



# Hólar University

Report for Annual Quality Dialogue

May 2025

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## 1. Introduction

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This report discusses recent developments and progress on areas for improvement based on previous Institution wide review (IWR) as well as internal quality assurance reviews in the past school year and plan for the 2025-2026 school year.

## 2. Recent developments

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### 2.1. Establishing a University System in cooperation with University of Iceland

Hólar University (HU) has been working towards establishing a University System in cooperation with University of Iceland (UI). A tripartite agreement between the Ministry of Higher Education and the two universities on establishing a new multi-campus University System was signed on April 25<sup>th</sup> this year. The System will officially begin operations on 1 January 2026.

The agreement is a milestone for higher education in Iceland, and especially for higher education in rural areas. The opportunities created for our communities through the University System are substantial and has the potential enhance the quality of teaching, research, support services, and innovation.

The University of Iceland's Research Centers activities will come under the auspices of Hólar University. There are 12 research centers and they are all located in the rural areas.

The goals of the University system are to improve the competitiveness of the universities as well as to increase the quality of studies, research, support services and

increase connections with industries and society throughout the country. Other goals of establishing a university system include: diversity in the range of educational offering, development of programs and courses with an emphasis on the needs of the industry and society, integration of degrees, increased service to students and teachers, improved teaching methods and increased research collaboration. The University system is also intended to strengthen the UI as a leading university in the Icelandic society and the HU as a specialized university in rural areas. Emphasis is placed on making the University system attractive to other universities and research institutions.

A project plan is in place for defining and integrating structures, procedures and responsibilities. Work packages include quality and governance, finance, HR, academic affairs, research, IT, improved infrastructure, PR, transfer of the Research center and general administration. A steering committee for the project has four representatives from each university. Each work package will have a dedicated group working on the assignments. The work groups include members from the steering committee as well as key staff members from each university. Focus groups with more representatives will be established as needed.

## 2.2. Teaching and research facilities in Hólar and Sauðárkrókur

Significant work has been done in order to secure improved facilities for teaching and research in Hólar and Sauðárkrókur. The parliament has approved to build or rent new facilities for HU. The following projects are in preparation at Hólar and Sauðárkrókur.

### Teaching and research premises in Sauðárkrókur:

Two buildings for teaching and research are being prepared. Plans for construction have been approved by the Government property agency and partial funding secured for specialized 780m<sup>2</sup> facilities dedicated to research in aquaculture and aquatic biology, with some hand-on teaching facilities. A location in Sauðárkrókur has been secured with the municipality with direct access to both freshwater and seawater. The other building being prepared has facilities for classrooms and office space for academic staff, graduate students and support services. Plans for construction of that building have been confirmed by the Government property agency, with options and costs being calculated.

### Brúnastaðir, the Horse stable in Hólar:

The Parliament has approved the right to purchase the facilities. The Ministry of Higher Education has requested a cost evaluation from the Government property agency

### Research and teaching premises at Hólar:

The Government property agency is starting a preliminary assessment requested by the Ministry of Higher Education to evaluate the need for new facilities for classrooms and offices in Hólar.

### 2.3. Restoration of Hólar in Hjaltadalur

A working group consisting of representatives from several ministries, the municipality of Skagafjörður, The Northwest Iceland Regional Office, Hólar University and the bishopric of Hólar, led by the Prime Minister's Office, submitted a memorandum with proposals for the restoration of the historic site of Hólar in Hjaltadalur in October 2024. The Icelandic Government has now appointed an executive group that will discuss the implementation of the proposals. The executive group includes representatives from 6 ministries. The results of the working group can be expected in the fall of 2025.

Hólar university has had an informal role in maintenance and services for the historic site of Hólar, although this role was not clearly defined or accounted for in the financial model for universities. Separating university operations from maintenance and services in the Hólar area will allow the university better use of its resources in order to improve quality of university operations.

### 2.4. Development of new study programs

New programs have been developed or are in the final stages of development in sustainable aquaculture, sustainable regional development and horse farrier. Other study programs are in early stages of development in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

#### 2.4.1. Sustainable aquaculture

Hólar University has been leading the development of study programs in sustainable aquaculture in collaboration with all public universities in Iceland. Although there is a growing need in the aquaculture industry for people with specialized education in the field, there is a lack of a comprehensive study path in aquaculture in Iceland. Currently, there are no full degree programs available at bachelor's level. Three specialized joint degree programs at the bachelor level and one dual degree program at masters level are now being developed in the collaborative project. The project received two consecutive grants (in 2022 and 2024) from the collaborative fund of the Ministry of Higher Education.

The department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology has been leading this work based on its long-term expertise in teaching and research in aquaculture. The development of a new Master in Sustainable production in aquaculture (projected for Fall 2026), led by Hólar, aligns well with the development of new facilities for the department to be placed in Sauðárkrókur. This master degree, supported by the three bachelor levels, will fill the gap in education in aquaculture at the graduate level in Iceland, which will secure educated personnel for the rapidly growing aquaculture and marine industry.

#### 2.4.2. Sustainable regional development

An interdisciplinary program in regional development at master level is being developed in cooperation with University of Iceland, the Icelandic regional development institute,

Institution for University of Iceland ´s research centers and the association of knowledge centers. The program is scheduled to start in the Fall of 2026.

#### 2.4.3. Horse farrier

A 30 ECTS credit microcredential study program in Horse farrier has been developed by the Department of Equine Science and is scheduled to start in the fall of 2025. The program is at undergraduate level. The program will serve as a cornerstone in the development of the farrier professionals across the international Icelandic horse industry. Currently there is no university level training available in farriery.

### 3. Progress on areas for improvement

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Progress and strengths identified in the 2019 IWR included strong stakeholder and industry engagement, impressive range of research activities, short communication lines and collaborative curricular development. Areas for improvement identified in the IWR included a need to enhance institutional infrastructure, improve formalization of procedures and structures, increase the use of strategic data and key performance indicators in running the university, improve levels of interdisciplinary research and teaching, enhance marketing efforts and strengthen the ICT capacity for blended learning. The Year-on Report published in February 2022 systematically discussed progress made on each of the areas identified for improvement in the IWR. The Annual Quality report from August 2024 discussed further improvements.

The report from 2024 discussed the enhancement of support services with strategic hirings of employees with specialized qualifications. This has resulted in more consistent service operations. HU was able to hire a marketing and event manager for a temporary position which has already resulted in increased marketing efforts. The establishment of a university system will add to the resources of the University, such as specialized knowledge and organizational infrastructure, which will add to the support services available for students and staff. ICT capacity and access to pedagogical guidance for blended learning will be enhanced with the formation of a university system with UI.

Research activity continues to be strong at HU with an impressive success in applications for research funding.

### 4. Internal Quality reviews

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The quality committee has been developing the approach to internal monitoring and quality reviews in accordance with the guidelines published by IAQA. An operational calendar for ongoing monitoring and quality reviews has been set in place. The operational calendar includes the monitoring by the central administration and by each academic department. Each department as well as the central administrative unit is responsible for the scheduling of periodic reviews. A review of support services is scheduled in the school year of 2025-2026.

A comprehensive institution-wide Quality survey for students was developed in the Quality committee. The survey focuses on teaching, learning and student services.

Self-evaluation for the coming IWR and reviews made in the preparations for the restructuring of procedures, responsibilities and regulations for the establishment of a University system with UI will be done during the coming school year.