



Hólar University

Report for Annual Quality Dialogue

August 2024

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1. Introduction

This report discusses progress on recommendations and areas of improvement from the previous Institutional-Wide Review (IWR). The year-on-report from February 2022 discusses improvements from the review in 2019 and until then. This report describes improvements that have been made on the areas of improvement from the 2019 IWR that have not already been described in the year-one-report from February 2022 or discussed in previous annual quality dialogues. This report also presents an overview of Internal Quality Assurance reviews at Hólar University during the previous school year and a schedule on IQA reviews for the next 12 months.

2. Progress on areas for improvement identified in previous IWR

Hólar University underwent the QEF2 Institutional Wide review in the Fall of 2019. Progress and strengths identified by the IWR Team included staff development in relation to research and research management, active engagement with the elements of QEF, strong stakeholder and industry engagement, strong employability of graduates from Hólar University, impressive range of research activities, short communication lines and rapid decision making, significant collaborative curricular development and a comprehensive equality policy.

Areas for improvement identified by the IWR team included a need to formalize better procedures and structures, better follow-up of regulations and action plans, enhancing institutional infrastructure, utilization of key performance indicators related to student satisfaction and learning experiences, increase student engagement, defining procedures for handling student issues, improve levels of interdisciplinary research and teaching, enhance marketing effort, increasing the use of strategic data in running the University, strengthen the ICT capacity for blended learning and creating more practical support for research.

The Year-on Report published in February 2022 systematically discussed progress made on each of the areas identified for improvement in the IWR of QEF2. The report discusses structural reformation made in August 2021 as a major milestone for progress on the areas for improvement, as it increased clarity of operation cohesion, integration of knowledge and information and enhanced formality and quality of daily operations. Hólar University continues to work on the areas for improvement identified in the IWR. Following are some highlights of progress that has been made since the publication of the Year-on-report in February 2022.

2.1. Enhancement of institutional infrastructure for administration and support.

Formalization and follow-up for regulations, structures, procedures and action plans.

Institutional administration has been improved with strategic hirings of employees with specialized qualifications to improve procedures and infrastructure for administration and support. Significant improvements have been made on internal financial allocation and structures and automating financial procedures to increase efficiency and access to information. Procedures regarding student issues have been revised. Capacity for student services, human resources and quality management has been increased. A quality committee has been established with representatives from all departments and divisions.

2.2. Interdisciplinary research and teaching

Research activity at Hólar University has greatly increased, and the number of applications for research funding has been growing. Participation in internationally and nationally funded cooperative projects on research and/or teaching has increased significantly, and many of those are interdisciplinary. Collaborative teaching includes two joint degree programs with European Universities.

2.3. Strengthening of ICT capacity for blended learning

ICT capacity for blended learning continues to be developed with the implementation of ICT systems fit for blended learning, such as systems for online examination, communication and instruction.

2.4. Marketing efforts and increased visibility of Hólar University

Hólar University has been through rebranding and has run marketing campaigns in 2023 and 2024. New marketing material has been created with a modern layout to emphasize the university's progressive and innovative approach. The new look has been well received by students and stakeholders.

The marketing campaigns in 2023 and 2024 were run on social media platforms, printed media, radio, television, online news websites, bus stops and more. Representatives from the university have also attended multiple conferences and events to increase visibility within the local community, professional forums and for the target group of students. Visibility of Hólar University in the news and other media coverage has increased substantially during this period, both in newspapers (paper and online editions), TV and radio. Marketing efforts are continuously being developed.

2.5. Student engagement

Hólar University has been working on further engaging the Student Union, and allocated staff provides support to student representatives.

Students have a representative in the University council. Students have participated in the Subject level reviews of all departments. Students have representatives in study committees in all departments.

3. Internal Quality Reviews

Internal Quality Assurance reviews have mainly been done by the departments who are responsible for the quality of their study programs and research. All departments completed a subject level review between 2022 and 2024.

Various reviews are regularly performed at institutional level. Examples include:

- A course evaluation at the end of each course. The evaluation includes items on teaching and organization of the course, student workload, what students gain from the course, and how much effort students put into the course. Each teacher has access to the results for their course, as well as the Director of Academic Affairs and the Heads of departments. Results are reviewed in the study committees of departments.

- Institution of the year (Í. Stofnun ársins) is a survey performed by Sameyki Union. Although this is an external survey, the results provide helpful information. It measures nine factors of their work environment: trustworthiness of managers, morale, salary satisfaction, work conditions, work flexibility, work independence, image of the institution, satisfaction and pride, and equality. Results are reviewed by the management team and discussed with staff.
- Various statistical information is collected and reviewed, such as regarding finances, human resources, teaching and research. Analysis of salaries is done as a part of Equal pay system. Human Resources also collects and reviews statistics regarding teaching load per employee. Educational statistical data is reviewed both on institutional and departmental level. Statistics on research is collected and reviewed both formally and informally. The formal statistics include a bi-annual report to Statistics Iceland and various data platforms for research. Informal statistics collection and review has also been performed on ad-hoc basis.

Departments are responsible for reviewing their programs regularly, and each department has developed their own methods. Examples of reviews by each department include:

- The Department of Rural Tourism discusses the development and quality of study programs and courses in monthly staff meetings in the department. Learning outcomes of programs and courses are revised annually and focus on how well the learning outcomes in individual courses reflect the learning outcomes of their respective programs. Work on learning outcomes is conducted in joint meetings of all academic staff. The department evaluates instruction methods and course outcomes at their final spring Department meeting before the end of each academic year. They focus on what was good and what could be improved so that necessary changes can be made for the following academic year. Then at the start of the academic year, early in the fall semester, work meetings are held to further review teaching and individual courses.
- The Department of Equine studies conducted focus groups in the Fall of 2023 where meetings were held with students from each schoolyear, faculty, support staff and stakeholders. These meetings provided students with an opportunity to give feedback on their studies and the facilities of the department. In January 2024 there was a micro survey among students from the department. Three students were randomly selected from each schoolyear, a total of nine students. Response rate was 67%. Each student was asked to name one good thing about their studies and one suggestion for improvement. A SWOT analysis with department staff was conducted in two meetings in March and December of 2023.
- The Department of Aquaculture and fish biology performed sessions with all students to discuss the progress of the program, and their general satisfaction about courses during the schoolyear 2023-2024. Reviews with an external expert were started in the previous schoolyear and completed in 2024. The review included meetings and a SWOT analysis with staff, and department's operations, management and support systems were reviewed. Learning outcomes of programs and courses are reviewed annually.

A position of a Quality Director was established on August 1st 2024. A quality committee consisting of all department heads and other managers has been formed and is currently revising the University's approach to Internal Quality reviews in accordance with the newly published guidelines by IAQA for Internal Monitoring and Reviews in QEF3. Templates and approaches to on-going monitoring, and periodic reviews of programs are being developed as well as for reviews of units.

4. Quality enhancement initiatives

4.1. The preparation of university alliance in collaboration with University of Iceland.

The main quality enhancement initiative Hólar University is working towards is the preparation of a university alliance in collaboration with the University of Iceland. The alliance will affect other decisions on policies and procedures, and working towards it will be prioritized.

4.2. Improvement of facilities

There is a need for improvement of facilities and infrastructure for the study programs of Hólar University, particularly for the departments of Aquaculture and Equine studies. Maintenance of current facilities is needed, and there is also a need for new facilities. The management has worked on creating awareness about this need and seeking ways to fund the needed improvements. The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation has provided 150 million ISK in 2023 for building facilities for research and teaching of Aquaculture and further 350 million ISK were allocated in the state budget for 2025. However, more funding is needed and the bureaucratic process for starting constructions has been slow and the process is therefore still at the planning stage. Responses have been positive but there is a need to secure more funding to make the necessary improvements.