies preparing to undergo an initial external review, Riga, Latvia, attended by Board Manager
	Meeting of Board Chair with Chair of National Rectors' Conference, Reykjavík
	ENQA General Assembly, Astana, Kazakhstan, attended by Board Manager
October	Quality and the student Environment. Workshop and Conference hosted by The National Union for Icelandic Students, Reykjavík, attended by Board Manager
	Board meeting, Reykjavík
November	REAC meeting, Reykjavík
	Meeting of Quality Board with Quality Council, Reykjavík
	Meeting of Quality Board with National Union for Icelandic Students, Reykjavík
	Meeting of Quality Board with representatives of Greenlandic students, ministry officials and university representatives, Reykjavík
	Quality Council Annual Conference, Reykjavík, attended by Board Manager