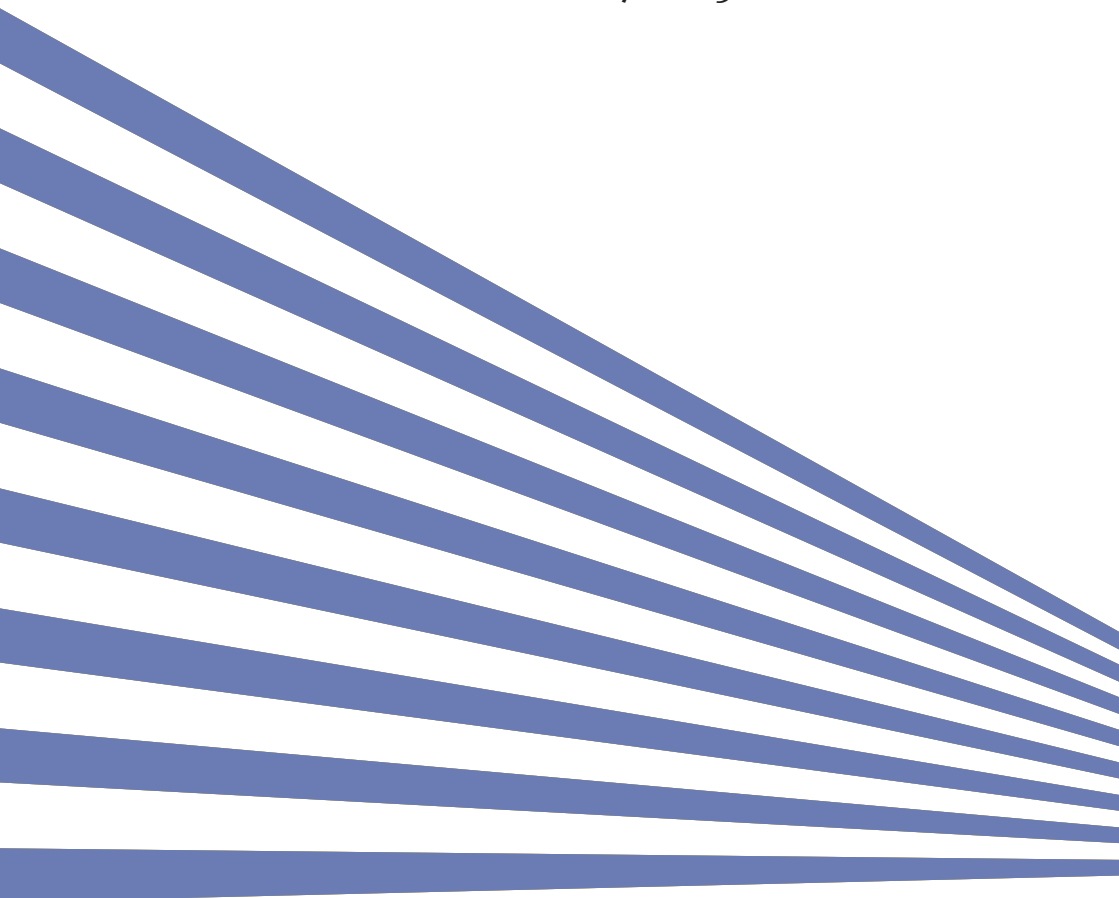


# **Student Guide on the Quality Assurance Work of the Universities**

*Based on a framework programme on strengthening quality in the field of higher education in Icelandic universities 2017–2023*



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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
<b>Chapter 1: Quality of universities</b> .....	5
What is quality? .....	5
Participation of students in the quality assurance work of the universities .....	7
Importance of active participation by students .....	7
How can students participate? .....	7
<b>Chapter 2: Quality Enhancement Framework</b> .....	8
About QEF II .....	8
Changes to QEF II from QEF I .....	8
Main parties involved in QEF II .....	9
Summary of the roles of student representatives in QEF II .....	10
Annual meetings with the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education .....	12
What is reviewed and what is the role of students? .....	12
Subject-Level Reviews and role of students .....	12
Reports in Subject-Level Reviews .....	13
Institution-Wide Reviews and the role of students .....	14
Discussion on quality of research framework .....	18

# Introduction



The aim of this guide is to provide an introduction of how quality of studies and teaching is defined in Icelandic universities, explain how a systematic evaluation of the quality of university work takes place and what the involvement of students is, on the one hand, in an internal

review (self-review) of organisational units conducted by the universities and, on the other hand, external review of the universities conducted by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education. The guide is structured in such a way that at the start, quality in universities and participation of students is discussed in general terms and in the second chapter, QEF II is discussed and how that process works.

Involvement of students in QEF II reviews is an important part of the process and the guide is therefore written to specifically inform those students who participate in these reviews so they can better attend to their roles. It also serves the purpose of making students and other stakeholders aware of the importance of quality assurance in universities.

Purposeful training and information dissemination to students is a prerequisite for them becoming active participants in the process and the National Union of Icelandic Students (LIS) places an emphasis on promoting the active participation of students in all quality assurance work of universities.

## What is QEF II?

QEF II is a process that is intended to enhance quality of teaching and research in Icelandic universities and takes place from 2017–2023. For the first six years, reviews are carried out, and in the seventh year, an evaluation of the results of the process is conducted and organisation of possible improvements to QEF, before embarking on the next process.

## Chapter 1: Quality of universities

### What is quality?

Quality in a university environment is often evaluated subjectively and it can therefore be difficult to define this term. How to define the term can vary between individuals and even between countries. Below are examples that can provide an idea of quality assurance work in universities in Iceland and that are relevant in evaluating the quality of studies and teaching.

- **Curriculum** – what kinds of study programmes are offered and what is the content and structure of courses? Are study programmes and courses regularly reviewed?
- Progress of studies – is the structure of study programmes logical so that prior courses and prerequisites effectively prepare students for demanding courses and projects in the latter stages of their studies?
- Studies and teaching – is student-centred learning in place? Are learning outcomes used (knowledge, competences, skills)? Are teaching, assessment and feedback in accordance with learning outcomes?
- Knowledge of teachers – do teachers have specialist knowledge of the content of their courses?
- Assessment and feedback – is feedback such that students can make use of it to better understand the learning material and improve their abilities?
- Support services – do students who need learning assistance or special assistance have access to appropriate services?
- Infrastructure and information technology – what types of facilities are available for studies and teaching, for example, classrooms, facilities for

practical teaching, group work facilities and access to library?

- International dimension and mobility – do students have an opportunity to pursue part of their studies abroad? Does the structure of the study programme make this easy for students and is it ensured that students will get credits completed abroad evaluated for credit transfer in Iceland?
- Research – do students get an opportunity to participate in research? Is teaching in methodology suitable and do teachers disseminate their research in teaching?
- Ties to industry – do part-time lecturers from industry participate in the studies? Do students have an opportunity to strengthen their abilities and knowledge by working on practical projects with companies and institutions? Are there opportunities for practicum and is this evaluated for credit?
- Student ID numbers – are student ID numbers used when taking exams and submitting assignments or do students submit using their name and/or national identity number?
- Right to take repeated course components due to illness or other reasons – do students have fair right to take repeated course components due to illness or other reasons?
- Status upon graduation – do the studies open doors to the employment market and/or further studies?

Often, though, it is difficult to develop meaningful scales for these aspects that are comparable between universities. Each and every university has different emphases in its strategy and, furthermore, individual faculties or schools within the same university even have different emphases. For example, there is often less flexibility in curriculums that provide protected professional titles

upon graduation, such as police science. If a university places an emphasis in its strategy on carefully attending to students, then it is likely that it places great emphasis on support services. In a university or faculty that places an emphasis on ties to industry, one could expect an emphasis on practical assignments with direct connections to parties within organisations. One could go on but hopefully, these examples show that in quality reviews, it is important to look at environment and emphases when carrying out a review.

A few measures exist that are often used to understand quality of university work. Among these are the following:

- Number of students in individual courses.
- Proportion of teaching in the hands of part-time lecturers compared with proportion of teaching conducted by permanent teachers.
- Proportion of assignments where students receive interactive feedback.
- Student dropout.
- Average number of semesters that students need to complete their degree.
- Proportion of students who have found a suitable job shortly after graduating.
- Proportion of students who pursue exchange studies abroad and have these evaluated for credit transfer.
- Statistics on the social dimension, for example, in regard to the composition of the student group.

When these measures are evaluated, it is important to give consideration to the strategy of the university and faculty. Quality assessment is also about evaluating standards of degrees awarded. There

exist various standards for degrees, both foreign and domestic. An examination must be conducted of, for example, those standards that the universities must fulfill by national law and those relating to international commitments. Here can be mentioned the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education.

#### What is ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)?

Requirements and guidelines for quality reviews in the field of university education in the European Higher Education Area that were approved by the ministers of education in Europe in 2005. The proposal that was submitted for approval was prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU) and university associations in Europe (EURASHE and EUA).



## Participation of students in the quality assurance work of the universities

### *Importance of active participation by students*

In order for students to see a benefit in pursuing university studies in Iceland, the higher education system must be sufficiently quality driven to support a knowledge community and increase competitiveness and quality of life for individuals. It is important that education in Iceland develops and strengthens in step with new times and is in accordance with international standards.

The ESG and the Regulation on Quality Assurance of Teaching and Research in Higher Education Institutions clearly state that students shall be active participants in all quality assurance work of universities. It is therefore important that universities provide students with an opportunity to do so and create an active forum for collaboration so that students can influence the operations of the university. In order for this to succeed as well as possible, students must be empowered and encouraged to express themselves still further. Participation of students in the quality assurance work of the universities keeps the universities focused and strengthens the credibility of the work.

Students shall steadily participate in the quality assurance work itself of the universities, but it is also important that students get an opportunity to present their opinions when reviews of quality of studies and teaching are conducted.

Through internal and external quality reviews, students have an opportunity to support the universities but also keep them focused.

### *How can students participate?*

One way to categorise the quality assurance work of universities is, on the one hand, into internal quality assurance work and, on the other hand, external quality assurance work and students shall be active participants in both processes. It is also possible to participate in strengthening quality in other forums, such as in the National Union of Icelandic Students (LIS).

- **Internal quality assurance work** revolves around the work that the university itself undertakes to improve quality within its walls. Participation of students in such work varies by universities but most often consists in serving on various committees and councils under the auspices of the university or faculties where students generally have the right of audience and right to propose motions but in some instances, the right to vote. Students also participate in the internal quality assurance work of their university by answering questionnaires on quality (for example, teaching evaluations) and by giving feedback and information when study programmes are established or reviewed. It is necessary that those students who represent university students are aware of how these matters stand, receive an opportunity to have their voice heard in this regard and get a chance to have a real impact.
- **External quality assurance work** refers to the Quality Board's oversight of quality of studies and the framework for the research work of the universities. It revolves around processes where a

university or faculty prepares a self-review report. Students participate in this work. The process is completed when an external party, expert or expert team, carries out an external review of the university or faculty (on the basis of the self-review report) and submits an opinion.

- **National Union of Icelandic Students (LIS):** Students can participate in the work of LIS which is a consultation platform for students in Iceland and abroad. Students can, for example, apply to serve on the quality board of LIS whose role is, among others, to increase knowledge of the quality assurance work of universities among students and work on the coordination of quality assurance work in Icelandic universities.

## Chapter 2: Quality Enhancement Framework

### *About QEF II*

With the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (second cycle, QEF II) an environment is created where universities can 1) ensure the standards of all university degrees, 2) strengthen the learning environment of students and 3) improve the framework of research activities in a systematic way.

All universities in Iceland have now implemented a process based on the framework programme QEF II. It includes, on the one hand, Subject-Level Reviews (SLR) which are used to strengthen the programmes and, on the other hand, Institution-Wide Reviews (IWR) which are purposeful oversight and organisational processes that are used to enhance monitoring of quality and standards at the entire institution.

The reviews in QEF II will be carried out over a seven-year period as of 2018.

The framework programme is, for example, based on the standards of the European Higher Education Area which the Icelandic government has committed itself to follow as these standards were presented in May 2015 in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ESG.

### *Changes to QEF II from QEF I*

The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education submitted important comments in the first process of the reviews, called QEF I, that concern the internal work of the universities but also the higher education system as a whole. Many comments were received from stakeholders after these reviews and many and diverse conclusions could be drawn from the process which were used in preparing for the next process, QEF II.

In developing QEF II, a wide-ranging assessment of the framework programme was used for support, as well as conversations with Rectors, students and representatives of student organisations, officials in the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the directors of quality management at all the universities that serve on the Quality Council of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education.

The five main changes in QEF II from QEF I are the following:

1. A review is now conducted of the framework for research.
2. Increased responsibility of the universities for implementation of Subject-Level Reviews.



## Timeline:



3. Public information provision on the results of Subject-Level Reviews.
4. Appointment of a student to the Quality Board, as well as a participating observer from the group of students.
5. The decision that transparency shall be one of the key factors in the framework programme.

Students have two representatives on the Quality Board who are nominated by LIS. This is a way to ensure good cooperation of students with everyone involved in the process at all levels and to contribute to their interests being considered in all decision-making.

## Main parties involved in QEF II

### *Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education:*

The Quality Board determines the overall arrangement and implementation of the framework programme at the start of each process according to an agreement with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture with the publication of the QEF Handbook. The role of the Quality Board is to develop, maintain and supervise the operations of QEF in accordance with international criteria and in connection with Icelandic culture, traditions and legal framework. The Quality Board convenes for meetings four times a year. The Quality Board is composed of six international experts, as well as one student representative nominated by LIS. The members of the Quality Board (besides the student representative) are international

#### How are reviews carried out in QEF II?

On the one hand, internal reviews of organisational units (Subject-Level Reviews) are conducted which are certified by a foreign and independent professional party, and on the other hand, Institution-Wide Reviews are carried out by a team of international experts appointed by the Quality Board. Each university and each organisational unit within each university undergoes a review in QEF II once.

experts in the field of quality control at the higher education level and possess much experience in the field of quality reviews. The chairperson of the Quality Council (see below) and one student representative, nominated by LIS, are participating observers in meetings of the Quality Board.

#### **Quality Council:**

The Quality Council operates alongside the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education; the Council is composed of the directors of quality management at the universities and student representatives nominated by LIS. The Quality Council serves as a point of contact between the Quality Board and the universities. The role of the Quality Council is to be a leading force in quality assurance work in Iceland, a cooperative forum for directors of quality management and students, and to serve as an advisory unit to the Quality Board. The chairperson of the Quality Council is a participating observer on the Quality Board.

#### **Research Evaluation Advisory Committee:**

The Research Evaluation Advisory Committee also works alongside the Quality Board and is composed of the following parties: representative from the Quality Board, who is also the chairperson of the Committee, one former member of the Quality Board, two representatives from the Quality Council, representative from the Science and Technology Council and three representatives nominated by the Rectors' Conference of Higher Education Institutions, thereof one student pursuing doctoral studies. The role of the Committee is to guide and provide support to the Qual-

ity Board in implementing the research review system in QEF II and work on further developing the system.

#### **Ministry of Education, Science and Culture:**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture assigns to the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education the implementation of an external review and the publication of criteria on Subject-Level Review. The Ministry appoints all members of the Quality Board for a period of six years at a time. The Quality Board regularly meets with the Ministry to communicate how matters are progressing but is independent of the Ministry in its work.

### **Summary of the roles of student representatives in QEF II**

Table 1 shows a summary of the roles of students in committees and councils that have been explained here above and are a part of QEF II. With this arrangement, an effort is made to ensure that the voice of students is as strong as possible and that students are active participants in enhancing quality in universities at all levels..

#### **What are organisational units?**

Organisational units are individual faculties or other units within a university which correspond to one discipline or academic field. Examples of organisational units are a faculty of law and faculty of psychology.

Table 1. Overview of formal roles of students in QEF II.

Stakeholder	Number of students	Nomination/ appointment	Role of students
Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education	2*	Nomination by LIS, appointment by Ministry of Education, Science and Culture	Ensure that viewpoints of students appear in discussions and decisions of the Quality Board when implementing QEF II. Keep LIS informed about the work of the Board.
Quality Council of Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education	2	Nomination by LIS, appointment by Ministry of Education, Science and Culture	Ensure that viewpoints of students appear in discussions and decisions of the Quality Board when implementing QEF II. Keep LIS informed about the work of the Board.
Research Evaluation Advisory Committee	1	Rectors' Conference of Higher Education Institutions/Quality Board	Ensure that viewpoints of students in research-based studies appear in discussions and decisions of the committee.
Subject-Level Review Committees	2**	Decision by organisational unit	Ensure that the viewpoints of students are included in the Review Report of the organisational unit.
Editorial board of Reflective Analysis for Institution-Wide Review	1	University	Ensure that as many students as possible have a voice in the Reflective Analysis and that students' opinion of primary interests is clearly stated in the report.
Institution-Wide Review Team	1	LIS/Quality Board	Ensure that the primary interests of students are thoroughly examined in the review and have weight in judgments on quality of degrees and learning environment.
Team for annual meetings with representative of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education	2**	University and student organisation within each and every university	Ensure that progress of tasks related to the main interests of students are discussed honestly at the meeting.

\*one fully-fledged member with right to vote and one participating observer with right to propose motions and right of audience

\*\*this decision is in the hands of the university/faculty at each time but at least two are recommended

## **Annual meetings with the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education**

At annual meetings, the senior administration of the university, along with a representative/representatives of students, meets with a representative of the Quality Board and reports on progress of tasks that are to enhance quality at the university. At the meeting, the role of the student representative is to report on the participation of students in quality assurance work within the university, report on progress of quality assurance tasks from the viewpoint of students and communicate information from other student representatives. These meetings can take up to four hours. The student representative at the meeting can prepare for the meeting by, for example, looking at the last Institution-Wide Review of the university and public summaries of recent Subject-Level Reviews. The representative could also prepare by speaking with other student representatives within the university to find out what they believe is going well and what can be improved. LIS can assist student representatives in preparing for these meetings. Further information on the annual meetings can be found in chapter six of the QEF Handbook of the Quality Board.

### **What is reviewed and what is the role of students?**

As previously stated, quality assessment in the QEF II process consists, on the one hand, in reviews of individual organisational units at the university (Subject-Level Review, SLR) that the

universities themselves lead and, on the other hand, in external review by the Quality Board, which is called an Institution-Wide Review (IWR). Within the process, a review is conducted of how quality assurance work is carried out, based on three main emphases:

1. Quality of degrees
2. Quality of learning experience/learning environment of students
3. Quality of the framework for research

In Subject-Level Reviews, it is up to the universities themselves to assess whether they fulfill quality standards as regards these three points. In Institution-Wide Reviews, however, judgments are made concerning whether the universities fulfill quality standards.

### **Subject-Level Reviews and role of students**

Each organisational unit undergoes at one time a review in QEF II (2018–2023) and the universities themselves decide when the review takes place, in consultation with the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education. It can be assumed that work on the review will take two semesters from organisation to publication of a report, with certification by an international expert. All work on the review takes place within the universities but its implementation and preparation of the report is in the hands of employees and students from the respective university which form a Subject-Level Review Committee. The work consists for the most

part in the meetings of the Committee itself, its meetings with teachers, students and stakeholders, critical examination of performance measures, report writing and read-throughs of chapters that others have written for the report.

The universities are required to always ensure that students are active participants in Subject-Level Reviews. At least two students have a seat on the editorial board for the Subject-Level Review Report and it is necessary that as many students as possible voice their opinion when information is collected.

Below are a few words of advice on good procedure which helps to ensure active involvement of students; further information can be found in chapter 3 of the QEF II Handbook of the Quality Board.

### Students on the Subject-Level Review Committee:

- The student organisation of the organisational unit chooses at least two student representatives for the Subject-Level Review Committee in consultation with the senior administration of the faculty. Student representatives must have good English language skills as the Subject-Level Review Report is written in English. Student representatives must preferably have completed 3–4 semesters of their studies when they are nominated. It is important that student representatives can work effectively in a group, are responsible and actively participate in their studies and have as a result good insight into the position of students within the respective faculty. If postgraduate studies are offered in the faculty, it is important that one of the student representatives is from the group of postgraduate students.

Student representatives must receive appropriate

- training in order to be well informed about the purpose of the review and what is expected of them.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the Subject-Level Review Committee collects information from the general student population through the following means:

- Introduce reviews in large courses, send out questionnaires and furthermore point to the importance of responding, as well as working with the student organisation of the organisational unit to advertise the review on its social media. Encourage students to attend open meetings.
- Acquire information on graduated students from student registry and send emails with questionnaires, if appropriate. Contact previous boards of student organisations, which could, for example, attend meetings of focus groups or meet with review committees.
- Examine results from teaching surveys.

It is recommended that student representatives get their work in relation to the review confirmed in a Diploma Supplement upon graduation. Students in review committees can contact LIS confidentially if questions arise concerning their rights and obligations in review work.

### *Reports in Subject-Level Reviews*

A Subject-Level Review is completed with a report that is certified by a foreign and independent professional party, which ensures that the report has been completed with integrity and in accordance with the QEF II Handbook. Following this, the report is sent to the Quality Board. Accompanying the Review

Report shall be an action plan for the next period. The Quality Board treats the reports as confidential but it is for each university to decide whether Review Reports are published, in whole or in part, for example, on the website of the institution. Summaries from the results of Review Reports are, though, always published on the websites of the universities. Results from Subject-Level Reviews are discussed at the annual meetings of the universities with the Quality Board.

### ***Institution-Wide Reviews and the role of students***

In Institution-Wide Reviews, the focus is on the organisation of the respective university as regards quality control, including supervision of research. In these reviews, universities are required to demonstrate how they assess whether the learning experience of students is always as good as possible according to Icelandic and international standards, how it is verified that degrees are comparable domestically and internationally and how the universities evaluate the framework for their research work. These reviews should therefore be important tools in the strategy formulation process within institutions.

In Institution-Wide Reviews there are special Review Teams for each university composed of international experts and a student representative, who are appointed by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education, with the exception of the student representative who is nominated by LIS. The teams examine the extent to which individual universities

fulfill these same quality standards.

An Institution-Wide Review also ensures that current and prospective students, the government, employers and other stakeholders inside and outside the country can rely on the ability of the universities to provide students with a good learning environment and award degrees that fulfill domestic and international criteria.

Who conducts Institution-Wide Reviews?

Institution-Wide Review Teams are composed of persons appointed by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education, with the exception of a student representative nominated by LIS. Team members appointed by the Quality Board are usually selected based on experience within the higher education system, particularly as regards reviewing quality, standards and research. Institution-Wide Review Teams are generally composed of the following individuals:

- Chairperson of Review Team
- Three international experts
- Student representative, nominated by LIS
- Secretary, nominated by an employee of the Quality Board

It should be kept in mind that there should be no fewer than two experts on each team. It is important that no one considered part of the team has any relations to the university being reviewed and only the student representative and secretary may be from Iceland.

## The role of students is threefold in connection with Institution-Wide Reviews:

**Firstly**, they are part of an editorial board that writes the Reflective Analysis of the university.

**Secondly**, one student representative has a seat on the Review Team itself.

**Thirdly**, students form one or more interview groups that the Review Team interviews while visiting with the university.

These three roles are described in more detail below.

As in the case of the Subject-Level Review Committee, student representatives in Institution-Wide Reviews must possess good English language skills as the Reflective Analysis is written in English. It is also important that student representatives can work effectively in a group, are responsible and actively participate in their studies and have, as a consequence, good insight into the position of students. If postgraduate studies are offered at the university then it is advisable that one of the student representatives is from the group of postgraduate students if two or more students serve on the Committee.

Student representatives are fully-fledged members of editorial boards and Review Teams. This means that they therefore have the same right as others to speak at meetings, write and comment on the Reflective Analysis. **Student representatives are first and foremost responsible for the voice of students being heard at meetings and for students' viewpoints concerning their main interests being clearly stated.** Comments on the Reflective Analysis appear in a

report called a Review Report which is completed by the Review Team; these are published in their entirety on the website of the Quality Board.

The Director of Quality Management at LIS can provide student representatives with information on their rights and obligations, if any questions arise. It is recommended that student representatives receive a Diploma Supplement upon graduation which confirms their work in connection with writing the Reflective Analysis and their work on Review Teams.

In addition to the description below, a more detailed discussion on Institution-Wide Reviews can be found in chapter four of the QEF II Handbook of the Quality Board.

## *Further discussion on roles within the Institution-Wide Review*

### *Editorial board of Reflective Analysis*

Work methods of editorial boards can vary by university but it can be assumed that serving on an editorial board may take up to one year. At the start of the work, it is likely that members of the board divide duties among themselves and then discuss the progress of writing the report at regular meetings. The work consists in information collection, information review, holding of meetings and report writing. When the team is pleased with the final version of the report, all of the members sign it. The president of the student organisation of the university also writes a short account describing the involvement of students in preparing the report.

The student organisation of the university shall be involved in selecting members of the editorial board and it is up to each university to decide how many students serve on the editorial board.

Student representatives on the editorial board receive information and/or training concerning the purpose of the review and what is expected of them by the university. Especially important is their role in writing the chapters that relate to student engagement in internal quality enhancement.

### **Review Teams**

Generally, the Review Teams are composed of a chairperson, three international experts, an independent Icelandic student and personnel from the office of the Quality Board/Rannís. All members, with the exception of the student representative, are appointed by the Quality Board on the basis of experience in the field of higher education, particularly as regards management and assessment of quality, standards and research.

LIS appoints a student representative to the Review Team and this student shall generally be enrolled in either undergraduate or postgraduate studies at an Icelandic university. Students can, though, serve on the Review Team until one year has passed from their graduation. No student can participate in a review of his/her own university or a university where he/she has previously studied or where a close relative or spouse is a student or employee.

Serving on a Review Team can take up to six months.

At the start of the work, members of the team read the Reflective Analysis of the university and discuss between themselves at online meetings how to arrange the work and whether further information needs to be requested from the university prior to the review visit of the team to the university. Shortly before the visit, the training of the team takes place under the auspices of the Quality Board. The review

visit takes 3–5 days. The visit is meant to serve as a conversation between peers but not an “inspection”. After the review visit, the student writes a framework for the chapter(s) that were assigned to him/her and reads through drafts of chapters from other team-members. When the team is pleased with the final version of the report, all of the members sign it. All members of the Review Team are expected to chair individual meetings during the visit and this includes the student representative.

### **Interviewees at meetings with the Review Team**

It is assumed that four meetings will take place with special subgroups of students. There are meetings with students in undergraduate and postgraduate studies, student representatives and students who are considered minorities or other groups that the university and team believe it is necessary to meet with specially. One open meeting is also held which all students have an opportunity to attend.

It is preferable that as many students as possible get an opportunity to meet with the Review Team. To ensure as good attendance as possible, it is advisable to introduce reviews with a short presentation in large courses. It would also be advisable to send out questionnaires with an introduction that underlines that importance of responding. Furthermore, the student organisation of the university can be collaborated with to select interviewees for meetings and announce the review on its social media and encourage students to attend open meetings.

### **Results of an Institution-Wide Review and their importance**

Three results are possible when the Review Team has communicated its confidence in, on the one hand, quality of degrees, and on the other hand, quality of learning experience and learning



Table 2: Overview of possible questions in a review of the framework for research.

<p>Research strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Does the unit have a research strategy?</li> <li>● How does it relate to the institutional strategy?</li> <li>● How realistic is the strategy?</li> <li>● Does the strategy link research to teaching?</li> <li>● Is the strategy effectively monitored?</li> <li>● Does the strategy take into account issues of equality?</li> </ul>
<p>Management of research outputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Does the unit purposefully monitor the quality of its research outputs?</li> <li>● Is it ensured that the methodology of research is reliable?</li> <li>● Is peer review or review by users of research output used directly or indirectly?</li> </ul>
<p>External support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How is research funding allocated according to the mathematical model for university funding?</li> <li>● Is funding sought from competitive funds?</li> <li>● Is research funding sought from the private sector?</li> </ul>
<p>Impact of the unit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Does the research work have an effect on the life and work of many individuals and/or work methods of many institutions or companies?</li> <li>● How extensive is the impact of research work?</li> <li>● Does research have an effect on the academic field itself, on related strategy formulation, on culture, economy or society?</li> <li>● Does research have an effect on the local environment, all of Iceland or internationally?</li> </ul>
<p>Exceptional blue skies research</p>	<p>Is research carried out within the faculty that is “blue-skies” and does not fit appropriately with existing paradigms for recognising the significance of research?</p>



environment. Possible outcomes can be categorised in the following way:

1. Confidence in quality system
2. Limited confidence in quality system
3. No confidence in quality system

It is possible that a university would receive a statement of confidence in the quality of a degree but limited confidence in the quality of learning experience and learning environment and vice versa. The consequences for the universities vary according to what result they receive for their quality assurance work, but in general, these judgments are very significant. A statement of confidence in the processes and procedures that the university uses in quality assurance increases trust significantly, both within the university itself and among external stakeholders, domestically and abroad.

The first two categories indicate that the university in question fulfills at least minimum criteria on trust. It is important to keep in mind that a result of limited trust is not a failing judgement but indicates that improvements must be made in a timely manner to safeguard the learning environment of current and/or future students and/or ensure the standards of their degrees.

The last category, no confidence in the quality assurance system, is considered a failing judgement. It can therefore be said that the methods of the respective institution in monitoring quality and/or standards or, in other words, the quality assurance system of the university, do not fulfill minimum criteria. In such

instances, there are significant signs of serious fundamental flaws that hamper the ability of the university to safeguard standards and/or maintain an acceptable course offering. Furthermore, there are no tangible signs that there are plans to make improvements to the process to any meaningful extent.

The results of an Institution-Wide Review Team on confidence in a quality system are covered in more detail in chapter 4 of the QEF II Handbook of the Quality Board.

## **Discussion on quality of research framework**

In the first cycle of QEF I, there was not much discussion on research and its quality, but in QEF II, a decision was made that reviews would also extend to research. The review of research is limited to a material discussion on the framework of research activities. Here, it is assumed that the following will take place:

1. Individual faculties describe their management of research work in Subject-Level Reviews. The Subject-Level Reviews therefore cover, for example, the five defined dimensions for evaluation of research management. The dimensions are listed in table 2, along with examples of questions relating to each of them.
2. In Institution-Wide Reviews, Review Teams look at the Subject-Level Reviews and take a position on how well the university supports active research work in faculties. The report of the review committee therefore only states what the university is doing well in research within its walls and what can be improved.

## Further reading material:

Quality Enhancement Framework Handbook, 2nd, Ed, <https://en.rannis.is/activities/quality-enhancement-framework/>  
Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ESG, <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg>  
Student participation in quality Scotland, Sparqs, <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk>  
Website of European Students' Union, ESU, <http://www.esu-online.org>  
Quest project, <http://www.quest.esu-online.org>  
The Strategy of the National Union of Icelandic Students on Quality in the Icelandic Higher Education Community, <https://www.studentar.is>

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