

RULES

pertaining to quality assurance of teaching and research in higher education

Article 1

Scope

The rules contained herein apply to quality assurance of teaching and research in higher education, as carried out through each institution's internal reviews and through periodic external reviews by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Article 2

Aim

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

Systematically improve the quality of 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 Rules No 1067/2006 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 Framework Handbook published by the Quality Board; and

Safeguard the international competitiveness of higher education institutions.

Article 3

Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education

The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education is appointed by the Minister. The Quality Board is composed of five international experts, appointed for a six-year term, and a student representative (nominated by the National Union of Icelandic Students), appointed for a three-year term.

Remuneration of board members and other costs incurred in the operation of the Board are to be paid from the Budget appropriation for the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education.

As a general eligibility criterion, Board members must possess the necessary knowledge and competence to carry out external reviews of higher education institutions in Iceland. Specific eligibility criteria are, on the one hand, that international board members may not have been engaged in research or teaching activities at an Icelandic higher education institution and, on the other, that any contacts that board members may have, or may have had, with the higher education institution under external review must not be of a kind liable to cast doubt 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 Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education to operate its own offices or to enter into contracts with competent third parties to provide services on behalf of the Board. The Quality Board may engage a Manager and other staff to handle, on behalf of the Board, the daily execution and management of tasks assigned to the Board under these Rules. The Manager of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education must be in possession of a university degree and 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 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 carried out either by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture or by an external party on its behalf and directed at teaching and research in higher education. 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 study programmes, or of individual aspects of their activities.

Article 5

Standards for internal and external reviews

The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education is responsible for establishing standards for internal and external reviews, including guidelines for their implementation. The standards established by the Quality Board should cover the following aspects, among others:

- Purpose and aims;
- Governance and organisation;
- Teaching and research arrangements;
- 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;
- The organisation of research—frameworks for research activities;
- The gathering of information forming the basis of internal and external reviews.

The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education 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 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 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 Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education establishes standards for internal reviews of academic units (academic programmes, faculties).

Article 7

Publication of information about internal reviews

Higher education institutions should make public, at regular intervals, a summary outlining the manner in which internal reviews are conducted in accordance with the handbook published by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education, including through the publication of a plan for the gathering, analysis and processing of key data and other information. The results of each internal review are to be made public, accompanied by a description of how those results are put into use for the purpose of academic improvement and reform.

Article 8

External reviews

External reviews of the quality of teaching and research in higher education are to be conducted in accordance with a plan drawn up for seven-year periods. 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, one or more of its individual units, or particular aspects of its academic activities may also be decided on.

The contract entered into between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and each individual higher education institution 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 Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education may also require higher education institutions to submit standardised data sets for the purpose of reporting. The Minister of Education, Science and Culture establishes general standards for the gathering, processing and publication of key data about the work of higher education institutions.

Before commencing an external review, a set of guidelines for its conduct should be established. Higher education institutions that are 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 Minister of Education, Science and Culture delegates the conduct of external reviews to the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education.

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 Quality Board.

Article 10

Results of external reviews

The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education is responsible for external reviews and for the publication of their results. The results of external reviews are also publicly announced by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 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 and suggestions for improvement.

Within three months of the publication of an external review report, the higher education institution concerned must make the results of the review known 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 of Education, Science and Culture may, following the procedure laid down in Article 5 of Rules No 1067/2006, withdraw the accreditation of the higher education institution concerned, either in respect of specific academic programmes or of the 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

These Rules, which are issued pursuant to Article 11, second paragraph, of the Higher Education Act, No 63/2006, shall come into force forthwith. At the same time, Rules No 321/2009 pertaining to quality assurance of teaching and research in higher education are repealed.

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 11 December 2018.

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Disclaimer: *This is an English translation. The original Icelandic text, as published in the Law Gazette (Stjórnartíðindi) is the authoritative text. Should there be discrepancy between this translation and the authoritative text, the latter prevails.*