INSTITUTION-WIDE REVIEW

Reykjavík University

September 2019

Quality Board
for Icelandic Higher Education

Contents

Preface

This is the report of an Institution-Wide Review of Reykjavík University 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 in quality assurance;
- Quality Council-led enhancement workshops and conferences;
- Quality Board-led special reviews.

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

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Review Team

The following experts comprised the review 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), Reykjavík University's Institution-Wide Review (IWR) visit took place in May 2019, with the report published on September 23, 2019. Reykjavík University (the University) submitted its *Reflective Analysis* (RA) for purposes of this review on February 4, 2019 and gave the Review Team (the Team) access to supporting documentation via an online file storage system. The University plans to implement a cycle of Subject-Level Reviews (SLRs) in QEF2s starting in Fall 2019. In the previous QEF cycle (QEF1), the University participated in IWR in 2012, and implemented SLRs during the period 2012-2017.

This review followed procedures outlined in the 2nd edition of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education[1]. 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* (ESG)[2], and the commentary on ESG provided in Annex 11 of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education. The full programme of the 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 role of Reykjavík University is to create and disseminate knowledge, i.e. to educate and research, so as to strengthen the competitiveness and quality of life for both individuals and society, while guided by ethics, sustainability and responsibility. The University fulfils this role by striving to be a strong teaching and research university with emphasis on technology, business, and law. The core activities of the University are teaching and research with strong ties with industry and society,

[1] https://en.rannis.is/media/gaedarad/Final-for-publication-14-3-2017.pdf
[2] https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

emphasising interdisciplinary work, international context, innovation and excellent service. The University is housed in one purpose-built building, inaugurated in 2010.

The University defined a strategy for the years 2014-2018, building on learning from the IWR and SLRs in QEF1. The University reviewed progress in 2018, and judged performance to be good. This improved performance formed the foundation for development of a new University strategy termed *RU 2020+*, comprising strategies for education, knowledge, workforce development and organisational development. Implementation of the organisation development strategy included introduction of a new structure for the academic units. The four former schools were reorganised into seven academic departments, located in two (new) schools. The School of Technology comprises: Department of Engineering; Department of Computer Studies; and Department of Applied Engineering. The School of Social Sciences comprises: Department of Law; Department of Business; Department of Psychology; and Department of Sports Science. The new structure was introduced on 1 March 2019, and both the University and the Team recognised that at the time of the visit the new organisation was in the very early stages of implementation.

1.3. Funding/resourcing

The University reported in its RA that it does not depend on its owners (Chamber of Commerce Education Fund, The Federation of Industries, and Iceland Business) for operational funding. The Icelandic *Ministry of Education, Science and Culture* supplied the Team with RU's *Key Statistics* for calendar year 2017, which is the most recent data set available. According to these *Key Statistics*, the University receives funding from two main streams: block funding from the government (55% of total funding) and tuition fees (30%). The remaining 15% come from fees from students in preliminary studies, competitive funding awards, and various other sources. Approximately 80% of that competitive funding revenue comes from national funding sources.

Block funding is determined by a service agreement with the *Ministry of Education, Science and Culture* according to a model that applies to all Icelandic universities, both private and public. The overwhelming majority of block funding is based on historic student and graduation numbers, and a small percentage is earmarked for research activities.

Internal budgeting happens in the fall. The largest allocation of funding goes to the departments, based on their needs in teaching and research. Funding allocated to support services includes budgets for development of new infrastructure. Funding for strategic projects is managed by the President's office, with current initiatives including: research fund, teaching development fund, infrastructure fund and innovation fund.

A major objective of the 2014-18 strategy was to achieve financial stability. This was successful, and the University is now financially sustainable, and has some reserves ("a rainy day fund").

1.4. Staff

The University reported in its RA that it employed 250 full-time staff and faculty at the time of submission, along with a similar number of part-time external teachers (sessional staff). The *Ministry of Education, Science and Culture Key Statistics* for calendar year 2017 painted a slightly different picture, with 209 staff classified as "academic staff," and 341 as sessional staff. Approximately two-thirds of academic staff were male, according to the *Key Statistics*, and two-thirds were full-time. Of academic staff, 29 were Professors, 34 docents and 47 lectors. Adjuncts were 30, and 69 academic staff had the designation "other." The university-wide staff-student ratio was a little over 1/20, based on annual full-time equivalencies for both staff and students. It was reported to the Team in interviews that faculty contracts stipulate that in most cases the effort of full-time faculty should be divided between research (45%), teaching (45%) and service and societal engagement (10%), but agreements can be made on variations thereupon.

1.5. Students

The University reported in its RA that approximately 3500 students were registered at the University at the time of submission, and that this number has been fairly stable since 2015. The School of Science and Engineering is the largest of the four units according to the old governance structure (see Section 1.6) with approximately 1100 students. The School of Business (981 students) and School of Computer Science (865) are not far behind, but the School of Law is by far the smallest in terms of student numbers (285 students). During the site visit, it was reported to the Team that approximately 150 students were enrolled in preliminary studies in the current semester (Spring of 2019). In the RA, the University reported that from 2016-2018, it has graduated a little over 800 students each year.

According to the *Key Statistics* for calendar year 2017, student headcount was 3243, with approximately 2500 annual full-time equivalent students. The female/male ratio in that year was 39/61. Student numbers by degree cycle are also provided in Key Statistics for 2017. Almost 2200 students were at the baccalaureate level, approximately 740 at the Master's level, and 38 at doctoral level. Finally, the University had 274 students enrolled in preliminary studies in that year.

1.6. Key committee and managerial structures

The Board of Directors oversees strategy and finances. The Board described its main priority as making sure the University has a strategy for the future that is clearly defined, and a plan for execution. In discussion with the Board, the Team formed a view of strong institution-level leadership and strategy, supporting institution-level objectives, and a culture of continuous improvement. This is supported by financial allocations clearly aligned to mission, and making the most of resources. The Board receives an annual *Quality Report* presenting high-level summaries of results, including: Quality of Education, reporting results of student evaluations and surveys; Quality of Research, including results of research evaluations; Quality of Workplace and HR.

The President[3] publicly represents the University, and is in charge of academic, operational and financial operations. The President answers to the Board of Directors. In discussion of strategy development, the extent of the President's widespread stakeholder engagement was evident. Staff at all levels, and students' representatives who met with the Team, emphasised the open-door policy, approachability and responsiveness of the President. It was very evident that staff and students have a clear and effective opportunity to engage directly with the President on any aspect.

There is a clear structure of institution-level committees comprising: University Council, Executive Board, Curriculum Council, Research Council, Ethics Committee, and Equality Committee. Within the former four-school organisational structure, University Rules required each school to operate a School Council, Curriculum Council and a Research Council. The formation of councils within the new academic organisation structure was ongoing during the period of the visit.

During the visit, the Team met with many representatives from these committees, and discussed a range of topics. Without exception, participants were clear about the remits, responsibilities and relationships between these institution-level committees, as well as between institution-level and school- or department-level committees. Participants were also very well informed about strategic developments, and in general they reported that they had been involved in discussion of future directions.

1.7. The Reflective Analysis

The RA submitted by the University had a number of gaps and limitations. It was limited in terms of evaluation, including in particular, management of enhancement (see Section 6).

[3] Reykjavík University refers to its principal academic and administrative officer as "President" in its Reflective Analysis.

The RA referred to the Quality Assurance (QA) System for Learning and Teaching at Reykjavík University, which was available on the University web pages. The RA acknowledged that this was a recent development, and that further work is needed. These points were discussed during the visit, and the Team considers that the new academic organisation structure presents an opportunity to review the proposed University System for QA (see also Section 6).

There was no consideration in the RA of research degree programmes and students. However, these topics were discussed at the Pre-visit, and explored during the visit.

1.8. Summary evaluation

Despite the limitations in the RA noted above, the Team formed an initial view from the RA that this is a very distinctive University. The University is relatively young; it is ambitious, and has come a very long way in a short time. The University is outward-looking, in terms of mission and interactions. The University's organisational structure is designed to be very highly devolved with a high degree of autonomy to academic units.

The Team approached the visit with a concern to work with this initial view, to engage with the distinctive nature of the University, and to implement the QEF2 methodology in ways that would be helpful to the University.

The Team quickly gained a sense of a pervasive quality culture that reflected the mission, was student-centred, and dynamic. This was evidenced in discussions with both students and staff. Students demonstrated great enthusiasm for their study programmes, their staff, and the University. Staff demonstrated great enthusiasm for their students, their teaching, research and innovation, and the University environment and societal engagement.

At the time of the visit, the University had very recently re-structured the academic organisation, including new appointments at school and department levels. However, this did not prove problematic for the Review. All staff who met with the Team were able to discuss their roles in the working of the University, both within the previous organisation structure, and in terms of ideas for the new organisation. They did so in ways that were open, reflective, evidence-based, and included multiple examples of practice.

In summary, the Team formed a view of a very distinctive, innovative University, with a mission that is clearly aligned to the needs of Iceland. The University has strong institution-level leadership and strategy, with objectives and financial allocations clearly aligned to its mission. The Team found evidence of a pervasive quality culture focussed on excellence and relevance.

2. Learning from prior reviews

2.1. Learning from previous IWR

In discussion, the President expressed the view that the IWR in QEF1 in 2012 coincided with a turning point in the University – it gave the University an opportunity to reflect on what they could do better. The RA discussed key changes at institution level following the QEF1 IWR: increased student involvement in governance; revised organisation and operations rules; revised learning and assessment rules; and new IT systems.

2.2. Learning from SLRs

The Team formed the view that in general, implementation of SLRs in QEF1 involved significant effort, was self-critical, evidence-based, included externality, and has informed enhancement actions.

The RA acknowledged that SLRs in QEF1 had been implemented at subject- and school-level in different ways, that were intended to recognise the distinctive aspects of the academic subjects and contexts. The RA also acknowledged the challenges about integrating or linking QEF1 SLR processes with external professional or subject accreditation processes, which are a key part of the University's management of standards and quality.

The RA discussed key changes at institution level arising from SLRs in QEF1. These were: investment in facilities and support for education, including teaching training, central services, information technology and a fund for advancing teaching; increased focus on international studies and education, as well as closer collaboration with select international universities; reviews of study and assessment rules for the University, along with work to improve evaluation of individual courses; emphasis on practical training in parallel with the education provided, to better advantage students in competition for jobs; and development of strategies, rules and processes at the school level. The RA also described a range of changes and enhancement actions at school- and programme-level arising from a sample of SLRs in QEF1 (see also Sections 3 and 4). The RA discussed learning points about the processes of implementing SLRs. The first was to manage potential overlaps between subject or programme accreditations and SLRs. The second related to the extent of standardisation in approach across schools. The RA noted that the results from different schools varied in terms of presentation and coverage. Whilst this was intentional, in that the reviews were primarily to support the quality enhancement of the different programmes, the University recognised that more standardisation would help linkage of SLR and IWR. The University also reported that it had discussed with the Quality Board how to make best use of resources in departments that have to do both an SLR and programme accreditation in QEF2, and that the Board would be producing more guidance on how to use programme accreditation to complement SLRs.

2.3. Learning from other reviews

University policy is to seek external, international accreditation at the subject or programme level, wherever possible. Discussions with academic staff indicated that they found these processes helpful in benchmarking and guiding enhancement.

In terms of research, the University undertakes an annual evaluation of research activity by each member of academic staff. It also engaged in an evaluation and audit with reference to the *European Commission* policy regarding the working environment of researchers (see Section 5). Focussed or local research project reviews have also taken place. In 2018, the University hosted a research study visit for students from the University of Toronto to explore stakeholder engagement across the University. In 2014 the School of Computer Science also engaged in an international study on subject-level quality assurance in computing.

3 Managing Standards

3.1. Institutional approach to the management of standards

Management of standards at the University is overseen by the Executive Board, University Council, Curriculum Council, and Research Council. Management of standards is supported and reinforced through the work of the Deans, Department Chairs, and school- and department-level councils through documented and understood policies and processes. These policies and processes are well-established, enhanced and safeguarded, including through external accreditations and SLRs. Management of standards is linked to and utilised in the development of the University's strategic and operational monitoring and planning processes.

Programme outcomes are defined within each programme, and assessment processes are utilised effectively to evaluate performance of students. This information is incorporated into benchmarking

processes with external stakeholders including industry partners, research/grant management, and external accreditations; thus demonstrating incorporation of the institution's mechanisms to evaluate degrees awarded into all activities.

Standards of doctoral degrees are assured by a number of processes including: rules requiring that externally peer-reviewed publications form part of the thesis; the existence of research councils in each department for evaluation of progress and standards; department-level Curriculum Council approval of CVs of thesis examiners, and a requirement for doctoral students to study abroad for at least one semester.

There is an evident quality culture across the University of engaged practices and procedures in assurance of standards at all levels of the institution. Schools take responsibility for the link between learning outcomes for programmes and learning outcomes for individual courses; and all major changes go to the University-level Curriculum Council. Annually, the course catalogue for each study programme is discussed and approved by programme management and appropriate departmental Curriculum Council. Finally, processes and policies to promote academic integrity, and guard against academic fraud, are evident. The assurance of academic standards is also in line with ESG 1.1 stating that the institution should have evidence-based mechanisms to evaluate to what degree it is living up to its stated aspirations and values.

3.2. Admissions criteria

The University has a well-documented and comprehensive policy and process for admissions across all academic programmes. The foundation of the admission policy is a University-wide policy, documented on the website, which provides conditions and requirements that the institution has deemed necessary for students to make progress in their degrees. Additional to the University requirements are processes and requirements which are managed at the school or programme level

to ensure students are prepared in the areas required for them to be successful at the programmatic level. This is similar across undergraduate and graduate admission processes at the University. Furthermore, it was evident that all of the admission processes and requirements were well communicated and consistently applied.

The University continues to offer preliminary studies to students who have not met the requirements for University admissions, with the main objective being to prepare students with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to undertake university studies.

3.3. External reference points and benchmarks

External reference points and benchmarks are evident throughout the work of the University, and are directly linked to the management of standards, assessment and evaluation of performance. A prime example of this is the University's focus on external accreditations of programmes, and the number of external accreditations which programmes have received during the last review cycle.

In addition, the Team saw evidence of a wide range of school- and department-level identification of external reference points and benchmarks, and two examples are provided in the following text. The School of Computer Science has participated in an annual, voluntary research benchmarking exercise since 2009 through an international activity that originates from the IT University of Copenhagen. This process compares the productivity, reputation and resources of the different participating institutions and results of this exercise provide the University with valuable information on its comparative standings. The Law School works with Nordic Universities via a form of consortium to facilitate cooperation in research and student/faculty exchanges.

Beyond academic programmes, external experts are regularly utilised to consult and work with the University on issues of concern and to ensure adequate responses. Recent examples include the use

of experts to assist with development of policies and student conversations surrounding equity and the #MeToo movement. Engineering programmes participate in the international programme group of the CDIO framework, to align activities and gain external feedback and benchmarks on programmatic performance. Finally, across the University there is a wide range of projects, which are connected with external companies; most students have the opportunity to engage with those outside the university through internships, sponsored projects, and final projects.

3.4. Resources for safeguarding standards

A core focus of the University is ensuring that the academic programmes and experiences of the students are directly linked to industry and community, both within Iceland and beyond. This focus is evident from the top down, through institution-level mission, strategy development, and resource allocation. Strategic planning has a direct link to quality assurance with a goal to ensure standards of the degree that are aligned to the needs of business and industries.

3.5. Design, approval, monitoring and review of programs

The assessment of the relevance, academic strength and viability of a new programme begins with the faculty, department and school, with the initial approval to begin the development being directed by the Dean. A similar process occurs regarding evaluation and changes to existing programmes and curricula, with this process also being impacted by external evaluations (accreditation and industry changes). There is a clearly developed process for this work and as with other activities at the University, students and faculty work collaboratively to develop academic programmes that meet the needs of the discipline and field. However, there is an opportunity for collaboration across programmes and schools to create more opportunity for shared resources and joint programming. This could build on current collaborative working, in particular the three-week interdisciplinary courses that feature group work in open areas in the building (see Section 4.7).

Individual courses are monitored, typically on an annual basis. The process considers: student workload, dropout rate and graduation rate; the effectiveness of student assessment; student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme; and the learning environment and support services of the programme.

The University allows some flexibility to schools in when and how programmes are reviewed, but with a requirement that at minimum a review should be conducted every three years. The review process is expected to consider development within the respective discipline and involve consultation with stakeholders. The process focuses on: the content of the programme with regard to both international standards and domestic standards; influence on the programme from the latest research in the discipline; and the changing needs of society and industry.

3.6. Assessment policies and regulations

The responsibility for assessment and regulations is shared across the University, with the Office of Teaching Affairs managing the student record, awarding of diplomas, teaching evaluations, and policies on assessments. In coordination with the Deans, adaptations to assessment polices and regulations are developed and implemented, and this process is defined and documented. It is important to note that this work also involves students and other stakeholders. An example of a recent adaptation was the revision of both the assessment weight of a final exam, and the inclusion of final projects as acceptable types of 'final exams.' These revisions to policy, assessments and practices was welcomed by stakeholders across the University and was incorporated into operations in 2018.

Recent additions and changes across schools at the University have included digital assessment tools. The incorporation of the *Canvas*™ Learning Management System (LMS) into operations has provided opportunities to staff to add the use of these digital assessment tools into programmes

through both in-house development of assessment-software in the School of Computer Science, and with the implementation of the *DigiExam*™ assessment tool, primarily in the School of Law and the School of Business. This represents an opportunity for growth and demonstrates the innovative nature of the University in their assessment and student-centred approaches.

Another strength demonstrated at the University was the pervasive practice of incorporating stakeholder feedback from students, industry representatives and graduates. The University reviews comments from externals and takes them into consideration in the development and review of programmes, and utilises external assessments of students' performance to inform academic progression through internships and research experiences.

3.7. Consistency in grading and assigning ECTS

The RA outlined guiding principles in establishing new study programmes and in making major changes to existing programmes. These include: definition of the expected student workload within each degree using ECTS credits; and definition of assessment with reference to learning outcomes. The RA also described the role of school curriculum councils in overseeing implementation. All these features align well with ESG 1.2.

3.8. Collaborative provision

Processes to manage standards in collaborative programmes including joint degrees, are the same as for provision within the University. In all cases, University staff grade projects and examinations.

3.9. Staff induction, appraisal and development

New teachers, both full-time and sessional, are offered a half-day preparation course at the start of each semester, which includes a focus on both standards and quality. The course covers technical issues, the relation between learning outcomes and assessments, teaching methods, time

management, ECTS, and the use of the *Canvas*™ LMS. Teaching assistants are also offered a course at the start of each semester.

The University's approach to annual appraisal is based on Annual Performance Interviews that cover performance in teaching and research. Inputs regarding teaching include student evaluations and the teacher's own evaluation and plans for improvement.

A comprehensive and varied range of staff development opportunities is available, with training provided at both university and school or department level. Central development is aligned to topics emerging from student evaluations and to University strategy; this includes a Teacher Training Day at the start of each semester. Staff are able to get advice and support from pedagogic experts within Teaching Affairs, and have free access to courses provided by the Open University. Staff are encouraged and funded to visit other universities to attend higher education conferences and to engage with Erasmus+ development opportunities.

Staff development also includes the use of a teaching expert from Teaching Affairs, who monitors the teaching of randomly chosen teachers each semester. This expert evaluates the course material, the course website, and the interactions between the teacher and students outside the classroom. The expert also pays visits to the class during teaching hours to evaluate what happens in the classroom. Subsequently, the teacher receives a report on the teaching, with suggestions for improvement. In discussion, teachers reported that they found this process very valuable. Staff also cited examples of local approaches to support development including mentoring and learning from visiting international teachers.

In interviews with students and staff, the team heard that sessional staff seemed generally highly appreciated as experts in their field, but some were less prepared for teaching and course

administration. It was also unclear on which grounds they were chosen, which is in contrast to the rigorous and competitive process of hiring full-time faculty. With specific reference to teaching assistants, students commented on variability in the quality of teaching activities.

The University should consider ways of strengthening and widening the range of support for pedagogic and technological competence, to include *all* people with teaching roles, in particular sessional staff and teaching assistants. It should also consider the benefits of increasing transparency, and some formalisation, in the selection and appointment of sessional teachers.

3.10. Using SLRs to safeguard standards

The RA highlighted the significance of linking professional or subject accreditation in consideration of standards within SLRs in QEF1. The RA also summarised aspects of focus on academic standards within SLRs in QEF1. These included review at the programme level of alignments of learning outcomes and assessment (see also Section 2).

3.11. Summary evaluation of security of standards

The University's origins, mission and strategy focus on the value of degrees, shaping development of curricula that are clearly aligned to both the short- and longer-term needs of Icelandic business and industry, promoting both employability and job creation. Curricula are informed and enriched by research, and by involvements with business and industry.

Academic standards are secured by systematic organisational rules and procedures that are implemented effectively by staff. These procedures involve a high degree of externality, including systematic use of professional and subject accreditations.

Similar to the 2012 IWR, the Team identified that the management of standards at the University is coordinated and lead by University's Executive Committee and supported by the work of the Deans,

Schools, and departments, as well as the Curriculum and Research Councils. Management of standards is also further strengthened by external benchmarks through participation in numerous external quality exercises including programmatic accreditation and benchmarking exercises, so that the University examines its standards against international expectations. Furthermore, it is evident that the University continues to benefit from faculty and administration whose academic preparation, prior work experience, research, and community involvement help it to have a broader-than-Iceland perspective on academic quality and standards.

The RA did not document a clear quality process, however through discussions and meetings it became apparent that quality processes are well established and integrated at school and department level throughout the University, covering both standards and quality. However, the quality processes differ in some parts between schools and departments. The Team heard a recurring view that there is an implicit approach to management of standards across the organization and it is a shared responsibility. There is no explicit, university-wide single process for doing this and everyone understands the process differently.

Unlike in 2012, the University has solidified and incorporated programme learning outcomes across all programmes and has connected these with assessment methods, thus assisting with the clear expectations for student learning across the university. Examples of this effort include, the formalization of a clear definition of dual and joint degrees which provide a safeguard to the standards.

Technology, specifically the lack of a functioning Student Information System (SIS), does not currently support the ability of the institution to routinely gather and report on the quality process and demonstrate through performance that students are meeting the outcomes of their programme.

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 judgement on standards of degrees and awards.

Overall, the Team judgement is of confidence in the standards of degrees and awards.

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 institution has evidence-based mechanisms to evaluate to what degree it is living up to its aspirations and to inform management following ESG 1.1 *Policy for Quality Assurance.* However, the lack of an explicit, university-wide single process for managing standards is not fully consistent with the requirement. ESG1.1. states the need for a system specified in a quality policy which works throughout the institution's organisational levels and units with plans for prioritised activities at institutional level with identified milestones, target dates, accountabilities, performance indicators and resources.
- The quality processes are well in resonance with ESG 1.2. *Design and Approval of Programmes:* they have externality and the rigorous processes for qualifications and assessment are accompanied by school curriculum councils overseeing implementation.
- ESG 1.3 *Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment* stresses the importance of active learning, with assessment reflecting this, encouraging the adoption of a learning outcomes approach. The work at RU follows this; with programme learning outcomes connected to assessment. Interviews also showed that complexity is addressed; e.g. diversity, transferable skills and external assessment. The connection to CDIO further strengthens the work with learning outcomes and facilitates dissemination of best practice.
- The work with programme accreditation, external reviews and rigorous processes means that ESG 1.4: *Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification* is fulfilled to its full intention with clear regulation including student exchange and international students.
- ESG 1.5: *Teaching Staff* reflects the importance of hiring and development. RU is aware of the importance of hiring and to recognise the importance of a broader-than-Iceland perspective on academic quality. A comprehensive and varied range of staff development opportunities is also available, many of them commendable and well worth spreading. However, this ESG also specifically mention processes for sessional staff, where the Team has identified room for improvement.
- ESG 1.6: *Learning Resources and Student Support* ensure provision of adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support. The visit showed a multitude of examples on how RU works with the building and the support resources in a strategic manner (including the *Canvas*™ case study) and the students experience an accessible and constantly developing support.
- Implementation of the University's plans and the Team's recommendations regarding the SIS will improve the alignment of the University's processes for managing information relating to academic standards, in particular student attainment and progression, with reference to ESG 1.7 *Information Management*. It will also facilitate the implementation of processes in a university-wide system and policy aligned with ESG 1.1 *Quality policy*.
- RU is a university closely aligned to the societal, business and industry needs, with close cooperation. This resonates well with ESG 1.8: *Public Information* that requires dissemination and cooperation.
- ESG 1.9: *On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes* is fulfilled by the review every third year, the inclusion of education in SLRs, and the work with benchmarking within international communities or accreditation bodies.

4. Student Learning Experience

4.1. Overview: Institution's management of standards of student learning experience

Management of quality of the student learning experience at the University is overseen by the Executive Board, University Council, Curriculum Council and Research Council; and supported and reinforced by the work of the Deans, Department Chairs, as well as school- and department-level councils. Consideration of the student learning experience is linked to and utilised in the development of the University's strategic and operational monitoring and planning processes.

4.2. Relevance of Case Study to enhancing student learning experience

The University's Case Study described the process of choosing and adopting a new learning management system called *Canvas*™. The University explained that this process was chosen for a case study as it was a significant step forward in the process of enhancing quality in teaching and learning, while also requiring significant involvement of faculty, staff and students in the decision-making and implementation processes. The case study included a recognition that the *Canvas*™ system is still a very new part of Reykjavík University and it will take some time for everyone to become fully adjusted to it and to use it to it fullest potential. The University explained the ways in which it had evaluated staff and student feedback on the new system. It concluded that overall, the transition went remarkably well and the system has been very stable, but that the major problem was inconsistency in use by staff, with some teachers not following guidelines on how to set up courses.

Discussion with students indicated that they were generally happy with the system. They confirmed the University's evaluation about the major problem being inconsistent use by staff, and added some concerns about ease of accessing video content. Students and staff also expressed enthusiasm for some of the potential add-ons, an example was the way some individual staff used the *Piazza*™

community question and answer system, which allows for students to ask questions and staff to provide answers that are available to all students in the course. Teaching staff echoed that view.

Discussion with teaching staff confirmed generally widespread use by staff, and an enthusiasm for the potential of developing use of the system, including assessment tools and linkage to a future SIS. Discussion with support services staff confirmed that they were using the system to provide links to online support resources for students.

4.3. Resources for enhancing student learning experience

The University ensures provision of resources for both assuring and enhancing the learning experience of students. The RA and evidence gained during the site visit emphasised the importance of strategy development and implementation, staff resources, and the university building.

Discussion indicated a top-down concern from the Board of Directors to make best use of resources, and to ensure financial allocations to support strategic developments and continuous improvement. The Executive Board oversees the budget and operating plan, and has a specific role in decision-making regarding ideas for new developments. The largest allocation of funding goes to the departments, based on their needs in teaching and research. Strategic funding to develop new infrastructure goes to support services. There is also specific funding for strategic projects, including a research fund, teaching development fund, infrastructure fund and innovation fund. The *RU 2020+* strategy for education includes a range of planned developments to enhance student learning considering the characteristics and needs of students of the future.

A number of aspects of staff resources were discussed, including technical expertise and staff numbers, with reference to student numbers. The current plan is not to grow student numbers, but rather to invest in staff resources and the staff working environment. Students were extremely

positive about their staff, citing staff commitment, capability, availability and approachability, with a view that teachers knew students as individuals.

The building and the ways in which it is used are central to the quality of the student learning experience. The design is optimised to the University's model and approach of student-centred learning with extensive project-based activities. Similarly, the ways in which the building is used are designed to enhance student learning, encouraging 24/7 open access by students. Students were very clear and extremely positive about the significance and importance of the building to their learning experience. They also emphasised the student culture of respecting the needs of all users in the building.

4.4. Student induction

During the first two weeks of the semester, courses and mini-seminars are offered to students about student life, on academic methods, how to write research papers, time management and general preparations for achieving academic success. The University's annual survey among incoming students shows that in general, new students appear to feel welcome and supported at the university

4.5. The student voice and engagement of students in QA

The students have a very active role at all levels of the University. The Board of Directors does not have student membership, but does connect with student representatives, and takes the student voice very seriously. Students are represented on the Executive Board, University Council, Curriculum Council and Research Council, with the right to speak and propose motions. Discussion with students' representatives indicated that they felt no implication of tokenism. Student representatives seem actively engaged and willing to take part, which suits the student-oriented model.

Student representatives emphasised the effectiveness of their interactions with the President, including monthly meetings which lead to direct action by the President. The Board of Directors emphasised the importance and effectiveness of their communications with the students.

The Team asked in meetings during the site visit whether student representatives receive sufficient and formal training in order to better understand their roles and how to be a useful member of a committee. Based on those responses, the Team is of the view that the University should review the effectiveness of current training and consider whether it, together with the student organisation, might develop additional training to bridge the experience gap between senior professionals and undergraduate students new to roles in representation. This could include training sessions, pre-semester kick-off meetings to discuss expectations and ground rules, or publishing handbooks for members of each body.

4.6. Student support services

The University has very active, committed and effective student support services, both centrally and within departments. Students seem to be very well aware of the role of the support services and seem to know where and when to go to if they need help with something. School offices serve as an interface with students; they can take student concerns up to the relevant parties, often through the head administrator of the school, the Dean or those in charge of study programmes. The University Front Desk in the foyer of the building has an important and highly-valued role as a first point of contact, and also in monitoring student concerns and needs, and feeding these into institution-level improvements (such as online support, for example). The University has been active in developing support services to respond to student needs, for example by providing more psychological services and revising the organisation and operation of the university library.

Discussion with support services staff indicated a real ethos of commitment and responsiveness to students. Developments have included a general commitment to make effective use of online systems, including the new *Canvas*™ LMS, to explain support services to students, and to allow easy off-campus access by students, including for doctoral students exploring study options abroad.

4.7. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

The University *Teaching Strategy* sets out a student-centred view of learning and teaching. This includes an emphasis on small group teaching, active student participation, real-life projects, collaboration with industry stakeholders as resources allow, and practical approaches. It also states the expectation that students shall take responsibility for their own studies through active participation.

The *Organising and Operating Rules* of the University set out the University's requirements regarding programmes and courses defined in terms of learning outcomes, and methods of teaching and assessment that are aligned to these outcomes. In discussion, the Team gained the impression that the prevailing quality culture promotes and supports student-centred learning, emphasising relevance of learning to industry and business. Meetings with students and staff confirmed the University's view of key elements expressed in the RA: students start engaging in realistic projects during the very first semester of study; students have opportunities to work with industry and institutions on projects related to their studies either through internships or projects. Projects can include specialised projects in collaboration with business or industry with students being funded by the companies in question. To achieve these goals, the university has developed a "12+3" week semester structure. That is, each "regular" semester is 12 weeks; this is followed by 3-week intensive project-based courses that are utilised for flexible and intensive project-based courses, including courses that mix students from different programmes in project groups. Students expressed particular enthusiasm for these practical, project-based assessments.

The design of the building, and the ways in which the University manages its use, are optimised to support student-centred learning. This was evident to the Team during the visit, and was emphasised by students.

4.8. Use of sessional/adjunct teachers

Sessional teachers seem to serve a very specific purpose at RU. They are typically experienced industry professionals who are used to bridge academia and professional skills, and are used to teach more practical applications. This is in keeping with the University's foundational aims relating to contributing to Icelandic industry and business.

In discussion, Department Chairs were very positive about the contributions from sessional teachers. Bringing in faculty from abroad and from industry helps create networks for students in the future for future employment or further study. The semester structure allows the department to get faculty from abroad for a semester, or especially for the 3-week sessions for specialist topics that full-time faculty can not cover. Department Chairs were also positive about the trend towards having formal agreements with companies so that a company's workers can spend a semester in the University, rather than leave their day jobs to teach a class.

In discussion, sessional staff were very positive about their roles and support offered by the university. They identified very closely with the University, and its culture, and seemed very committed to their students. They felt they were well-managed and supported at programme and department levels, including department offices and central support services. They explained that their performance was evaluated by students, and were clear that concerns from students were relayed to them promptly by programme or department staff and heads.

The university also makes use of teaching assistants, typically advanced undergraduate or graduate students who can be appointed to assist with teaching activities. Students who met with the Team were critical about inconsistency in the quality of the performance of teaching assistants, and questioned whether they received appropriate training and feedback. In light of this finding, the University should strengthen and widen the range of training support for teaching assistants.

4.9. The language experience

Most bachelor level teaching is done in Icelandic, as most bachelor students are coming from the Icelandic high school system and need transition from Icelandic before they can be exposed to education at the more advanced levels where spoken English is more in use. However, it should be noted that assigned readings are mostly in English at all levels. A majority of masters and PhD studies are done in English, as there is a higher international diversity at this level. However, support materials are not readily available in English and there does not seem to be consistency in what material and information is in Icelandic and English.

4.10. Internationalisation

The University Strategy for Teaching includes a focus on international dimensions. This includes international benchmarking and accreditation of programmes, as well as teaching of modules by visiting international staff. The new *RU 2020+* strategy includes an intention to further develop international aspects of both education and knowledge through research.

The majority of masters-level programmes are taught in English, both to facilitate entry by non-Icelandic students and to support international perspectives and communication skills for Icelandic students. Masters and doctoral students who met with the Team were very positive about opportunities to spend part of their course in an international university. At institution-level, the University has a number of international collaborations, including with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which has informed both development of teaching and strategy. The Iceland

School of Energy collaborates with a range of international organisations, and attracts international postgraduate students. More generally, individual academic staff develop international collaborations based on their specific fields of research.

4.11. Links between research and teaching

In discussion of development of the *RU 2020+* strategy in the RA, the University described a strategic objective: "the combined strategies of education and knowledge are for Reykjavík University to serve as a bridge between the fourth industrial revolution and Icelandic society." The University's Strategy for Teaching Students states that "students shall receive training in scientific methods; students shall have an opportunity to participate in scientific research; instructors shall connect research within their discipline to their teaching".

During the visit, the Team heard about many examples of developing practice and strategy associated with research-teaching linkages. Staff who met with the Team explained the benefits: teachers' wider insights from keeping up to date with reading of research, and staff who are passionate about research in the subject. It was noted by the Team during the student interviews that students feel this passion and excitement.

Staff cited examples of current approaches to strengthening links between research and teaching, including: formal programmes to engage undergraduate students in research - based on good practice learned from MIT; get students to understand what knowledge is, and how to gain it and evaluate it; try to involve students in research at all levels, and be ambitious; also hope they have fun doing that research. Students could also get credits for a class called "research activity". Staff also noted aims to increase research-teaching linkages, including potentially including this as a focus in SLRs in QEF2.

Students who met with the Team were enthusiastic about projects focusing on innovation and entrepreneurship, and tended to use these terms to describe all projects, including some cases that seemed to the Team to be research-focussed.

The new organisational structure presents an opportunity for the University to consider how it could reinforce the complementary relationship between teaching and research, and how it could assist with coordination and sharing of best practices across schools and departments.

4.12. Postgraduate programmes

The University offers taught masters, research masters and doctoral postgraduate programmes. In recent years, an effort has been made to enhance the student learning experience of the PhD students. The central administration of the University initiated the establishment of a union of PhD students within the University. At the same time, a PhD-student representative was made a member of the Research Council. An effort has been made to look into what kind of arrangement could be useful for the purposes of ensuring that the relationship between the supervisor and the PhD-student is in good order, for example by establishing the role of "ombudsman" for PhD students. This work is still in process.

The University has launched a special two-semester course for PhD students. The course addresses the following topics: how to write a good grant proposal to a competitive research fund, how to write and publish a scientific paper and write scientific English, ethics in science, statistical methods in science – best practice (field-specific), and instruction in how to teach. The postgraduate students who met with the Team were a mix of masters and doctoral level students. They were generally positive about their experiences, citing: general research environment; access to, and support from, supervisors; opportunities to support teaching, which was valuable experience; training course in writing academic proposals; funding to attend international conferences; and support for planning

career after graduation. Negative comments were primarily about differences across departments in terms of availability of grants for research students.

4.13. Collaborative Provision

The University has teaching collaborations in Iceland with the University of Akureyri, the University of Iceland, parties in the Westman Islands, and an international collaboration in Computer Science with parties in Italy. There is also collaboration with international universities in doctoral-level studies, such as the collaboration of the Law Department with the University of Oslo.

Processes to manage quality in collaborative taught programmes, including joint degrees, are the same as for any other provision in the University. In all cases, University staff maintain contact with students and monitor their experience. Graduate students reported widespread opportunities to spend part of their programme in collaboration with an external, international university, and were positive about these experiences.

4.14. Serving the needs of different student populations

The students enrolled to undergraduate programmes are almost or exclusively Icelandic. Students enrolled to postgraduate programmes are both Icelandic and international. International students reported that they were mainly attracted by the University's expertise in certain specialist areas of knowledge or technology.

International students were positive about their overall experience, but were critical about lack of support materials available in English. Student leaders expressed an awareness of the situation of international students, primarily around language and socialisation. They expressed a view that language in education was not a problem. However, they recognised problems in terms of written support information available to international students. They also noted that social activities were predominantly in Icelandic. Student leaders expressed a desire to improve the situation, and were

very positive about the support provided to them by the International Office. The international students interviewed by the Team expressed concerns about the cost of housing, but were hopeful that the University's current project to construct student accommodation in the vicinity of the University would alleviate that situation.

Students are made aware that the Student Counselling and Career Centre will serve them in full confidence regarding any matters they may need to bring up outside the formal venues. Students with special needs, e.g., physical disability, dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are given support for their studies and examinations according to clear processes.

/sys/tur ('*sisters'*) is an organisation that was founded in 2013 by female students within the School of Computer Science. Their main goal was to create a forum for women to have conversations about computer science in a male-dominated subject area. Since then, its goals have become more diverse and /sys/tur now provides a support network for girls and introduces them to technology as an option for both sexes.

4.15. Management of information

As noted above, the University's SIS is not functioning, and it was explained in the RA that this is due to the failure of a vendor to fulfil its contractual obligations. As a result, student data are not used sufficiently in the daily operation of the university. Data can be mined from a data warehouse by dedicated IT staff, but those data are only available upon request and are delivered with some delay. For example, drop out rates are periodically reviewed in this fashion but cannot be properly monitored continuously.

The sample of Alumni who met with the Team reported satisfaction with the ways that their programmes and interactions with business and industry during their studies were valuable in

getting good jobs. However there is lack of systematic data on alumni job destinations to show progress and real-world application of their degrees.

4.16. Public information

Students who met with the Team reported that their actual experience as a student of the University either met or surpassed their expectations, implying that public information is abundant and accurate. Most people seemed aware of where to find information on the website. As noted in 4.14, international students would like more public information in English. The University should consider a formal policy on publications in Icelandic and English, including on the website.

4.17. Using SLRs to enhance student learning experience

The RA highlighted the significance of linking professional and subject accreditation in consideration of the student learning experience within SLRs in QEF1. The RA also summarised examples of how SLRs in QEF1 had focussed on the quality of the student learning experience. These included development of teaching and learning methods, and the presentation of information about teaching, learning, and assessments to students.

4.18. Summary evaluation of the student learning experience

The effectiveness of the University's commitment to provide students with a high-quality learning experience is evident in its pervasive quality culture, the outstanding learning environment, and the ways in which University strategies and organisational rules promote and support student-centred learning.

Staff, both academic and in support services, demonstrated great commitment and enthusiasm for their students. Students demonstrated great enthusiasm for their study programmes, their staff, and the University.

The University Building, online learning and support infrastructure, including the recently introduced *Canvas*™ LMS, provide an effective learning environment. The University should consider exploring the use of *Piazza*™ or alternative ways of supporting academic staff with techniques and technologies to help them efficiently manage potential large volumes of student online inquiries and emails.

University strategies and policies encourage student-centred learning that is enriched by interactions with research, business and industry.

The University should expedite the planned implementation of a functioning SIS to enable it to monitor student data.

The text box below relates the linkages between ESG and the evidence of secure management of quality of student learning experience, which underpins the confidence judgement quality of student learning experience.

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

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.

- The institution has a student-centred view and ESG 1.1 *Policy for Quality Assurance* points to specifications to further student engagement, learning outcomes, integrity and to avoid discrimination. It also mentions training of students to foster participation in QA, and the Team notes that there is a possibility to improve that further.
- ESG 1.2 *Design and Approval of Programmes* stresses student involvement, which is extensive at RU. It also stresses the connection between not only intended learning outcomes and assessment, but also design of corresponding learning modules. The University's model and approach of student-centred learning with extensive project-based activities enriched by interactions with research, business and industry is a strategic mode to achieve just that.
- ESG 1.3 *Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment* stresses innovative methods of teaching, questionnaires etc., to gauge the extent of co-creation, procedures for complaints, and flexible learning paths. The student-centred approach, the use of the building and 3-week curriculum slots for innovation, as well as the financial means for teaching development and the supportive staff all promote alignment to ESG 1.3.
- ESG 1.4 *Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification* is focussing on the preparation, support and monitoring of progression of individual students , especially those at risk. The strong support service and student-centred view is positive, but a fully implemented SIS will improve alignment with ESG 1.4 regarding monitoring of progression.
- ESG 1.5: *Teaching Staff* reflects the importance of formal evaluation, on-going training and recognition of excellence. RU provides a comprehensive and varied range of staff development opportunities, many of them commendable, well worth spreading. However, this ESG also specifically mention processes for sessional staff, where the Team has identified room for improvement. In addition the formal evaluation could be improved from the current annual Faculty Contribution Report to include and acknowledge teaching and service.
- ESG 1.6 *Learning Resources and Student Support* ensures provision of adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support to prepare for entry to both employment and further study. The visit has shown a multitude of examples on how RU works with the building and the support resources in a strategic manner (including the *Canvas*™ case study). The connections to business and industry give more examples on a wider view of learning support preparing for employment
- Implementation of the University's plans and the Team's recommendations regarding the SIS will improve the alignment of the University's processes for managing information relating to the student experience with ESG 1.7 *Information Management*.
- ESG 1.8: *Public Information* requires dissemination. Students who met with the Team reported that their actual experience as students of the University either met or surpassed their expectations, based on information prior to entry. International students, though, asked for more information in English which would improve alignment with ESG 1.8.
- ESG 1.9: *On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes* points to including students in the review, using data, including student support in the review and encompassing intended Learning Outcomes with assessment and learning design. It also points to action reports and communicating these. RUs' policies for review every third year, the inclusion of education in SLRs, and the work with benchmarking within international communities or accreditation bodies include all these factors. Implementation of the SIS will improve the alignment when it comes to the use of comparative data in review and monitoring.

5. Management of Research

5.1. Research policy and strategy

The University describes the role of research "as ... not limited to the publication of papers, as research activity also connects with the education offered and emphasis is put on research that has positive impact on companies through innovation, tech transfer and start-ups." The University's goal for research "is to ensure an environment that enables powerful research that strengthens the University's international reputation, infuses its teaching with new ideas, and provides society with new knowledge."

Policies and processes for managing research, including doctoral students, are clearly stated on the University's website and include: Research Council; the Quality Assurance system in research; Annual analysis of outputs; and Rules on Doctoral Studies. The University's policy regarding the working environment of researchers is benchmarked against EU guidelines.

The Research Council has a responsibility to help build and maintain a strong research-oriented culture at the University through motivation and support, design of processes and the pursuit of funding opportunities. The Research Council formulates a research strategy and provides advice to the President and Deans for implementing the strategy. Further, the Research Council provides the President with advice in research matters that do not pertain to individual schools. School proposals on the composition of review committees for academic hiring and promotions are sent to the Research Council for comment.

Since 2007, the University has had an ambitious policy to grow research, including local knowledge transfer and driving innovation. This direction was continued in the 2014-2018 strategy, with the primary focus on research being to advance research, innovation and knowledge transfer; and to

increase and formalise collaboration with industry. The continuous growth in research performance provides clear evidence of the success of the University's policies and strategy.

In the recent *RU 2020+* strategy, the over-arching objective for research is for the University to be a knowledge-centre that creates and disseminates knowledge for society and industry in a world that is changing rapidly. The key elements are to strengthen professional subject knowledge; improve ability to disseminate and share knowledge; establish facilities and support for innovation; expand education in innovation and support for student start-ups; and increase impact both domestically and internationally.

5.2. Monitoring of scientific quality of outputs

The University's Quality Assurance System for Research is based on annual evaluation of research activities of each individual member of academic staff. The University Research Council is responsible for and in charge of the evaluation, in collaboration with the University's Research Services who provide operational coordination.

The evaluation process starts with an annual report of research activity by each member of academic staff, termed the *Faculty Contribution Record* (FCR). These reports are considered by an Evaluation Panel of six external, international experts. Panel members are asked to base their evaluation, and hence their rating, primarily on the quantity and quality of research output in peer-reviewed outlets. Results are reported annually to the Research Council and in an overall summary titled "*The Academic Strength of Reykjavík University*". The outcomes of the evaluation are also used by the Deans in annual reviews with staff.

The FCR process is seen by staff as one of the drivers for changing the atmosphere to focus more on research, and it has been successful at achieving that goal. However, academic staff expressed some

concerns about the details of the process. Some referred to it as a "black box," as they were not really sure about the basis of the evaluations they receive. Also, some would like to see more consideration of impact on practice and society in these evaluations.

5.3. External support

The University's Research Services supports academic staff in obtaining external research funds including: monitoring financing opportunities nationally and abroad (EU and USA); assisting academic employees in writing application to competitive funds; and assisting academic employees in writing reports and running research projects. The RA referred to external support from Icelandic business and industry, including industry-funded projects.

5.4. Impact

The outcomes of the University's evaluations provide evidence of the University's growth of research and the current very high level of performance. The RA highlighted a number of achievements. The number of publications per faculty member has grown significantly. The University was listed among the best 350 universities worldwide in 2018, according to *Times Higher Education*, and as one of the top 100 young universities in the world.

The RA described the impact of the University's research on business and industry through innovation, technology transfer and company start-ups, with a recent policy to increase the development of formal collaboration agreements with companies. The RA also highlighted impact in terms of benefits to students who work with companies on industry-funded projects. In discussion, students were very positive about such opportunities.

5.5. Institutional enhancement of research management

The QA system has an explicit objective to enhance research performance. This is supported by a number of incentives including: a Research Award – given out annually, first time in 2010; Financial

Support to Research Centres – introduced in 2012; Faculty Research Expense Accounts – established in 2015; and an Internal Research Fund – introduced in 2018. This last initiative has awarded eight PhD Student Grants, in total 42.720.000 ISK; each grant is 420.000 ISK per month for a maximum of one year, as well as a 300.000 ISK travel grant. The Research Council has a lead role in enhancement, for example leading investigations and developing an action list that is seen as a shopping list for the Executive Board, to help fulfil the University's research strategy.

5.6. Benchmarks

Research performance and impact are benchmarked through the QA system for research. Reykjavík University is the first Icelandic university to participate in a formal implementation programme of the European Commission Policy regarding the working environment of researchers. The University has participated in self-evaluations and external audits regarding implementation of the EU principles. A task group at the University completed an internal analysis in 2010, which was a necessary precondition for entering the implementation programme and receiving the acknowledgement. The University formally applied for the acknowledgement by the European Commission in 2010 and received it in 2011. In 2012 and 2014 the University submitted a self-assessment and an update of its Human Resources Strategy. In December 2014, the University received an evaluation report from a committee of experts; this recommended that the University should continue to be acknowledged for implementing the "Charter and Code."

The School of Computer Science participates in a research benchmarking exercise. This is an international activity that originates from the IT University in Copenhagen. It is an annual, voluntary benchmarking exercise and the university has participated since 2009.

5.7. Collaboration

The University encourages and supports collaboration with Icelandic industry and with international partners. The most common types of university-business collaborations are: co-financed

collaborations about innovation in research and teaching; collaboration on contract research and services; access to inventions and transfer of new technology; funding of student projects, including industry PhDs; and endowments for faculty positions.

In discussions, senior staff considered that the University had gained, and continues to gain, a lot from international collaboration. They also noted that development of international research collaborations is primarily driven by departmental academic staff, based on subject expertise and interests. Academic staff and members of the Research Council expressed enthusiasm for more collaboration with international research groups.

5.8. Teaching-research balance

Human Resources policies, processes and support for academic staff consider both teaching and research, and also wider personal wellbeing. Academic staff contracts typically balance teaching 45%, research 45%, and and service and societal engagement 10%.

Annual staff interviews consider both teaching and research, informed by the FCR. The RA acknowledged that teaching is covered in less detail than research, and that changes are being made so as to better balance the contributions of teaching and research in the FCR.

5.9. Support for grant-getting activities and grant management

The University's Research Services supports academic staff in obtaining external research funds including: monitoring financing opportunities nationally and abroad (EU and USA); assisting academic employees in writing applications to competitive funds; and assisting academic employees in writing reports and running research projects. The University should consider how it could encourage the creation of an Icelandic common resource to support applications for international research programmes.

5.10. Using SLRs to manage research on an institutional level

The RA made no reference to explicit consideration of research in SLRs in QEF1. It should be noted that QEF1 did not require coverage of management of research in SLRs. Reference to school-level documents provided as Annexes to the RA indicated that the majority of schools *did* consider research in their SLR evaluations, with some also considering research degree students. Discussion with academic staff indicated that they would wish to include both research and research degree students in SLRs in QEF2.

5.11. General comments on the management of research

The University has a clear mission, strategies and management processes to develop and manage research, including research degree programmes. Research activities include an extensive range of international collaborations. The University QA system for research is aligned to peer-reviewed, international benchmarks and rankings. The effectiveness of the University's management is confirmed by both the current level of performance in these external rankings, and in the impressive growth of research outputs.

The Team would encourage the University to progress its plans to review the FCR process to consider the balance between teaching and research. The Team recommends the involvement of senior academic staff to explore the benefits of introducing a career review and development process that takes a wider, and longer-term view. This should include and acknowledge contributions in teaching and service, and should try to promote transparency in the quantitative evaluation of research.

6 Managing enhancement

6.1. General enhancement context

The distinctive context of the University is discussed in Section 1.8. In summary, the University is young, very focussed in terms of mission and academic subjects on the needs of Icelandic business and industry, and is very highly devolved with a high degree of autonomy for academic units.

As discussed in Section 1.7, the RA did not include a comprehensive summary of the University's priorities for enhancement (See QEF2 Handbook, Annex 6, "7 Managing Enhancement"). However, information coming from various parts of RA, its annexes, and meetings enabled the Team to gain evidence of the impacts of the University's general approach to enhancement.

The University's development has been rapid and impressive. The University illustrated examples of achievements. For example, the University has seen a growth in the number of publications per staff; from 1.1 in 2007 to 4.2 in 2016 (see also Section 5.2), and the number of graduations in IT-related fields has grown from 55 in 2007 to 220 in 2017 in response to industry demands. Also illustrative of the general enhancement context is the University's emphasis on quality of teaching and learning . There is also a focus on project-driven pedagogy (see Section 4.7) and technological solutions in teaching, including the recent introduction of the *Canvas*™ LMS (see Section 4.2, for example).

All this points to a student-centred and flexible University, that wants to, and is able to respond to short- and long-term demands of society, while at the same time considering the long-term educational benefits to students. However, the University's enhancement agenda is hindered to a degree by the lack of a responsive and comprehensive SIS (see Section 4.15)

6.2. Strategic planning and action planning

The University defined a strategy for the years 2014-2018, building on learning from IWR and SLRs in QEF1. The primary focus of this strategy was as follows: secure financial independence; increase quality of teaching; advance research, innovation and knowledge transfer; increase and formalise collaboration with industry; and preserve the strong core of faculty, staff and operations.

The University reviewed progress in 2018, and judged performance to be good. This improved performance formed the foundation for development of a new University strategy termed *RU 2020+*, comprising strategies for education, knowledge, workforce development and organisational development. This strategy is designed to cover the years 2020-2025 and its updating will likely start in 2023.

The *RU 2020+* strategy for education focuses on three key issues: modern and effective teaching methods; increased flexibility in study programmes; and access to education. The *RU 2020+* strategy for knowledge and research also focuses on three elements: serving as a source of knowledge; having a leading position in research; and being firmly an innovation university. The University noted the importance of its research strategy not being solely based on bibliometrics and international rankings, but also on relevance, local knowledge transfers and innovation. The *RU 2020+* strategy for workforce development is intended to ensure that the University is a good workplace and offers an environment that supports employees and operations. The *RU 2020+* strategy for organisational development was at a very early stage of implementation at the time of the visit (see Sections 1.8 and 6.3).

The leadership of the University is working on the implementation of the strategy and there is a working plan for the Board of Directors and University Council for the next two years. In discussion, the Team heard that the *RU 2020+* Strategy did not include a comprehensive set of specific Key

Performance Indicators (KPIs) and milestones. Rather, the University leaders think that the drive of the managers and staff is more important than an over-prescriptive plan. The Team considered that history of past success gives credibility to this approach.

Overall, one can observe the implementation of a distinctive, innovative mission that is clearly aligned to the needs of Iceland.

6.3. Committee structure

On the 1st March 2019, a new organisational structure for the University, was introduced. The four former schools were reorganised into seven academic departments, located in two (new) schools: The School of Technology and The School of Social Sciences (see Section 1.2).

The University explained the reasons for these changes, which are based on workload and focus. The workload of the former four Deans was considered to be excessive. The new structure creates a senior group of 3 academic leaders working closely together (the President and the two new Deans). The roles of the seven new Chairs will focus on developing and implementing coherent and well-defined teaching and research at the departmental level. One of the intended side effects of this re-organisation is to create more opportunities for interdisciplinary work.

The Team formed a view that, given the relatively modest size of the University, this new organisation, which does not include the typical role of Vice-President or Vice-Rector, is lean, well thought-out, tailored for this specific university and should facilitate the implementation of *RU 2020+*.

Key committees at institution level with remits in managing enhancement are: Board of Directors; University Council; Executive Board; Curriculum Council; Research Council. Within the former four-

school organisation structure, University Rules required each school to operate a: School Council, Curriculum Council and a Research Council. The formation of councils within the new academic organisation structure was ongoing during the period of the visit.

6.4. Evidence base

Although not evident from the RA, meetings with stakeholders (in particular with students), indicated that leaders, both at University and School levels, continuously use stakeholder feedback and KPIs (with one significant exception - see below) to inform flexible and responsive actions. The significant exception relates to the delay and difficulty in implementing a functional SIS (See Section 4.15). In the RA, the University acknowledged that this has prevented the University from gathering important information on student drop outs, duration of studies, etc. The Team recommend that the implementation of a functional SIS should be expedited.

6.5. Benchmarks

At institution-level, benchmarking is an implicit feature in terms of strategy statements for teaching and for research (see Sections 3.1, 4.3, 5.1 and 6.7); seeking professional or subject accreditations (see Sections 3.11, 6.7) ; and quality assurance of research (see Section 5.3). The design of the new organisational structure also included a comparative study.

At departmental level, for example in law and business, benchmarking is done regularly to inform decisions on curricula. Likewise, staff from support departments (including Quality Assurance) engage with international developments and spend time and travel to learn the best practices of other universities in EU and Nordic countries. Thus, even if benchmarking is not explicitly included in a strategic document of the University, it is common practice

6.6. Internal sharing of best practice

Among academic staff and leaders, the sharing of best practice occurs predominantly in an informal way, mostly without a dedicated structure. With regard to implementation of SLRs in QEF1, there appeared to be little, if any, discussion between units. On the other hand, the Heads of department offices have very frequent informal contacts and discuss topics of common interest, including "hot topics" as they arise. During the meeting with these administrative directors, it was obvious that they shared a true team spirit and interacted with each other very well.

Even if the modest size of the University facilitates informal contacts between units and colleagues, a more systematic approach to sharing of best practice on important topics is recommended. This is an opportunity that should be developed in the light of the new organisational structure.

6.7. Drawing on international experience

A common feature of the conversations with University members, particularly with the leaders at the school and university levels, is an outward-looking perspective that includes international dimensions. This is in line with the clear University strategy to ensure that its programmes satisfy international quality standards. Indeed, all the subject areas within the University, except Sport Science, have received international accreditation or have been developed in collaboration with other universities or international organisations. Also, the post-graduate students can benefit from the University's support for their international contacts and travel to attend seminars.

The University's international focus is clearly a distinctive feature and a strong point of the University.

6.8. Domestic co-operation

The main examples of domestic academic cooperation in undergraduate studies are with the University of Akureyri, first in Computer Science, and then for courses related to the fishing industry.

In these programmes, the University implements its own rules and policies to ensure University standards and quality checks. The RA and discussion with staff and students highlighted the significance of domestic co-operation with business and industry, in particular joint projects that often involve students.

For applications to international research programmes, the University has its own support structure and services (see Section 5). This is independent of the University, and is not shared with the comparable services of other Icelandic universities. Given the small size of the country, the University should consider whether it could encourage the creation of an Icelandic common resource to support applications for international programmes.

6.9. Evaluation

The RA and the University's published policy statement on the QA system were not explicit about institution-level evaluation. However, the Team found widespread evidence of "evaluation built-in". That is, the University's culture, strategy and management of operations are generally informed by effective evaluation of relevant inputs and evidence, and benchmarked against national and international standards and expectations.

The University should consider how it could map and make explicit existing evaluation processes, and link the new SIS to support a revised QA system.

6.10. Summary evaluation of managing enhancement

The University has a clear, distinctive strategy in line with the country's needs. It is a flexible and student-centred University which has recently reorganised its structure in a way that has been welcomed by staff, with implementation in-progress. The University benefits from an outward-looking perspective that includes extensive international dimensions.

Enhancement is built-in to the culture, strategy and working of the University, with evidence of a commitment to continuous improvement and making best use of resources. This includes dealing with the challenging financial situation in Iceland in the recent past. Enhancement activities are enabled by strong institution-level leadership and strategy, with objectives and financial allocations clearly aligned to mission, and benefit from an outwards-looking perspective.

The new academic organisation structure presents an opportunity to review the proposed University System for QA and how it could support both assurance and enhancement in the future. The Team recommends that the Deans and Department Chairs should be involved in reviewing the design and implementation of a University QA System that will fit the needs of the new academic organisation, and ensure clear ownership by academics of this system. This work should take account of existing University policies, procedures, rules, etc., which currently address aspects of standards and quality. It should also continue to consider alignment with ESG. The review should include consideration of a number of key questions. First, what types of information regarding quality and standards are needed at different levels in the new organisation? Second, what is the right balance between consistency across the University and local approaches within schools, departments and programmes? Third, how to link annual and periodic review processes, including accreditations, benchmarking and SLRs? This should consider ways to minimise duplication of effort and bureaucracy. Fourth, how to make the whole system as lean as possible, while at the same time allow for sharing of effective practice across the University? It should be noted that the Team is *not* recommending an additional layer of systems and bureaucracy. The University already has a system of policies, procedures, rules etc. A helpful early action could be to map these against the ESG and consider possible gaps and redundancies. Finally and crucially, how can the University build on and work with its existing strengths and quality cultures?

What is needed is an increased involvement of higher academic management in the implementation of a revised QA system, in ways that are systematic and efficient, fully in line with the ESG, and are taking advantage of existing departmental cultures.

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 enhancement are aligned to the ESG.

- Implementation of the University's plans and the Team's recommendations regarding the QA System will further improve the clarity of the University's alignment with ESG 1.1 *Policy for Quality Assurance*, and the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation of University quality processes.

7. Conclusion

7.1. General summary, including overview of management of research

The Team is very grateful to the President, Directors of the Board, staff and students for the very warm 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 good humour, 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 Team specifically acknowledges the commitment of the President in presenting the institution's showcase, including its strategic development.

The visit came at a time when the University had very recently reorganised structure of its academic organisation. However this presented no problems for the Team or for those who met with the Team. This is evidence of the extent of stakeholder engagement in the organisational development process, as well as of the University's capability to manage change.

The RA presented a picture of a very distinctive and dynamic university. One which has made very significant progress in development since its IWR in QEF1, and which has clear, ambitious plans for the future in its *RU 2020+* strategy

The Team found a wealth of evidence to confirm the RA and to enable the Team to make the confidence judgements noted in 7.4 and 7.5 below.

The Team also found evidence of the effectiveness of the University's management of research. This is confirmed by both the growth in research performance during period since the IWR in QEF1 and recognition in external rankings of current performance.

More generally, the Team found a University that truly stands out, in terms of its distinctive mission, pace and scale of development, outstanding physical environment, culture and ways of working.

The Team concludes by wishing the University every success in implementing its *RU 2020+* strategy and continuing its very impressive journey of development.

7.2. Summary of strengths

- A distinctive, innovative institutional mission that is clearly aligned to the needs of Iceland
- Strong institution-level leadership and strategy, with objectives and financial allocations clearly aligned to mission
- Development of curricula that are clearly aligned to both the short- and longer-term needs of Icelandic business and industry, promoting both employability and job creation
- An institutional strategy to deliver strong research performance
- A pervasive quality culture focussed on excellence and relevance

- A culture in which students demonstrate great enthusiasm for their study programmes, their staff, and the University
- A culture in which staff demonstrate great enthusiasm for their students, their teaching, research and innovation, and the University environment and societal engagement
- Continuous use of stakeholder feedback, in particular from students, to inform flexible, responsive actions
- Institutional commitment to student representation at all levels, with positive and constructive engagement
- Alumni satisfaction with the ways that their programmes and interactions with business and industry during their studies were valuable in getting good jobs
- A single-building campus that has been designed, and is actively managed, to promote genuinely student-centred learning and effective research
- The successful implementation of the *Canvas*™ Learning Management System demonstrates the University's commitment to updating and developing technological infrastructure.
- Departmental administrative offices, with staff who are clearly motivated to make things work well, and who share ideas and good practice across departments
- An outward-looking perspective, including international dimensions, benefitting both students and staff
- Externality in department-level management and enhancement of standards and quality

7.3. Summary of areas for improvement

Areas for further development that the University is asked to consider are:

- Involve the Deans and Department Chairs in reviewing the design and plans for implementation of the University's Quality Assurance system - this should build on the existing quality cultures and commitment to strategy-driven enhancement; and should recognise opportunities provided by the new organisational structure

- Consider how the revised Quality Assurance system (referred to above) can be used to inform efficient implementation of future Subject-Level Reviews
- Strengthen and widen the range of support for pedagogic and technological competence to include all people with teaching roles, in particular sessional staff and teaching assistants
- Expedite the implementation of a Student Information System
- Support academic staff with techniques and technologies to help them efficiently manage large volumes of student online inquiries and emails
- Involve senior academic staff to explore the benefits of introducing a career review and development process for a wider and longer-term view than the current annual Faculty Contribution Report through a process to include and acknowledge teaching and service in addition to research
- Increase transparency and formalisation in the selection and appointment of sessional teachers
- Consider whether the University could encourage the creation of an Icelandic common resource to support applications for international research programmes

7.4. Judgment on managing standards of degrees and awards

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

7.5. Judgment on managing standards of student learning experience

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

Annex 1: Visit Programme

Tuesday May 15

Time	Meeting	Attendees
08:30-9:00	**Briefing with President**	Dr. Ari Kristinn Jónsson, President
09:00-11:30	**University Showcase**	Dr. Ari Kristinn Jónsson, President Einar G Hermannsson, Director of Facilities Dr. Einar Hreinsson, Direcor of Teaching Affairs
11:30-12:30	**Lunch**	
12:30-13:30	**Key Staff from Upper Management**	Dr. Ari K. Jónsson, President Dr. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Dean of Social Sciences Ingunn Svala Leifsdóttir, Executive Manager of Finance Sigríður Elín Guðlaugsdóttir, Executive Manager of Quality
13:30-14:30	**Executive Board**	Dr. Ari K. Jónsson, President Dr. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Dean of Social Sciences Ingunn Svala Leifsdóttir, Executive Manager of Finance Sigríður Elín Guðlaugsdóttir, Executive Manager of Quality Heiðar Jón Hannesson, Executive Manager of IT Dr. Luca Aceto, Chair of Computer Science Dr. Ágúst Valfells, Chair of Engineering Hera Grímsdóttir, Chair of Technology Dr. Bryndís Björg Ásgeirsdóttir, Chair of Psychology Dr. Hafrún Kristjánsdóttir, Chair of Sports Science
14:30-15:00	**Coffee break**	
15:00-16:00	**Department Chairs**	Dr. Luca Aceto, Chair of Computer Science Dr. Ágúst Valfells, Chair of Engineering Hera Grímsdóttir, Chair of Technology Dr. Bryndís Björg Ásgeirsdóttir, Chair of Psychology Dr. Hafrún Kristjánsdóttir, Chair of Sports science Dr. Stefan Wendt, Head of Master's Studies in Business
16:00-17:00	**Heads of Support Services**	Dr. Einar Hreinsson, Director of Teaching Affairs Dr. Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of Research Services Sara St. Hildardóttir, Head of Library and Information Arnar Egilsson, Head of IT Support Gréta Matthíasdóttir, Head of Counselling Guðrún Gyða Ólafsdóttir, Head of Reception Guðlaug M. Jakobsdóttir, Head of International Exchange

Wednesday May 16

Time	Meeting	Attendees
08:30-09:30	**SLR Reports from Science and Engineering**	Dr. Ágúst Valfells, Chair of Engineering Dr. Sigurður Ingi Erlingsson, Professor of Physics Ingunn Sæmundsdóttir, Director of Undergraduate Studies
09:30-10:30	**Future SLR-reports from Social Sciences**	Dr. Hafrún Kristjánsdóttir, Chair of Sports Science Dr. Bryndís Björk Ásgeirsdóttir, Chair of Psychology Eiríkur Elís Þorláksson, Chair of Law Dr. Stefan Wendt, Director of Master´s Program in Business Dr. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Dean of Social Sciences
10:30-10:45	**Coffee break**	
10:45-11:45	**Undergraduate Students**	Not disclosed. N = 3.
11:45-12:00	**Preparation for open meeting**	
12:00-13:00	**Open meeting with Students**	Not disclosed. N = 35.
13:00-13:30	**Gathering notes**	
13:30-14:30	**Graduate Students**	Not disclosed. N =7.
14:30-15:30	**Department Office Heads**	Sigrún María Ammendrup, Computer Science Sigrún Þorgeirsdóttir, Engineering Benedikta G. Kristjánsdóttir, Law Áslaug Pálsdóttir, Business and Pyschology Ása Guðný Ásgeirsdóttir, Sports Science Hjördís Hreinsdóttir, Technology
15:30-16:00	**Coffee break**	
16:00-17:00	**Student Leaders**	President of SARU (Student Association of Reykjavík University) Vice President of SARU Former Information Officer of SARU Former President of SARU Former Vice President of SARU Student Interest Representative Former Student Interest Representative President of Pragma (Student Association for Engineering) President of Tvíund (Student Association for Computer Science)
17:00-18:00	**Debriefing**	Dr. Einar Hreinsson, Direcor of Teaching Affairs

Thursday May 17

Time	Meeting	Attendees
08:30-09:30	**Senior academics**	Dr. Haraldur Auðunsson, Engineering Dr. Ármann Gylfason, Engineering Dr. Jón F. Sigurðsson, Psychology Dr. Bjarni M. Magnússon, Law Dr. Magnús M. Halldórsson, Computer science Dr. Már Mixa, Business Kristján Halldórsson, Sports Science
09:30-10:30	**Part time teachers**	Katrín Oddsdóttir, Law Ágústa E. Björnsdóttir, Sports Jóhann A. Harðarson, Engineering & Technology Davíð F. Jónsson, Engineering Sigurður Óli Gestsson, Engineering Ingibjörg B. Kjartansdóttir, Engineering & Technology Jón Bjarnason Engineering, Engineering and Technology Ingunn Hafdís Hauksdóttir, Business Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson, Business
10:30-10:45	**Coffee break**	
10:45-11:45	**Board of Directors**	Hjörleifur Pálsson (Chair), Board Chairman of Syn Frosti Ólafsson, CEO of Orf Genetics Halldór Benjamín Þorbergsson, Managing Director of SA
11:45-12:00	**Preparation for open meeting**	
12:00-13:00	**Open meeting with staff**	No attendees
13:00-13:30	**Gathering notes**	
13:30-14:30	**Alumni**	Not disclosed. N = 8.
14:30-15:30	**Research council**	Dr. Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of Research Services Dr. Hannes H. Vilhjálmsson, Chair of Computer science Hlín Kristbergsdóttir, PhD student Jónas Þ. Snæbjörnsson, Engineering Dr. Bjarni Már Magnússon, Law
15:30-16:00	**Coffee break**	
16:00-17:00	**Defriefing with President**	Dr. Ari Kristinn Jónsson, President