

RULES

pertaining to quality assurance of learning, teaching and research in Icelandic higher education institutions

Article 1

Scope

The present Rules apply to quality assurance of learning, teaching and research in higher education institutions, as carried out through each institution's internal reviews as well as through periodic external reviews by the Ministry responsible for higher education. Any reference in these Rules to "the Minister" or "the Ministry" not accompanied by express mention of or reference to a specific field of responsibility is to be read as referring respectively to the Minister and the Ministry responsible for higher education.

Article 2

Objectives

Quality assurance of learning, teaching and research in higher education institutions aims to:

Systematically improve the quality of learning, teaching and research;
Incite higher education institutions to assume greater responsibility for their own activities;

Ensure adherence to standards for ministerial accreditation of academic programmes at higher education institutions, in accordance with the Rules on the accreditation of higher education institutions pursuant to Article 3 of Act No 63/2006;

Ensure that the National Qualification Framework is complied with;

Ensure that quality assurance in higher education is pursued in accordance with the Quality Enhancement Handbook published by the Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance, and to safeguard the international competitiveness of higher education institutions.

Article 3

Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance

Quality assurance of learning, teaching and research in higher education institutions is the responsibility of an independent body, the Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance, the Board of which is appointed by the Minister.

The Agency's Board is composed of at least five experts, each appointed for a six-year term, and a student representative nominated by the National Union of Icelandic Students and appointed for a two-year term, with the possibility of a renewal for one year. The Board enjoys professional independence in its work.

Fees due to Board members and other costs related to the operation of the Agency are to be paid based on an agreement with the Ministry.

As a general eligibility criterion, Board members must possess the necessary knowledge and competence to oversee external reviews of higher education institutions in Iceland. Board members must also meet the specific eligibility criteria to not have been engaged in research or teaching activities at an Icelandic higher education institution, and to not have, or have had, such contacts with the higher education institution under external review as to allow doubt to be cast on their impartiality. Persons carrying out external reviews in accordance with these Rules and with standards laid down for such reviews must in other respects meet the conditions of Article 3 of the Administrative Procedures Act.

The Minister mandates the Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance to operate its own offices or to enter into contracts with competent third parties to provide services on behalf of the Agency.

The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance may hire an Executive Director and other staff to handle, on behalf of the Board, the day-to-day execution and administration of the tasks entrusted to the Agency under these Rules. The Executive Director of the Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance must be a holder of a university degree and be in possession of expert knowledge in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

Article 4

On internal and external reviews

Internal reviews of higher education institutions presuppose the existence of, on the one hand, pre-established organisational structures, procedures or measures introduced by the institutions for the purpose of evaluating the quality of their own learning, teaching and research and, on the other hand, a basis for policy-making and the formulation of work practices and reform agendas.

By external reviews is meant quality assurance of learning, teaching and research in higher education institutions, carried out either by the Ministry itself or by an external party on its behalf. External reviews mainly involve three types of activity: the accreditation of academic programmes following an audit by an international team; the periodic collection of standardised sets of key data about each institution's activities; and audits of higher education institutions, of their schools, faculties, or study programmes, or of individual aspects of their activities.

Article 5

Standards for internal and external reviews

The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance is responsible for establishing standards for internal and external reviews, including guidelines on their conduct. The standards should cover the following aspects, among others: purpose and aims; governance and organisation; the manner in which learning, teaching and research are conducted; eligibility criteria for staff; rules pertaining to admission requirements and students' rights and obligations; facilities and amenities for teachers and students and the services provided; the internal quality assurance system; descriptions of study content; the institution's finances and human resources; the organisation of/frameworks for research activities; the gathering of information forming the basis of internal and external reviews. The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance should carry out regular revisions of its standards for

internal and external reviews and establish new standards and guidelines as required.

Article 6

Internal reviews

Higher education institutions should adopt a formal quality assurance policy for learning, teaching and research, introduce working procedures conducive to continuous improvement, and promote increased awareness of the importance of quality in all aspects of their work. Higher education institutions are responsible for carrying out internal reviews through their formal quality assurance systems for learning, teaching and research. Internal reviews must be systematic and include the gathering of well-defined key data about the work of the institution. The active involvement of students and staff in the internal review process must be ensured. The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance establishes standards for internal reviews.

Article 7

Publication of information about internal reviews

Each higher education institution should make public, at regular intervals and in an accessible way, a summary outlining how the manner in which its internal reviews are conducted complies with the handbook published by the Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance. The results of each internal review are to be made public, accompanied by a description of how the results are put into use for the purpose of academic improvement and reform.

Article 8

External reviews

The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance conducts external reviews of the quality of each higher education institution's learning, teaching and research activities, in accordance with a plan which is revised at regular intervals no longer than five years. A review may extend to a higher education institution as a whole; individual scientific or academic units, departments, or study programmes; or other specified elements of the activities of a higher education institution. Where appropriate, an *ad hoc* external review of a higher education institution, of one or more of its individual units, or of particular aspects of its academic activities may also be decided on.

The contracts entered into between the Ministry and individual higher education institutions pursuant to Article 21 of the Higher Education Act, No 63/2006, should contain provisions on the periodic gathering of key data about the work of the relevant institution. The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance may also require higher education institutions to submit standardised data sets for the purpose of reporting. The Minister establishes general standards for the gathering, processing and publication of key data about the activities of higher education institutions. Before commencing an external review, a set of guidelines for its conduct should be established. Higher education institutions placed under external review are under an obligation to provide information (a self-review report) on the aspects covered by the audit.

Article 9

Conduct of external reviews

The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance is mandated by the Minister to carry out external reviews of higher education institutions. The external review process must ensure the involvement of students, as well as of international experts selected according to the same eligibility criteria as apply to the members of the Agency's Board.

Article 10

Results of external reviews

The Icelandic Agency for Quality Assurance is responsible for the external reviews carried out and for the publication of their results. The results of external reviews are also communicated publicly by the Ministry and published on its website. The results of external reviews must be presented in a clear and accessible way, and should include information about recommendations made and suggestions for improvement. Within three months of the publication of an external review report, the higher education institution concerned must communicate the results of the review publicly and publish on its website information about any action taken in response to the review.

Article 11

Withdrawal of accreditation

If an external review reveals that the conditions for maintaining accreditation of an academic programme are not met, the Minister may, following the procedure laid down in Article 5 of Rules No 1067/2006, withdraw the accreditation of the institution concerned, either in respect of specific academic programmes or of the higher education institution as a whole, or alternatively issue recommendations for improvement or set deadlines by which such improvement must be implemented.

Article 12

Entry into force

The Rules contained herein, which are issued pursuant to Article 11, second paragraph, of the Higher Education Act, No 63/2006, enter into force immediately.

At the same time, Rules No 1368/2018 pertaining to quality assurance of teaching and research in higher education are repealed.