

Self-Evaluation Report of Hólar University

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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------|---|
| AI | Artificial intelligence |
| AUI | The Agricultural University of Iceland |
| QEF2 | Icelandic quality enhancement framework, second cycle |
| QEF3 | Icelandic quality enhancement framework, third cycle |
| DAFB | Department of aquaculture and fish biology |
| DES | Department of equine studies |
| DRT | Department of rural tourism |
| DRIAA | Division of research, innovation and academic affairs |
| ECTS | European credit transfer and accumulation system |
| ESG | European standards and guidelines |
| HEI | Higher education institution |
| HU | Hólar University |
| IQA | Internal quality assurance |
| ICT | Information and communication technology |
| IWR | Institution-wide review |
| IWR19 | Institution-wide review of Hólar University in 2019 |
| IAQA | Icelandic agency for quality assurance |
| KPI's | Key performance indicators |
| MCIHE | Ministry of culture, innovation and higher education |
| NIHC | The national Icelandic horse competition |
| SER | Self-evaluation report |
| SLR | Subject-level review |
| UI | University of Iceland |
| UNAK | University of Akureyri |

Summary

Good practices to highlight

This self-evaluation shows the following key good practices to highlight:

1. Initiative for closer collaboration with University of Iceland (UI), resulting in establishing the University system. This provides HU with access to UI's shared infrastructure and services and will greatly enhance operations.
2. Initiative in discussion with authorities on improved facilities and work towards separating university activities from local administration in Hólar area.
3. Establishment of the quality committee in September 2024. The committee connects all key managers of the university and works cooperatively towards strategic planning and follow-up, development of the quality management system and reviewing internal quality assurance (IQA) activities.
4. Development and implementation of the annual quality survey and focus groups with students of all study programmes to better capture student voice and feedback. Development and implementation of annual monitoring of departments and programs
5. The revision of the Quality policy. The new policy describes a quality management system that consists of three connected pillars: strategic management, quality manual and internal monitoring and review.
6. Significant enhancement of participation in collaborative and interdisciplinary projects in research and teaching. Strong stakeholder engagement within departments who maintain strong links with industry and national and international collaboration networks. The report discusses examples of stakeholder engagement in development of new study programmes in all departments and in research
7. Strong discipline-specific research activities in all departments
8. Significant steps in rebranding and marketing of Hólar University as a response to IWR19

Enhancement areas to highlight

This self-evaluation points towards five key areas for enhancements. The first three relate to the fourth one – formalization of procedures. The establishment of the University system with UI has the potential for enhancement of all these areas, but it is important that they are attended to specifically for the campus in Hólar. Enhancements regarding the fifth theme on facilities and infrastructure are largely dependent on decisions by authorities, while the university seeks to collaborate with authorities towards solutions.

1. **Student support and engagement.** A recurring theme in IQA is the need to enhance student voice and engagement and to promote student wellbeing and equality. Significant steps have been taken as described in the report, but there is still need for enhancement. An enhancement project in this area is in early stages of

development. Self-evaluation tools have been explored as well as examples of enhancements by other universities. The project is planned to include as participants students and academic staff from all departments as well as staff from support services.

2. **Staff support and morale.** Feedback from staff shows the need to pay significant attention to staff support and morale. Areas that need attention include information flow, communications, management and support for research and teaching. The management team is committed to work towards enhancements and is cooperatively working towards an action plan. The team had a workshop on June 9th, 2026, to formally start this work, although preparations started as soon as results came from an external survey that is conducted on human resources of Icelandic institutions (*Í. Stofnun ársins*)
3. **Policy on teaching, learning and assessment.** Teaching staff have suggested the need for pedagogical training and support in how to engage with the emergence of artificial intelligence. A recurring theme in student feedback is that increased consistency in teaching and assessment would be helpful, for example on how the Canvas learning platform is organized. To engage with this feedback, it is planned to work collaboratively towards a policy of teaching, learning and assessment. The work will include external pedagogical training as well as collaborative workshops and will engage the resources provided at UI 's centre for teaching and learning.
4. **Formalization of procedures.** It is evident from the reflection on the evaluation themes and internal monitoring that significant work is needed to enhance the formalization and documentation of procedures. Various procedures and guidelines have been developed and are used by staff, but there is a need for them to be collected to a single platform, managed and communicated. The revision of the quality policy with the accompanying procedure for the management of documented procedures is a step in this direction. The quality committee systematically works towards the documentation of procedures. This work will be coordinated with strategy and quality team of UI.
5. **Facilities and infrastructure.** There is an evident need for enhanced facilities for research and teaching. Working with authorities toward enhancement of facilities has been a significant focus of the rector, and enhancements of facilities are included in the governmental financial plan. The rector will continue this focus.

Preface and editorial note

The circumstances in which this self-evaluation report is written are quite unusual. Hólar University (HU) is going through major transformation as a university system with UI is being developed, and changes to the laws to that regard have been accepted. The Institution wide review (IWR) is on the whole university system: UI as a system university and HU as a campus. The university system will formally start operations on July 1st, 2026, although considerable work is left for implementation. The submission date for this self-evaluation report is before the university system begins operations, while the site visit will happen after establishment.

Since at the submission date of this report the two universities would still be individual institutions, it was decided to perform the self-evaluation separately for each university, although the universities were at the same time working on the implementation plan for the university system. HU has shown initiative and agency through the whole process of negotiating and preparing the university system. HU approached the self-evaluation guidelines and process as a tool in the preparation for the university system. Doing the self-evaluation separately for each university will provide a clearer picture of the two quality management systems that will need to be integrated.

There were significant concerns that by going separately through the process of self-evaluation we would be doing extra work that might not end up being useful for HU, particularly as a such a small institution uniting with a much larger one. The self-evaluation team was aware of this, and approached the assignment differently that we would have done if the university system was not being prepared and sought to prioritize work that would be beneficial for HU as a campus of a university system. This is a balancing act. It was decided to postpone revision of some procedures, and the reflection for some statements of the evaluation themes is not as extensive as it would have been if the university system would not be in preparation. It was also decided not to choose an enhancement topic separately from UI. On the other hand, the report gives significant attention to learning from previous IWRs and internal monitoring and reviews. In the self-evaluation, we do seek to reflect on effects of the university system: benefits, concerns and things that will need to be considered in the implementation. Cooperation with UI 's quality and strategy team has been helpful in this regard, particularly having access to their quality manual with their documented procedures.

Introduction from the Rector

Hólar University respectfully submits this self-evaluation report to the Icelandic agency for quality assurance (IAQA) as part of the third cycle of the Icelandic quality enhancement framework (QEF3). We recognize the importance of IAQA's independent, enhancement-led approach in safeguarding and strengthening the quality of higher education in Iceland, and we view this process as both a responsibility and an opportunity for reflection, learning, and development.

This report is written at a pivotal moment in the history of Hólar University. As described in the preface and throughout the report, the University is undergoing significant transformation through the establishment of a new university system in collaboration with the University of Iceland, which will commence on 1 July 2026. This development represents a major strategic step towards enhancing the quality, sustainability, and impact of our teaching and research. The self-evaluation process has therefore not only served to review current practices but has also played an integral role in preparing Hólar University for its future within this system.

Over recent years, Hólar University has made substantial progress in responding to recommendations from previous institutional reviews and in strengthening its internal quality management system. As outlined in chapter 2, *Learning from Prior Reviews*, we have taken deliberate steps to formalize procedures, enhance internal monitoring, and build a more structured and evidence-based approach to quality enhancement. These efforts reflect a growing quality culture that is participative, reflective, and closely connected to institutional strategy.

My central objective as Rector is to further develop Hólar University as a strong, specialized rural university within Iceland and, in the near future, as a distinctive campus within the University of Iceland. This vision builds on the University's unique academic profile, its close integration with society and industry, and its historic role as a center of knowledge at Hólar in Hjaltadalur. Hólar University's three fields of specialization: equine science, aquaculture and fish biology, and rural tourism, are all of national significance and require highly specialized environments for both teaching and research.

To support this vision, three strategic focus projects have been defined and led by me. The first is the establishment of the university system with the University of Iceland. This initiative will provide access to a well-developed support structure, enhance collaboration across disciplines, and strengthen both research capacity and educational quality. It is a unique development within Icelandic higher education and has required extensive cooperation among staff, stakeholders, the local community in Skagafjörður and national authorities.

The second focus project concerns the continued development of infrastructure for teaching and research. Internal reviews and feedback from staff and students have consistently highlighted infrastructure as a key area for improvement. In response, significant progress has been made, and planning for new facilities, particularly in

aquaculture and equine sciences, is now in its final stages, supported by government commitment and collaboration with local stakeholders.

The third focus project addresses the evolving role of Hólar University within the community of Hólar in Hjaltadalur. As a small but historically important site, Hólar has long relied on the university for services beyond its academic mission. Recent agreements with the municipality and government have clarified these responsibilities, enabling the university to focus fully on its core mission of teaching and research while continuing to play a vital role in the local community.

While these developments create strong foundations for the future, we remain fully aware of the challenges ahead. Hólar University operates in a rural setting with a relatively small academic community, and its specialized programs require both dedicated facilities and highly qualified staff. At the same time, these characteristics are central to our identity and represent opportunities for innovation, close collaboration, and strong connections to society and industry.

In submitting this report, we reaffirm our commitment to continuous quality enhancement, transparency, and accountability. The self-evaluation process has provided valuable insights into our strengths and areas for development and has strengthened our preparedness for the next phase of institutional growth. We look forward to constructive engagement with IAQA and to further developing Hólar University as a dynamic, specialized and high-quality institution within the Icelandic higher education system.

Hólmfríður Sveinsdóttir, Rector of Hólar University

Message from the student representative in the University Council

Student involvement in matters concerning their studies and environment is extremely important, as students are key participants in the university community. Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to serve on committees and councils within Hólar University, which has been both rewarding and educational. In particular, serving on the University Council has been a positive experience, as I feel that students' perspectives are genuinely listened to, and efforts are made to ensure that their voices carry weight in decision-making. I have also participated in a steering group related to the university collaboration between the University of Iceland and Hólar University in matters concerning teaching and academic affairs, as well as serving as a student representative at departmental meetings and on the committee for on-site sessions of the Faculty of Tourism. In all of these forums, emphasis has been placed on ensuring that students' voices are heard and taken seriously.

Previously, I also served as a student representative in the National Union of Icelandic Students (LÍS), whose objective is to be the collective voice of students in Iceland and those pursuing studies abroad. This experience further strengthened my understanding of the importance of active student participation in policymaking, programme development, and advocacy.

It should, however, be noted that no student participated in the preparation of this self-evaluation report, which represents an opportunity for improvement for the university. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that Hólar University is a small institution, and it has been challenging to engage students in this type of work alongside their studies. Nevertheless, student participation in such processes is highly valuable, and it would be desirable to find ways to strengthen and encourage it.

It should also be recognized that student voices do not automatically carry influence unless students themselves take an active role. If students wish to influence and improve their education, they need to make their voices heard by attending meetings, participating in consultations, and responding to surveys available to them. Through active dialogue and participation, genuine opportunities for improvement can be created, benefiting both current and future students.

Sólveig Birna H. Elísabetardóttir, student representative in Hólar University council

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Self-Evaluation Process

Self-evaluation for the third cycle of the Icelandic quality enhancement framework (QEF3) started with the formation of the quality committee of HU in September 2024, a few months after the publication of the handbook for the framework and the accompanying guidelines for internal monitoring and reviews. The quality committee includes the rector, quality manager, head of academic affairs, the research manager and heads of departments. The rector can add members when appropriate, and the CEO and a project manager for the establishment of the university system with UI have worked with the committee. The committee meets bi-weekly.

The enhancement framework and the accompanying guidelines were reviewed to prioritise actions. It was decided to start with developing an institutional approach to IQA and prioritise the ongoing/annual aspects of the monitoring. At the same time, a status check was done for the evaluation themes in QEF3 using the indicative questions accompanying the handbook. The status check showed that although various rules, policies and procedures were in place, significant work was needed to formalize the quality management system.

Work towards the formalization of the quality management system started in the fall of 2025 with the revision of the quality policy and description of the quality management system as well as defining the procedure for the management of documented procedures.

The self-evaluation report was written during the 2025-2026 schoolyear, mostly in spring 2026. The quality committee makes up the self-evaluation team. Members of the committee and other staff contributed to the writing of the report, although most of the writing and editing was done by the quality manager and research manager. The first draft of the report was sent to the quality committee for consultation and feedback in April. The committee has since then held five meetings dedicated to discussing the content of the report, focusing on specific chapter/s in each meeting. Additional meetings have been held in smaller groups in relation to specific topics.

Students were not directly involved with the self-evaluation. Attempts were made to recruit a student for participation in the quality committee in fall 2024. The attempts were not successful, but we are aware that with more effort it would have been possible to engage students more in the self-evaluation process. However, feedback gained via focus groups with students in all study programs in 2025-2026 was very valuable and of high impact towards the results of the evaluation.

The quality committee has worked on strategic planning alongside the self-evaluation. Strategy workshops have been held with staff and students. Those have provided valuable feedback for this self-evaluation. The results of this self-evaluations will be used to formalize options for strategic themes and action items.

1.2 Institutional Background, Profile and Mission

HU is located at Hólar historical site in the Hjaltadalur valley in north-west of Iceland. The university is in the municipality of Skagafjörður. In March 2026, the municipality had a population of 4361, of which 93 lived in Hólar.

There is a long tradition of academic, cultural, and artistic activity at Hólar in Hjaltadalur, and it is believed that educational activities have taken place there, with interruptions, since the year 1106. HU has its roots in an agricultural college that began operating in 1882. In 2003, Hólar college received permission to offer university-level education, and in 2007 the school was formally converted into a university. HU is a public institution and is now one of four universities operating outside the capital region.

HU received accreditation for its academic fields in 2008. Its operations are based on the educational and cultural history of Hólar and on deeply rooted Icelandic traditions: the Icelandic horse, the rich freshwater and marine ecosystems, the heritage of sustainable use of resources, cultural legacy, and Icelandic hospitality.

HU has three academic departments: the Department of aquaculture and fish biology (DAFB), the Department of equine sciences (DES) and the Department of rural tourism (DRT). All departments offer programs at both undergraduate and graduate level. Although not at university level in the beginning, the three departments have operated for over 30 years and were the first to offer study programs in their fields in Iceland. Most of the programs offered are not offered in other universities. About 280 students are enrolled in the University, and the staff consists of around 60 people.

Study programs are offered either on-site at Hólar or as blended learning (distance learning combined with on-site sessions). The programs are structured around an integration of theoretical and practical training. Specialized facilities have been developed for on-site teaching at Hólar and students can rent accommodation at the university campus.

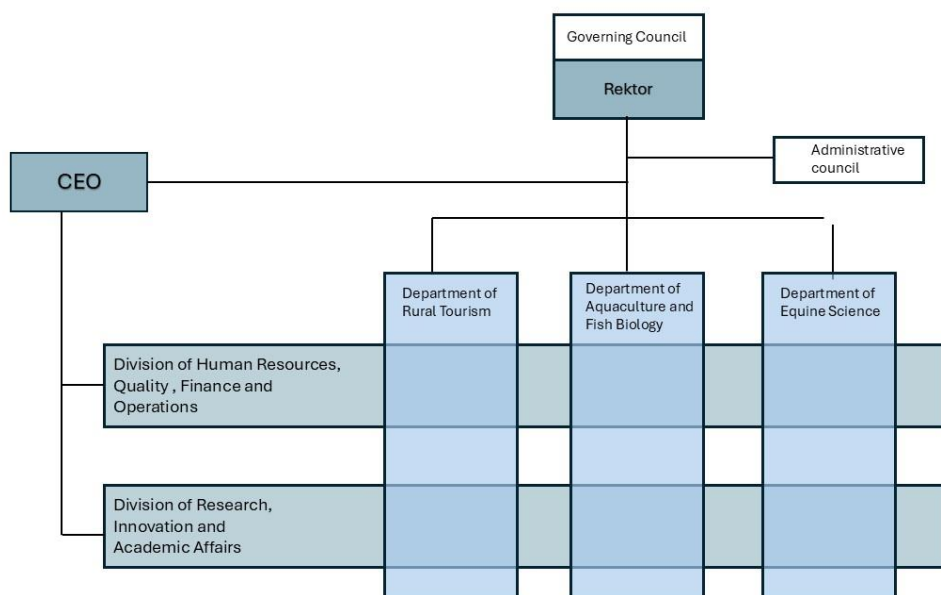
HU places a strong emphasis on close connections between academia and industry so that students gain both practical and theoretical preparation for future employment, graduate studies, and research. A large part of the practical training is conducted in collaboration with active business and research units. The university also maintains ongoing dialogue with local and national authorities regarding the development of education, operations, and institutional framework.

Research at HU is robust, and the school takes part in international research collaboration. It has exchange agreements with universities both in Iceland and abroad, allowing students to complete part of their studies elsewhere. Likewise, exchange students regularly study at HU.

The core values of Hólar University are:

1. **Professionalism** – Work at the university is carried out meticulously, responsibly, and with respect for the subjects to achieve excellence in teaching, research, and learning.
2. **Respect** – Respect is upheld for academic freedom, the subject matter, colleagues, students, and the environment.
3. **Creativity** – The university is a venue for study, research, and education that inspires individuals to creative endeavours.

The following picture shows the organizational chart for HU:



The CEO is the head of the division of human resources, quality, finance and operations as well as the division of research, innovation and academic affairs. The administrative council makes up the management team and includes the rector, heads of departments and the CEO. In addition to the formal management structure HU operates through a committee system defined in the operational rules. Key committees include the Research committee, Teaching committee and Graduate studies committee, which support quality assurance, research development, admissions, student progression and postgraduate studies. At departmental level, study committees and department meetings provide formal mechanisms for staff and student participation in academic decision-making and program development. The quality committee was established in 2024 and includes the management team, research manager, head of academic affairs and quality manager.

Currently HU is going through transformative changes with the establishment of the university system with UI. In order to found the university system changes in the law of public Universities were needed. A bill proposal was approved in the parliament on June 1st after being in the parliament for several months. The University system will begin

operations on July 1st, 2026. When the University system will be established, the research centers of UI will be part of the Hólar university campus. As part of the implementation process of the University system, HU has been working on a strategy for Hólar as a specialized rural university campus within a university system. Enhancements of quality management are also in progress. These developments will be discussed further in chapter 1.3.

1.3 Current developments

HU and UI are working on preparations for implementation of the university system. The project plan includes work packages on governance and quality, finance and housing, infrastructure, human resources, teaching and learning, marketing and communications, research and innovation, and IT. Specialists from both universities participate in the working groups for each work package in addition to temporarily hired experts. A steering group oversees the project, and four members of the steering group make up an executive group that meets each week. Full-day workshops with members of all the groups have been held twice during the schoolyear to coordinate and discuss their work. A workshop with staff of HU and the research centres of UI was conducted in October, led by the steering group for the university system implementation. Two workshops with staff and students have been conducted at Hólar by the group working on marketing and communications.

There has been a longstanding need for improvements of facilities for research and teaching at HU. Working with authorities on solutions has been a significant focus of the rector. Progress has been made, and a memo from the Ministry of culture, innovation and higher education (MCIHE) to the parliament committee of Judicial affairs and education in connection with handling of a bill to amend the Act on Public Universities (University system), states that the purchase of Brúnastaðir stable is in process within the ministry. Also, that finances for infrastructure and operations of facilities for teaching and research for the department of aquaculture and fish biology is secured, and that the governmental financial plan includes funding for facilities for research and teaching at the area for equine studies.

HU 's strategic plan was valid from 2021-2025. Discussion with UI on close cooperation and possible merger started in mid-year 2023. The cooperation with UI is a major strategic decision that affects most operations. Therefore, it was decided to postpone work on revising the strategic plan for HU until the governance structure for the University system would be defined. HU is currently working on a strategic plan for Hólar as a specialized rural university campus within university system. The timing of the different steps is arranged so that they follow slightly after the corresponding steps in the strategy revision at the UI, allowing the strategy for Hólar campus to align with the UI strategy. Strategy workshops have taken place with staff and with students.

After the establishment of a quality committee was established at HU in Fall 2024, the committee has focused on approaches to institutional IQA and revision of the quality management system. The quality policy was revised in 2025-2026 with a description of the quality management system. As HU is preparing to establish a University system with UI, the quality management system is designed in a way that it can work as a unit within a larger institution, and so that it aligns with the Quality management system of UI. For IQA, a quality survey has been designed and conducted, focus groups with students from all study programs have been implemented, and approach to annual monitoring of academic departments has been developed.

2 Learning from Prior Reviews

2.1 Learning from Previous IWR

HU underwent the QEF2 IWR in the Fall of 2019. The reflective analysis made in preparation for the review included extensive engagement on behalf of staff and students. The IWR Team identified significant progress in development from the IWR review in QEF1 in 2013, particularly around staff development in relation to research and research management. Other strengths identified in the IWR included active engagement with the elements of QEF, strong stakeholder and industry engagement, strong employability of graduates from HU, 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, enhance student engagement, define procedures for handling student issues, improve levels of interdisciplinary research and teaching, enhance marketing effort, increase 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 discusses progress made on each of the areas identified for improvement in the IWR19. The report discusses structural reformation made in August 2021 as a major milestone for progress on the areas for improvement. The goal of the reformation was to increase clarity of operation cohesion and integration of knowledge and information and to enhance formality and quality of daily operations. Following IWR19, HU prepared a strategic plan for the period 2021-2025.

Further updates on defined areas of improvement were presented in the annual quality reports from August 2024 and May 2025.

Current developments have or will further influence the areas identified for improvement.

The following table provides an overview of the status of recommendations from IWR19.

Below follows a more detailed discussion on how each recommendation has been addressed.

| # | Recommendations from QEF2 IWR | Current status (paraphrased) |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | The level of formality in the day-to-day running of departments and the University as well as in the institutional oversight of compliance with regulations and follow-up of action plans. | In progress. Significant steps taken with the establishment of the quality committee and revision of the quality policy. Will be further enhanced with the University system. |
| 2 | Improved formal connection and definition of the Department of Academic Affairs and the Department of Graduate Studies within important structures and decision-making processes at the institutional level. | Addressed in structural changes in 2021. Formal connections further established with the establishment of the quality committee in 2024. The quality committee connects key managers in research and teaching. |
| 3 | Enhancing institutional infrastructure to relieve the heavy administrative and student support load on departments and individual staff. | In progress. Some tasks will be enhanced with support from the university system. Improvements have been made by the teaching office, but capacity in administration is still needed. |
| 4 | The possible benefits of including the Head of the Division of Graduate Studies on the research committee to ensure that research is appropriately considered in the development of graduate curricula. | Departments are responsible for graduate curricula and for ensuring that research is appropriately considered. The quality committee connects all key managers, such as the department heads, the research manager and the head of academic affairs. |
| 5 | The development and utilization of a full range of key performance indicators related to student satisfaction and student learning experience more broadly. | In progress. Will be completed with the revision of the strategic plan. |
| 6 | Taking deliberate steps to capture the full student voice across cohorts and departments, as well as finding formal and informal ways to bring the student body more closely together. | In progress. Significant steps taken but enhancing student voice and bringing the student body closer together this remains an ongoing task. A planned enhancement project will address this. |
| 7 | The lack of consistent understanding and practice across those interviewed on how to refer students issues safely and in a confidential but documented manner, e.g., student support or misconduct. | Partially completed. The study rules are clear regarding issues related to assessment, but clarification is needed on other issues. |
| 8 | A need to better market the brand of Hólar University and to further raise its profile nationally, with an emphasis on the impact of its current research and teaching. | Significant steps taken with rebranding and creation of marketing material, will be further enhanced with implementation of university system. There will be a position at Hólar dedicated to marketing. |
| 9 | The levels of interdisciplinarity in Hólar's research and teaching. | There has been significant emphasis on collaborative interdisciplinary projects, and multiple such projects are ongoing. |
| 10 | A need to increase the use of strategic data in the day-to-day running of the University, for example through regularly updated dashboarding. | Strategic data is used in internal monitoring. Dashboarding is a part of implementation of university system. KPI 's will be defined as part of the new strategic plan |
| 11 | Strengthening the current capacity for blended learning development and ICT support to benefit both students and staff, and to facilitate future curriculum development. | Significant steps taken with implementation of Canvas Learning management system, Inpera examination system and Microsoft 365 tools. Will be further improved with implementation of university system, particularly with the services of the UI centre for teaching and learning. |
| 12 | Creating more practical support for research, exemplified by the staff sabbatical process. | Steps taken with a clearer definition of the support role of the research manager. Will be further improved with implementation of University system, for example with access to grant writing services, assistance with data management, funds and increased access to journals. |

Following is a discussion on each of the recommendation.

1. The level of formality in the day-to-day running of departments and the University as well as in the institutional oversight of compliance with regulations and follow-up of action plans.

Following the IWR19 structural changes were made to address the formality of daily operations. The teaching committee and graduate committee have worked on revising rules and procedures regarding administration of teaching. Examples of this are the revision of the manual for graduate studies in 2024 and of the study rules in 2026. There is still work to be done in reviewing and documenting procedures and adding them to the quality manual. To meet the challenge of the size of the institution, where there is often only one person in each role, support services have been structured so that more than one person has access to e-mail communications and information systems, so that work can continue smoothly if someone is absent.

A quality manager was hired in August 2024, and a quality committee was established that consists of the rector, heads of departments, research manager, head of academic affairs and head of support services. Part of the role of the quality manager and the quality committee is oversight of compliance with regulations and follow-up of action plans. HU approach to internal monitoring and review is being developed in the quality committee. As part of that, an approach for annual monitoring by departments has been developed and is now being piloted. The heads of departments will return the first such reports in June 2026.

The quality management system is in development. The quality policy has recently been revised with a description of the quality management system and a procedure for the management of documented procedures that are published in the quality manual.

Establishing a university system with UI will further enhance formalization of procedures, as UI has documented processes and infrastructure that will benefit Hólar university campus. The quality committee will review and implement procedures of the University system where applicable.

2. Improved formal connection and definition of the Department of Academic Affairs and the Department of Graduate Studies within important structures and decision-making processes at the institutional level.

After structural changes in 2021 the Divisions of research, academic affairs and graduate studies were merged into one Division of research, innovation and academic affairs (DRIAA). The CEO has had oversight of the division and has been a part of the management team. The role of the CEO is now being revised so that within the University system it will align with the roles of managing directors of the schools of the University system.

The teaching committee and the graduate committee are both chaired by the head of academic affairs, and coordination is ensured through monthly meetings. The quality

committee meets bi-weekly and includes the head of academic affairs, the research manager as well as heads of departments, rector and quality manager, and therefore connects key managers.

The rules for the University system are now being revised. Roles, structures and procedures at HU will be reviewed considering the new rules and will be revised if needed.

3. Enhancing institutional infrastructure to relieve the heavy administrative and student support load on departments and individual staff.

Roles within central administration have been established in order to enhance institutional infrastructure and relieve some of the administrative and student support load on departments. The head of academic affairs has a key supportive role and has the responsibility of assisting departments with administration. The human resource councillor assists departments with human resources of the departments. The quality manager leads the work of reviewing procedures as part of implementing the quality management system. The research manager has the role of providing support to researchers. Heads of departments note that administrative workload is still heavy and that enhanced capacity in program administration would be needed, either by increasing capacity within the teaching office or defining a role for program leaders or administrators within departments.

Due to the size of the institution, Hólar University has been struggling to maintain quality support services and institutional infrastructure with the resources available. This was one of the main reasons for the initiative for closer cooperation with the UI. The establishment of the University system will enhance support for students and staff. Students have had access to a student councillor at HU. As part of the implementation for the University System students have also been granted access to the psychology services of UI. When the University system will be formed, HU students will have full access to the student services of the UI, including library services, writing services and student facilities in Reykjavík. In order to organize student services for the students of HU within the University system, a review of student support services was conducted. As part of the review, students were offered to participate in a survey on their preferences regarding the organization of student support services for Hólar university campus. The results are being used in the the preparations for the University system.

4. The possible benefits of including the Head of the Division of Graduate Studies on the research committee to ensure that research is appropriately considered in the development of graduate curricula.

The responsibility of curriculum development is with the academic departments who ensure that research is considered in the development of graduate curricula. In structural changes in 2021 the Divisions of research, academic affairs and graduate studies were merged into one Division of research, innovation and academic affairs (DRIAA). The research committee and the graduate committee have representatives from all departments, so there is good connection between the committees and the departments. The quality

committee connects all key managers, such as the department heads, the research manager and the head of academic affairs.

5. The development and utilization of a full range of key performance indicators related to student satisfaction and student learning experience more broadly.

An annual quality survey was developed and implemented in spring 2025. The survey monitors student satisfaction and learning experience and can be used to monitor KPI 's. The results are reviewed in the quality committee, and heads of departments receive results for their departments and review them in their internal monitoring.

The capacity to extract statistical information from the student registration system (Ugla) has improved and become more reliable. Key statistical information are reviewed in internal monitoring and reviews. Examples of statistical data reviewed are course completion and student progression. Departments have used these information to reach out to students that have dropped out, and some have re-entered their programs.

KPI 's on student satisfaction and learning experience have not yet been implemented at the institutional level, although it is being monitored in the quality survey and the focus groups. A new strategic plan for Hólar University is being formed, and key performance indicators will be established to monitor the plan.

6. Taking deliberate steps to capture the full student voice across cohorts and departments, as well as finding formal and informal ways to bring the student body more closely together.

Enhancing student engagement is an ongoing task of the university. The three departments have very different student profiles. Students in DES live on campus and study full-time, while most students in DAFB and DRT are distance learners, many with jobs and family responsibilities. This creates challenges for engaging students and bringing the full student body closer together.

Student representation is engrained into the management structures of HU, with student representatives in the University council and study committees of departments. Since IWR19 all departments have taken steps to enhance student voice within the departments, for example by increasing the activity of study committees and involvement of students in department meetings. Students were involved in subject-level reviews of departments and have been included in revision of study programs.

Since 2025 there have been significant efforts to engage students. As part of the recently developed approach to internal monitoring every student has been invited to a focus group to provide feedback on their program. The focus groups were implemented in the 2025-2026 school year and will be annual. Students are also invited to respond to an annual quality survey to provide feedback on their studies and support services.

During the school year 2025-2026, The quality manager and the director of academic affairs have established monthly meetings with the board of the student union to provide

support and connection. The student union has been in communication with the UI student Union and the National Union of Icelandic students. The student union is working on restructuring their operations.

Students have been invited to participate in workshops as part of strategy formation and establishment of the University system with UI.

Student representation in management could be further enhanced by including student representatives in the teaching committee, research committee, graduate committee and quality committee.

7. The lack of consistent understanding and practice across those interviewed on how to refer students issues safely and in a confidential but documented manner, e.g., student support or misconduct.

The year-on-report that followed the IWR19 discussed revision of procedures for student issues and complaints. The pathway for such issues is through heads of departments and the office of academic affairs. However, results from focus groups with students indicate that pathways for student complaints need further clarification regarding issues not directly related to issues regarding assessment, which the study rules of HH are clear on. HU code of ethics apply to students and the ethics committee handles student issues that are referred to the committee.

UI has rules on student complaints and student misconduct (rules nr. 569/2009 article 50 and 51). The rules state that students send a written complaint to their deans of department who are responsible for deciding on actions. Students can appeal the decision to the University council. Cases on student misconduct are also handled by the deans.

The focus groups that showed the need for clarification on rules on pathways for handling student issues needed were conducted in Spring 2026. As it was expected that the rules for UI would apply to Hólar university campus with the establishment of the University system, work toward defining specific rules for HU was postponed. Now it has been decided that current rules apply until the rules for UI have been revised so there is a need to clarify procedures for student issues that apply for the interim period.

Implementation of the records management system with the establishment a university system with UI will provide appropriate tools for documenting on student issues.

8. A need to better market the brand of Hólar University and to further raise its profile nationally, with an emphasis on the impact of its current research and teaching.

A marketing firm was hired to lead a rebranding and marketing campaign for HU in 2023. New marketing material has been created with a modern layout to emphasize the university's progressive and innovative approach. Each year since then the material has been reviewed and small changes made. The look has been kept consistent, but information has been updated.

Marketing campaigns are 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 to increase visibility within the local community, professional forums and for the target group of students. The administration increased its PR towards media in early 2023 and has continued to do so. The establishment of a university system with UI has also affected the presentation of Hólar in the media.

HU shares stories of the impact of research and teaching on the website and social media platforms. However, there could be a more systematic approach to collecting information and analyzing and sharing the impact of research and teaching in collaboration with the academic departments.

One of the work packages for the University system with UI is on marketing and communication. As part of the preparation there have been two workshops with staff and students in relation to the uniqueness and marketing of HU. The results of the workshops will be used for branding Hólar university campus of the University system. When the University system will be established the division of marketing and public relations at UI will manage the marketing of Hólar university campus. The structure of this work is currently in development but is expected to include a part-time position at Hólar and increased student engagement in marketing activities. The person will work with the division of marketing and public relations of UI and with staff of Hólar to promote the activities of the academic departments of Hólar. It is important that this person works closely with the departments. It is important for the branding to consider the unique roots, history and image of Hólar university campus.

9. The levels of interdisciplinarity in Hólar's research and teaching.

There has been significant emphasis at HU on participating in collaborative and interdisciplinary projects on research and teaching. Project funding is on the agenda of the management team meetings every week. Projects on research and/or teaching at HU are for example funded by Erasmus, NORA, Horizon, Nordforsk, NSF – National Science Foundation, the Icelandic centre for research (Rannís) and the collaboration fund of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. Examples of collaborative and/or interdisciplinary projects/centers on research and/or teaching since the IWR19 review are:

- *Young Equine Innovators*: An Erasmus+ funded project led by the DRT in collaboration with Companion Gotaborg, European E-learning institute, Momentum consulting and Kildare county council. The goal of the project is to create learning materials for young people who want to work in equine innovation.
- *BRIDGES*: A Nordic collaboration project with the goal of increasing cooperation between industry and universities in developing practical training in fish farming. The project finished in 2025.

- *Biodice*: A collaborative project on biological diversity in Iceland. The project is a collaboration between various institutions and individuals. Project website: <https://biodice.is/>.
- *“Sustainable culture, breeding and use of aquatic organisms in Iceland: Building up courses and research at the University level.”* The goal of the project is to compile and create opportunities for academic education and research in the field of aquaculture in Iceland. The project is funded by the MCIHE. Participants in the project are HU, UI, UNAM, AUI, University centre of the Westfjords, Marine and freshwater research institute, Iceland food and biotech R&D and Icelandic museum of natural history. Two study programs have been developed within the project, A BS program in Aquaculture in collaboration with UNAK and MS in Sustainable production in aquaculture with all collaborative partners.
- *Research center on Creative fields*: Hólar University is a founding partner. The center is a collaboration between five universities in Iceland.
- *Arctic hubs*. A Horizon 2020 project, Global drivers, local consequences: Tools for global change adaption and sustainable development of industrial and cultural Arctic „hubs“ (ArcticHubs) was launched on 1st of August 2020 and ended 31st. July 2024. The project brought together 21 partners from eleven countries and in Iceland HU and UI participated in the project.
- *Field academy in Hofstaðir in Mývatnssveit* for research and teaching in archeology, heritage and cultural tourism. Funding renewed 2024 for 2 years.
- *Tourism studies for the future*. A collaboration with UI on development of curriculum and pedagogy. Funding 2024 for 1year from the MCIHE collaboration fund for universities.
- *Development of interdisciplinary study program on sustainable regional development*. Collaboration with UI. Funding 2024 for 2 years from the MCIHE collaboration fund for universities. A master-level program has been developed and students are being enrolled for the academic year of 2026-2027.
- *Academy of the Icelandic horse*. A collaboration on graduate studies and research on the Icelandic horse. Finished in 2025
- *Nordic Bridge*. Interreg northern periphery and arctic, which is a European Union programme fund, HU along with five other partners, including the association of municipalities in Northeast Iceland. Norway and Finland received a preliminary grant for organizing three workshops in Norway, Finland and Iceland. Project duration is 2024-2028
- *The national Icelandic horse competition (NIHC)* will be held at Hólar in the summer of 2026. This is the biggest event of the horse industry in Iceland and a major sport and cultural event. HU is now, for the second time leading an international interdisciplinary research project on NIHC as an event. This time with a focus on

sustainability and student participation in the research process. The preparation of the event was actively intertwined with the teaching in event management in 2025-2026 and both former and current research projects contribute to teaching of students within the field.

Collaborative teaching includes three programs:

- *Nordic master program in sustainable production and utilization of marine bio resources (MAR-BIO)*. A Nordic interdisciplinary master 's program that combines biology, oceanology, technology sciences and social sciences. The program is a collaboration of three Universities: Nord University in Bodö, University of Gothenburg and HU.
- *A BS program in Aquaculture* will be offered from fall of 2026 in a collaboration with the UI and UNAK.
- *A MS program in Sustainable Production in Aquaculture* in collaboration with UI, UNAK, AUI, University Centre of the Westfjords, Marine and Freshwater Research Institute, Iceland Food and Biotech R&D and Icelandic Museum of Natural History

10. A need to increase the use of strategic data in the day-to-day running of the University, for example through regularly updated dashboarding.

There have been efforts to increase the use of strategic data, but this remains an area for improvement. In financial management, strategic data has been used to restructure financial management so that it aligns more with the governmental financial model for universities. There have been developments in extracting data from the student management system Ugla – led by UI. Student data and data on human resources is used in monitoring and reviews of programs and departments.

In relation to the work on the revision of the strategic plan, key performance indicators will be defined, and the relevant data will be monitored. Data dashboarding will be implemented as part of the establishment of the University system with UI.

11. Strengthening the current capacity for blended learning development and ICT support to benefit both students and staff, and to facilitate future curriculum development.

Developments in ICT support since the last IWR for blended learning development include:

- Inpera system for examination has been implemented for online assessment, although paper exams are still used in some on-site courses.
- Microsoft Office programs have been utilized for enhancing quality of blended learning. Using Microsoft Teams has been particularly important to facilitate online meetings, collaboration and sharing of documents.

- Canvas learning management system has also been implemented to facilitate online instruction.

HU participates in Teaching academy of the public Universities, and there is one active member from HU in the academy.

The University system with UI will provide HU with enhanced resources for ICT and pedagogical support for blended learning. Teachers will have access to the services of the UI 's centre for teaching and learning. The support of the teaching center includes technical tools, instructional materials and personal guidance for teachers. It is planned to work collaboratively towards a policy on teaching, learning and assessment. That work includes consideration of the use of artificial intelligence, curricular materials and instruction methods.

12. Creating more practical support for research, exemplified by the staff sabbatical process.

The research manager provides researchers with support for research funding, finding resources and information. She has been in dialogue with researchers to assess their needs for support, for example by attending departmental meetings. A research day is scheduled every semester and is organized by the research committee under the lead of the research manager. The research day is a platform for presentations on services available as well as workshops where researchers support each other. Examples of topics that have been on the agenda include services available for data stewardship (dataice), the use of AI in research and IRIS system.

Some of the support that UI provides their researchers is already available to researchers at HU. When the University system will be established all the services and funds will be available to researchers at HU. Examples of practical support are assistance with data management, and services of the grant office, for example in administration, finances and implementation of projects. There will also be increased access to journal subscriptions.

The main internal funds that HU staff will be able to apply to are:

- University of Iceland research fund
- Postdoctoral grants
- Doctoral funds
- Grants to support public outreach
- Equipment purchase fund
- Complementary grants for Rannís infrastructure fund
- Travel grants for Phd students
- University of Iceland fund for APC charges

In addition, there are number of smaller funds that can be applied to for specific purposes.

Summary

The analysis of learning from previous IWR results in the following examples of good practices, areas for enhancements and areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with HU.

Good practices to highlight:

- Initiative for closer collaboration with UI, resulting in the establishment of the university system. This provides HU with access to UI 's shared infrastructure and services and will greatly enhance operations.
- Establishment of the quality committee in September 2024. The committee connects all key managers of the university and works cooperatively towards strategic planning and follow-up, development of the quality management system and reviewing of IQA activities.
- Development and implementation of the annual quality survey and focus groups with students of all study programmes to better capture student voice and feedback.
- Significant steps in rebranding and marketing of Hólar University as a response to IWR19
- Significant enhancement of participation in collaborative and interdisciplinary projects in research and teaching

Enhancement areas:

- There is a need to develop and utilize a full range of key performance indicators. This will be done as part of establishing the strategic plan that is to be set from the beginning of 2027.
- Although significant steps have been taken to capture student voice, feedback from students shows that this is still an area for enhancement.
- Working towards a common consistent understanding on how to refer student issues, complaints and misconduct.

Areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with UI:

- Review of UI documented processes that need to be implemented at HU
- Marketing of Hólar university campus within the University system
- Implementation of dashboarding of key strategic data that has been developed at UI
- Utilize services and tools provided at UI 's Centre for teaching and learning to further strengthen HU capacity for blended learning development

2.2 Learning from Internal Reviews

2.2.1 Internal monitoring and reviews at Hólar University.

As part of QEF2, all academic departments conducted subject level reviews. The reviews were completed in 2023 and 2024. When the handbook for the third cycle of the Icelandic quality enhancement framework (QEF3) and the accompanying guidelines for internal monitoring and review were published in 2024 HU started the work of developing an institutional approach for IQA.

As the departments had so recently completed very thorough subject level reviews it was decided that the focus would first be on developing and implementing annual/ongoing components of internal monitoring before establishing an approach for periodic reviews. Roles and responsibilities regarding internal monitoring and reviews are defined in the Quality policy, as well as a description of the system for internal monitoring. Procedure, guidelines and templates are being developed.

An annual quality survey for students was developed in 2024-2025. The survey is intended to collect feedback on the full learning experience of students and includes questions on their study programs as well as on support services and facilities. The survey has now been conducted twice, in April 2025 and 2026. The results of the 2026 survey are still being analysed. The quality survey is reviewed by the quality committee and the management team decides on actions. Heads of departments also get results for respondents of their department and are responsible for reviewing the results with their department and deciding on actions.

Focus groups for students in each study program were implemented in the 2025-2026 school year. All students got invited to participate in the focus group for their program. For students in the BA program of riding and riding instructions, the focus groups were separate for each year of study. The focus groups were conducted by two members of support services, usually the quality manager and either the director of academic affairs or the student counsellor. During the focus groups, the students are offered to provide feedback on good practices by the university related to their studies and on opportunities for improvement. A summary of each focus group meeting is sent to the head of department who is responsible for deciding on actions. A thematic analysis of all the focus groups is done by the quality manager when all the meetings for each school year is finished and is reviewed by the quality committee. The management team decides on actions.

Approach to annual monitoring of departments and programs has been developed and a template created. Annual monitoring of departments includes evaluation on teaching and learning, research, human resources and societal engagement. As input for the monitoring the departments use statistical data, results from the quality surveys and the focus groups, the surveys of the public universities and other data they have or collect themselves. Important part of the internal monitoring of departments is student feedback gained in the study committees of the departments. Ongoing monitoring of programs includes reflective

questions that are considered. Heads of departments are responsible for deciding on actions based on the monitoring. The quality manager also analysis the reports regarding results that relate to support services or things that would be worked on collaboratively. Those results are discussed in the quality committee and decisions on actions are made by the management team.

Aspects of IQA that remain to be developed are periodic reviews of units, periodic reviews of programs and reviews of research management. A revision of the course evaluation survey is also needed.

As part of the preparations for establishing the university system, a review of student support services was conducted in 2025-2026. Students were invited to participate in a survey on their views and preferences regarding student support services for Hólar university campus. Information on support services of both universities was gathered and compared. The results are used in decisions on how to organize student support services for Hólar university campus.

Additional ways that feedback from students and staff has been gathered is through workshops related to strategy work and preparations for the establishment of the university system. Results of surveys conducted by external parties are also reviewed, such as results from the “institution of the year” survey on human resources and the surveys of the public universities.

In the following sections learning from IQA activities are discussed. First, summaries of learning from the Subject level reviews are provided. Then learning from IQA on the following operational themes are discussed: Teaching and learning, research, student support, human resources and staff support, and infrastructure and facilities.

2.2.2. Subject level reviews from QEF2

Subject level reviews (SLS ´s) were completed in all three academic departments between 2023 and 2024. The reviews involved academic staff, students, external experts and stakeholders and examined teaching, research, infrastructure, student support and strategic development. Across departments, recurring themes included infrastructure challenges, the need for stronger institutional support structures, continued program development and closer coordination between departments and central administration. Following are summaries of the subject level reviews of each department.

2.2.2.1. The Department of aquaculture and fish Biology.

The review highlighted strong links to industry, extensive national and international collaboration networks and specialized expertise among staff. Practical teaching applied research and close interaction between students and teachers were identified as important strengths, together with the Department’s international profile and teaching in English. Staff and students emphasized the value of collaboration with industry and opportunities

for independent student research within the programs. The department's combination of applied and basic research and its success in securing research funding were also identified as strengths in the review.

At the same time, the review identified challenges related to infrastructure, organization and support systems. The loss of the facilities in Sauðárkrókur and uncertainty regarding future facilities affected both teaching and research activities throughout the review period. Concerns were also raised regarding outdated equipment, limited infrastructure, lack of technical support and weaknesses in communication and information flow. The review further pointed to the need of enhancement of central support for research activities and funding applications and the need for clearer administrative procedures and stronger coordination between the department and central administration.

Teaching and student support formed another important part of the review. Challenges identified included fluctuations in student numbers, long completion times for graduate students and the need for stronger support structures for postgraduate and international students relocating to Iceland. The review also discussed the need for pedagogical training, program revisions and development of new programs in aquaculture at bachelor's and master's level. Balancing teaching, research and administrative responsibilities was identified as an additional challenge affecting workload and continuity within the Department.

The review identified opportunities for future development through stronger international collaboration, increased public outreach and closer cooperation with industry and governmental actors. Development of new facilities, improved support for research funding, stronger internal collaboration and better long-term planning regarding infrastructure, staffing and student support were identified as important priorities for continued strategic development.

***EXAMPLES OF ENHANCEMENT FOLLOWING THE SLR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
AQUACULTURE AND FISH BIOLOGY***

The department has revised the practicum in the diploma program in aquaculture and made it more focused, with the aim of supporting both on-side teachers, and the education gained by the students. An assistant teacher has been hired in the diploma program to facilitate administration and provide student support. This has been highly successful, where the teacher creates continuation and glue between each course. The students in the focus group for the program showed great satisfaction with this arrangement. Similar arrangements have been set in place at master level to some extent.

New programs have been developed in collaboration with other universities. A BS program in Aquaculture was developed and is offered in collaboration with UI and UNAK. This provides a continuum in the study path for students who complete the diploma program in aquaculture, current and future students as well as students who have

completed it in the past. In addition, a MS program in Sustainable production in aquaculture was developed in collaboration with other universities and institutions, so a full study path is now available at both bachelor's and master's level for students who want to be educated for aquaculture. These new programs will benefit the aquaculture industry.

The department is actively working towards its next strategic plan

2.2.2.2. Department of equine science

The review placed considerable emphasis on the department's practical teaching environment and its role within Icelandic horse education and research. The integration of riding instruction, horse training, breeding knowledge and academic teaching was identified as a major strength, supported by specialized facilities, extensive infrastructure and close cooperation with the Icelandic horse sector. Student feedback showed strong appreciation for the practical components of the programs, the small learning environment and close contact with teachers, while also identifying challenges related to communication, organization of teaching, access to information and housing conditions.

The review repeatedly emphasized the department's close links to organizations such as the horse trainer's organization, the Icelandic riding club association and the International federation of Icelandic horse association and the importance of practicum-based learning and participation in events and applied projects within the horse sector. Compared to the IWR19, increased research activity and stronger international collaboration were evident through the establishment of the Academy of the Icelandic Horse, increased visibility of staff research, appointment of affiliate professors and development of MSc-level research activities. The review also stressed the importance of stronger institutional support for research development, conference participation and academic publication.

Infrastructure and long-term organization emerged as important areas requiring continued attention. Although the department benefits from extensive facilities, maintenance and renewal of buildings and equipment were identified as ongoing concerns. The review also pointed to the need for clearer strategic planning, more systematic quality procedures and stronger internal communication structures within the department. Student participation and communication within the Department were identified as areas where further formalization would be beneficial.

Overall, the review confirmed the department's strong academic and professional position within Icelandic equine education while identifying areas requiring continued strategic follow-up, particularly regarding infrastructure, communication, student support and research development.

**EXAMPLES OF ENHANCEMENT FOLLOWING THE SLR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
EQUINE SCIENCES**

The department has increased activities of the study committee of the department to enhance student participation in planning and enhancement of the operations.

The department has also appointed a dedicated riding teacher for each year/cohort who is responsible for administrative facilitation and scheduling of the riding teaching activities.

In their feedback, students pointed out that the arrangement for feeding and taking care of the horses needed revision. The department put together a working group to analyse the arrangements and provide suggestion for changes. The group consisted of teachers, stable staff and students. The group has turned in their suggestions and the changes that was possible to implement right away have already been implemented, and other changes will be implemented when possible.

2.2.2.3. The department of rural tourism

The review highlighted the need for continuous program development in response to rapid changes within Icelandic tourism and higher education, including the Covid-19 pandemic, technological developments, changing student needs, housing problems and increasing expectations regarding internationalization and quality assurance. This resulted in ongoing revision of teaching methods, curricula and program structures. Attention was given to the future direction and sustainability of some programs, including the BA program in tourism and hospitality management. As a follow-up, the department updated its timeline for systematic program reviews linked to findings from the subject level review.

The review confirmed the importance of maintaining strong links between teaching, research and the tourism industry through practicum periods, field-based learning and applied research projects. Increasing international collaboration through Erasmus+ cooperation, joint programs and externally funded research projects was also identified as an important development. At the same time, the review pointed to the need for stronger institutional support structures, as many collaborations depended on individual academic networks and initiatives.

Challenges related to infrastructure and support systems were also discussed, including building renovations, temporary facilities and the need to strengthen support related to teaching technology, information literacy and student services. Distance learning and on-campus sessions were identified as particularly important for student experience, networking and integration into academic life. Following the Covid-19 period, the Department placed greater emphasis on improving the quality and purpose of on-campus sessions and strengthening social and academic interaction during these periods.

Overall, the review confirmed strong practices in teaching, collaboration and applied research while identifying areas requiring continued strategic attention.

EXAMPLES OF ENHANCEMENT FOLLOWING THE SLR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RURAL TOURISM

Findings from the review have been used to guide program revisions, strengthen quality procedures and support strategic planning within the Department. This has resulted in a revision of the program offerings of the department. The diploma program in event management has attracted a good number of students, but a path to continue has been lacking. The department has developed a second diploma in sustainable event management and a BA program in responsible events management. By that, students can combine the two diplomas and by adding one academic year, they can finish a full BA within the field of events management. But HU is the only university in Iceland, offering a full program in events management. As part of further curriculum development, a MA program in sustainable regional management has been developed in a collaboration with UI.

2.2.3. Learning from internal monitoring and reviews in relation to operational themes.

2.2.3.1. Teaching and learning

The main activities to evaluate teaching and learning are the departmental SLRs, program reviews, annual monitoring of departments and programs, quality survey, focus groups and course evaluations. Workshops related to strategy work have also provided useful feedback.

An issue that comes up on teaching and learning in the quality survey and focus groups is that administrative procedures related to teaching need improvement. Students mention issues both in general administration and in organisation of individual courses. The head of academic affairs has worked on improvements on general administration in cooperation with the heads of departments. Preliminary analysis of the 2026 quality survey indicates that there have been slight improvements in this area from 2025, but there is still work to be done. We understand that this issue is largely due to limited capacity in personnel as well as infrastructure and formalization of procedures. It might partly be solved when some tasks that have been the role of the division of research, innovation and academic affairs (DRIAA) will move to central support services within the university system, so that the DRIAA can focus more on administration. However, heads of departments and staff of the DRIAA have noted that increased capacity in personnel for administration of teaching and pedagogical support would enhance the operations, both within departments and central administration, for example with defining a dedicated role of program administrators.

In the quality survey and focus groups, students mention inconsistencies in course setup in the Canvas LMS, syllabuses and assessment. The SLR of the department of aquaculture and fish biology identified the benefits of pedagogical training. The quality committee has suggested an enhancement project for the university to cooperatively work on a policy on

pedagogy and assessment. That work could include bringing in external expertise in pedagogical training as well as workshops with academic staff and support staff in positions related to teaching. This is an enhancement project that is being defined and is planned to start following the new strategic plan in the spring term 2027.

Results from reviews and annual monitoring also point to the need for guidelines or policy on how to engage with Artificial Intelligence (AI). UI already has as an AI policy. Workshops on how to engage with AI will be a part of the work towards a policy on teaching and assessment for Hólar university campus. The work toward the policy is listed in the summary of this report as one of the key enhancement projects resulting from this self-evaluation.

2.2.3.2. Research

In annual monitoring of departments, the departments reflect on research activities and possible enhancements. Research activities were also reviewed in the SLRs of departments. They all suggested that more practical support for researchers from central administration is needed. The establishment the university system will provide researchers with increased support, such as with grant writing, internal research funds and the centre for graduate studies. Local support at campus level will still be important.

The annual monitoring report for 2025 and the SLR from DAFB discusses the need for enhancing and defining procedures for the financial management of research projects and clarify how overhead grants are divided between the departments and central administration. The SLR notes that previously faculty had their own internal research account where they could keep externally funded grants and allocate to research projects. The department would like to establish this arrangement again.

The concerns that there is a lack of internal research funds have been raised by departments in SLRs, which is needed to be able to keep up basic research work when there are limited external funds available. Access to internal research funds within the university system will facilitate this. As part of the implementation of the university system, processes for management of research funding will need to be reviewed and coordinated.

2.2.3.3. Student support

Student support is evaluated by students in the quality survey, and students also get an opportunity to discuss support services during the focus groups for each program and in the study committees of departments. As part of the preparation for the establishment of the University system with UI, a survey was conducted on students' preferences for support services for Hólar university campus. A review of student services at both universities was also done.

The quality survey has shown that there is a need to enhance student voice and ways to suggest opportunities for enhancement of their studies. Major initiatives to enhance

opportunities to express their concerns is the implementation of the focus groups. In addition, students have had the opportunity to participate in workshops on the strategy formation and on preparations for establishment of the university system.

Another result from the quality survey is that enhancement is needed in student support and equality. Preliminary analysis of the 2026 survey indicates that there have been slight improvements from 2025, but enhancement is still needed.

The SLR for DAFB discusses the need for a tailored reception of master level students. This will be integrated into new student orientation day, where they receive program-specific information. One issue that foreign students have raised is that more support and tailored information is needed for foreign students who are locating to Iceland for their studies, for example with finding housing, finding jobs for partners, transportation and adjusting to Icelandic culture.

An enhancement project is being prepared. The project will focus on student support and how to enhance student voice and equality. Participants in the project will include staff from support services as well as representatives of academic staff and students from all departments. A brief description of the project is included in the report summary.

2.2.3.4. Human resources and support for staff

Hólar University uses the results of the Institution of the year survey to review how to improve human resources. SLRs of departments and results from strategy workshop also provide helpful feedback.

The results from the institution of the year surveys and the feedback from a strategy workshop with staff on February 16th, 2026, show that significant efforts are needed to attend to the institutional culture and staff support.

The results from the strategy workshop suggest that improvements are needed in information flow, communication, collaboration and consultation, and that more support, encouragement and empowerment of staff is needed. The institution of the year survey shows similar results.

Insecurities because of uncertainties due the changes relating to the establishment of a university system with UI are likely a contributing factor to the results of the institution of the year survey and staff feedback during the workshop. Although the changes offer opportunities for Hólar University, many experience insecurity. The management team has sought to respond with regular information updates, an information website, staff meetings, access to minutes from the meetings of the management team and university council.

With the establishment of the university system our staff will have improved access to human resource services and support through University of Iceland. However, there is a need to continue to attend to these matters internally for Hólar university campus. The management team is preparing an action plan on how to enhance work culture and staff

support, and this is listed in the report summary as one of the key enhancement areas resulting from this self-evaluation.

2.2.3.5. Infrastructure and facilities

Concerns regarding infrastructure and facilities are commonly raised in internal monitoring and reviews. This is evident in the SLRs, focus groups with students and strategy workshops.

The SLR of DAFB discussed the loss of facilities in Sauðárkrókur and outdated equipment. The review from the department of equine studies points out that maintenance of facilities and equipment is needed. The SLR of DRT points out challenges regarding office space for staff and graduate students and facilities for students in general.

At the strategy workshops with staff and students' as well as in the student focus groups concerns were raised that facilities need to be improved and maintained. A particular emphasis was on the need to purchase the Brúnastaðir stable. The stable is currently owned by an external party, and students need to pay significant rent to have stable for the horses they use for their studies. Students in DAFB also raise concerns about facilities for research. Further, the importance of appropriate facilities for distance teaching, and for campus sessions, are of a major importance for the learning experience of students in the DRT.

Working toward enhancement of facilities has been a significant focus of the rector, and progress has been made on work towards improved facilities. A memo from the MCIHE to the parliament committee of Judicial affairs and education in connection with handling of a bill to amend the Act on Public Universities (University system), states that the purchase of Brúnastaðir stable is in process within the ministry. Also, that finances for infrastructure and operations of facilities for teaching and research for DAFB is secured, and that the government financial plan includes funding for facilities for research and teaching at the area for equine studies.

Summary

The analysis of learning from internal reviews results in the following examples of good practices, areas for enhancements, tasks to be completed and areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with UI.

Good practices to highlight:

- Development and implementation of the annual quality survey and focus groups with students of all study programmes to better capture student voice and feedback.

- Development and implementation of annual monitoring of departments and programs
- Departments maintain strong links with industry and national and international collaboration networks
- Progress has been made towards securing improved facilities

Tasks to be completed

- Complete the development of the aspects of IQA that remain to be developed.

Enhancement areas

- Administrative procedures related to teaching and learning
- To create common guidelines for instruction and assessment, and in the use of artificial intelligence.
- Infrastructure, facilities and equipment
- Support for research activities
- Defining and enhancing procedures for financial management of research projects
- Enhance student voice, student support and equality.
- Attend to staff support and culture. The results from a strategy workshop suggest that improvements are needed in communication, collaboration and consultation, and that more support, encouragement and empowerment of staff is needed. The institution of the year survey shows similar results.

Areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with UI:

- Organizing support services for students of Hólar university campus within the University system
- Processes for management of research funding will need to be reviewed and coordinated.

3 Evaluation Themes

3.1 Evaluation Theme I – Learning and Teaching

This theme addresses the procedures used to manage and enhance the quality of study programmes and other educational provision. This includes the development, monitoring and delivery of education, the management of student progression and awarding of degrees or other formal qualifications, as well as academic support and other forms of support directed at student health and wellbeing.

- 1. New and existing programmes are based on defined planning and review procedures. These procedures are documented, effectively managed and widely understood by teaching staff and academic managers.**

Evidence

- VLR-002 Procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs.
- STE-001 Quality policy and description of the quality management system

Procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs is in place. The procedure describes the information and considerations needed in the preparation as well as the internal decision-making processes. Information needed for a proposal for a new study program include program description, learning outcomes, course outline and progression, financial plan, and results from need analysis. The need analysis should include stakeholder engagement.

The Quality policy and description of the quality management system was revised in 2026. The policy states that all programmes are to be monitored and regularly reviewed and describes roles and responsibilities.

Analysis and reflection

The procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs is currently under revision as there have been regulatory changes that affect the procedure and need to be considered, including a national framework for micro credentials. The revision will include a template that facilitates preparation for new study programs, as well as guidelines on curricular mapping (the relationship between the learning outcomes of the program and its constituent courses).

Procedures, guidelines and templates for IQA are being developed and piloted. Those will include guidelines and template for periodic reviews of programs.

- 2. Procedures for the development and delivery of education make appropriate reference to external reference points, including the Icelandic Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and the expectations of professional or other accreditation bodies where relevant. Students and external stakeholders actively participate in the planning and enhancement of education.**

and

3. **Planning and enhancement of education includes appropriate consideration of elements such as teaching and assessment methods, learning environments, student and staff support, graduate attributes and employability, learner progression and continuing education, research–teaching linkages, academic integrity and internationalisation**

Evidence

- STE-001 Quality policy and description of the quality management system
- VLR-002 Procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs.
- REG-001 The operational rules
- VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies

The quality policy and description of the quality management system describe how students are involved in enhancement of education through internal monitoring and reviews and strategic planning. The operational rules describe student representation within committee structures. The procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs includes a role for external stakeholders in needs analysis. The manual for graduate studies discusses the requirements and student progression regarding master level studies and research projects.

Reflection and analysis

The procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs is currently being revised. The current procedure does make references to external reference points. However, as there have been changes in those reference points, the procedure needs revision. The current procedure includes the role of external stakeholders but there is a need to enhance the role of students in the procedure, and this will be included in the revision. The revised procedure will also consider teaching and assessment, learning environments, student and staff support, graduate attributes, employability, learner progression, continuing education, research-teaching linkages, academic integrity and internationalization. Procedure and guidelines for internal monitoring and reviews are also being developed and will take those same aspects into consideration. Although those considerations are not all mentioned in the current procedure, they have been considered in preparing of new study programs.

To get feedback from students for enhancing learning and teaching, focus groups were implemented in the 2025-2026 school year as a part of ongoing monitoring. The focus groups are conducted for each program, and all students got invitation to participate. Departments use the feedback in their annual monitoring of the department and programs.

Students have representatives in the University council as well as on study committees of the departments. During the school year 2025-2026 monthly meetings have been with the quality director, head of academic services and the board of the student union. These meetings have been very beneficial in cooperating with students and will be continued. A strategy workshop with students was held in March 2026. Although participation was low in numbers the workshop was fruitful, and students provided helpful feedback.

UI has resources and guidance on pedagogy, assessment and technological tools available for HU teachers and other staff through the Centre of teaching and learning. However, it is planned that Hólar university campus will work towards its own policy on teaching, learning and assessment. Part of that work would be to explore how HU would best utilize the resources and guidance available through the University system.

New study programs have been developed in all three academic departments since IWR19. Following are short descriptions of the preparation process for the new programs with emphasis on the factors mentioned in the effectiveness statement

- The Department of aquaculture and fish biology:
 - Two programs have been developed in partnership with other universities. The development was externally funded through the ministries fund on collaboration across the university system. A BS program in Aquaculture and a MS program in Sustainable production in aquaculture. For both programs a need analysis was made that included surveys, focus groups and interviews were conducted with industry stakeholders and prospective students. A pedagogical specialist from the centre of teaching and learning at UI has worked with the preparation group to facilitate pedagogical considerations, particularly on issues related to online / blended learning. The program will offer students interested in aquaculture an opportunity to progress through bachelor's and master's level studies. Before they only had an opportunity to take a 90 ECTS credit diploma at undergraduate level.
- The Department of rural tourism
 - The department restructured their program offering to enhance learner progression. A special emphasis was put on development of event management programs as the event management diploma (established in 2007) has been particularly popular in recent years and students and industry have shown a strong interest in further educational opportunities within this field. A preparation for developing new programs in event management has been ongoing for a few years. The process did include factors such as: Review of other programs on an international level, conversations with industry stakeholders such as events managers and conference hosts, a special survey among students in spring term 2024 and collaboration and consultancy with international experts. As examples of consultancy with international experts, the department has for years been in

a strong teaching and research relationship with the Leeds Beckett University, UK. In June 2024 a DRT's staff member visited this university particularly to discuss curriculum development and further collaboration. In 2025-2026 DRT developed collaboration and got advice on curriculum development experts in sustainable event development in Denmark which was followed up by a visit of those two experts to Hólar in spring term 2026.

- The department of equine studies
 - A 30 ECTS microcredential in farrier studies was developed within the department in close collaboration with stakeholders in the horse industry. The program significantly enhances specialisation in the field as it is the first time that farriery is taught at university level in Iceland, and the only program for farriery of the Icelandic horse. In order to start teaching the program, specialized facilities and equipment needed to be set up.
- 4. The needs of diverse learners are taken into consideration, including arrangements for flexible study patterns and for identified physical or learning support needs. Wellbeing and equality are promoted for all student groups, and support or counselling arrangements are in place where necessary.**

Evidence

- REG-002 The study rules
- STE-002 The equality policy

Arrangements for support in assessment for students with identified physical or learning support needs are described in the study rules. Students who do not have Icelandic as their first language can apply for extra time for exams and can turn in assignments and exams in English if the teacher grants permission.

The equality policy and action plan states that the University seeks to support work-life balance of students, promote equality and diversity, work towards prevention of violence and harassment and enhance access to information in English.

Most programs provide a quite flexible study pattern as they are instructed online with on-site sessions. Some programs and courses require students to use specific equipment or facilities and therefore it is more challenging to offer flexibility, for example the Bachelor's program in riding and riding instruction.

Students have access to a student counsellor. The student counsellor is in a part-time position (25%). Students can book appointments online as well as on-site on specific dates. International officer in a 50% position assists foreign students and applicants with information, support and issues regarding their studies and assists all students and staff with Erasmus + and other international collaborations and exchanges. An IT manager

assists students with IT. A contract with UNAK was in place regarding library services until beginning of 2026 then students got access to the UI library services.

Analysis and reflection

Establishment of the University system will provide students with enhanced support services. Students will have full access to all the support services of UI, including for example student counselling, psychological services, international services and library services. Some of those services have already been implemented so that students have now access to them, for example library and writing services and access to psychologists.

Results from the quality survey suggest that enhancement is needed in providing support for students and promoting wellbeing and equality of all students. An enhancement project is being prepared and is briefly described in the report summary of key enhancement areas resulting from this self-evaluation.

- 5. Policies and regulations concerning student admission, recognition of prior learning (where appropriate), student progression, and awarding of degrees and other formal qualifications are applied in a consistent and transparent way.**

Evidence

- REG-002 The study rules
- VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies

Regulation on student admission, recognition of prior learning, student progression and awarding of degrees is set out in the study rules. The study rules define admission requirements for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, procedures for the assessment of prior learning and transfer credits, requirements for student progression, rules on assessment and examinations, appeals procedures and the requirements for awarding diplomas, bachelor's and master's degrees. They also specify responsibilities of academic committees and administrative units involved in admissions, progression monitoring and degree completion. The rules are regularly reviewed and published on the University website. Revision of the study rules was undertaken by the Teaching committee during the 2025–2026 academic year and approved by the University council in April 2026.

The manual for graduate studies discusses the requirements and student progression regarding master level studies and research projects. The manual was revised in 2024.

- 6. Information for students about their programmes are clear and readily available. Learning outcomes and workload (mapped to ECTS) are well defined, with clear**

protocols for the production and dissemination of handbooks and other support materials in a variety of formats. Achievement of learning outcomes is supported by teaching and assessment approaches. Students are encouraged to take an active role in their learning and receive feedback on their work to help them reach the learning outcomes.

Evidence

- VLY-001 Administrative calendar for Ugla registration system
- REG-002 The study rules
- VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies
- [The course catalogue](#)

Information for students about their programmes is provided in the course catalogue in the Ugla student registration system. The course catalogue is published every February for the upcoming school year. Information provided in the course catalogue includes the title of the program, degree title, outcomes of programs and courses, required and elective courses of the programs, degree title, qualification level, number of ECTS credits, length of programme, admission requirements, mode of study and program requirements. The course catalogue includes course description for each course with information on teaching and assessment approaches. Additional information on programs is published on the university website.

Reflection and analysis

It is planned to work on a policy on teaching, learning and assessment during the school year 2026-2027. Following the policy work relevant procedures and guidelines will be developed as may be needed, including guidelines for the use of feedback to help students reach the learning outcomes.

Reflection of workload mapped to ECTS credits has been part of reviews of programs and will be included in the template that will be created for periodic reviews of programmes.

Establishment of the university system will affect these processes, particularly regarding information management of the course catalogue and website information, as these will be managed through central administration of the university system. The UI centre for and learning will provide academic staff with enhanced resources and support materials. The intention is to make use of those resources when working on our own policy on teaching, learning and assessment.

7. Procedures are in place to ensure the accuracy and currency of public information, e.g., about admissions, RPL arrangements, courses, student support and academic rules.

Evidence

- VLY-001 Administrative calendar for Uglá registration system
- REG-002 The study rules

Reflection and analysis

The Head of academic affairs is responsible for publishing information on admissions, courses, student support and study rules on the website and course catalogue. The head of academic affairs works in collaboration with the Heads of departments who are responsible for the accuracy and currency of the information on the programs of their departments. The teaching office uses an administrative calendar for Uglá registration system as their guidelines, and the responsibility is with the Head of academic affairs. When the university system will be established the management of these processes are expected to move to central administration of University of Iceland.

Information on admission requirements is published in the study rules and in the course catalogue. The teaching committee, led by the Head of academic affairs, is responsible for the revision of the study rules.

Information on application status of students is available in the Uglá registration system.

Information on student services is published on the university website and is presented to students during new student orientation.

8. Educational provision is linked to the institution's overall societal engagement. Procedures are in place to support this, and these are embedded in the institution's management system.
9. Development of educational provision is promoted through collaboration with partners, academic networks, professional bodies, alumni, and/or other collaborators nationally and internationally.

Evidence

- VLR-002 Procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs.
- STE-001 Quality policy and description of the quality management system
- REG-001 The operational rules

The procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs lists stakeholder engagement and needs analysis as a necessary part of preparation for new study programs.

Reflection and analysis

The societal engagement of HU revolves around the three academic fields that make up the specialization of the university and are closely linked to economically important industries: tourism, aquaculture and the Icelandic horse.

The three academic departments are very well connected to the industry in their fields of specialization. The department of Equine studies works in close collaboration with organizations and companies related to the Icelandic horse. The department of Aquaculture and fish biology works in collaboration with aquaculture companies, and the companies receive our students for training. The department also works with government and research institutes in natural sciences. The department of Rural Tourism works in close contact with governments, policy makers in tourism and event management as well as businesses and other stakeholders.

Collaboration with stakeholders is an integral part of developing and revision of study programs as was discussed in reflection on statements 2 and 3.

Stakeholder engagement is very active at HU, but procedures on stakeholder analysis and strategic engagement have not been documented. Departments keep their own lists of stakeholders. As part of the work toward the new strategic plan, a stakeholder ecosystem analysis will be made to organize stakeholder engagement for the strategic plan.

Summary

The reflection of the effectiveness statements for evaluation theme I – Learning and teaching results in the following examples of good practices, areas for enhancements, documented procedures that need to be developed, revised or completed; and areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with HU.

Good practices to highlight:

- The revision of the Quality policy. The new policy describes a quality management system that consists of three connected pillars: Strategic management, Quality manual and internal monitoring and review.
- Implementation of focus groups as part of ongoing monitoring to get feedback from students of each study program for enhancing learning and teaching
- Extensive stakeholder engagement in preparation for new study programs

Documented procedures that need to be developed, revised or completed:

- The procedure for planning, preparation and revision of new study programs is under revision.
- Procedures, guidelines and templates for internal monitoring and reviews are being developed and piloted and will be finalized in 2026.
- Procedures on stakeholder analysis and strategic engagement need to be developed

Enhancement areas:

- Student voice, support and well-being

Areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with UI:

- Student support services
- Processes on information management of the course catalogue and website to ensure the accuracy and currency of information on programs.

3.2 Evaluation Theme II – Research and Innovation

This theme addresses the procedures used to manage and enhance the quality of research and innovation of all types and across all subjects. This includes collaboration, societal impact, stakeholder relationships and support for academic staff and research students.

- 1. The HEI seeks to strengthen the conditions for a stimulating atmosphere in relation to research and innovation, and it encourages activities with partners and collaborators both within and outside academia.**

Evidence

- STE-003 Hólar University 's Research policy
- STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology
- STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science
- STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism

HU aims to foster a stimulating environment for research and innovation across its' three academic departments. HU has an overarching research policy stating the general values of the university like academic freedom, open science and responsible research. Additionally, each department has its own research policy originating from 2017, including later additions and amendments. At the institutional level, research activity is supported through established mechanisms such as teaching-load reduction, a sabbatical system and an annual merit-based evaluation of research output for all academic staff. In 2025, the University advertised a 50% Research Manager position dedicated exclusively to research management. Before, this role was done by professors combined with teaching or individual research duties. This position is intended to strengthen coordination across the university, support more consistent procedures and increase transparency in research-related processes.

Reflection and analysis

A central strength of the university lies in its discipline-specific research environments and collaboration networks. In DES, specialised facilities enable research in areas such as biomechanics, behaviour, nutrition and performance. The department participates in major horse-related events that create research opportunities. For example, the week-long National Icelandic horse competition (NIHC) was held in Hólar in 2016 and will be again in 2026. The event accepts participation of about 1000 horses and about 8000 people. This big event is hosted by the local horse association Skagfirðingur in cooperation with the municipality and with a special agreement with HU. Preparations and organisation for the 2026 event involve both DES and DRT. This collaboration has strengthened conditions for research activities, student projects, industry engagement and event-related studies. Recently, DES has expanded its international research connections through two affiliate professors appointed in 2023 (from Sweden and Germany) and a Fulbright-affiliated visiting professor scheduled for 2026, whose work focuses on equine-assisted services and curriculum development. While DES has historically focused mainly on education and training practices, it has strengthened its research profile in recent years and did graduate its first MSc student working on a research project on weight-bearing abilities of the Icelandic horse in June 2026.

A further development in equine research is the establishment of the Academy of the Icelandic Horse. This is a formal collaboration between HU, AUI and the Institute for Experimental Pathology at Keldur. The Academy aims to coordinate research priorities, support graduate education in equine and equine-veterinary sciences and create a shared digital platform. The online platform is intended to connect students, alumni, researchers and industry, and to create opportunities for research dissemination, foster and initiate collaboration and enable knowledge exchange. This has already proven useful by initiating research projects within the Academy.

In DAFB research is supported through a combination of university resources, interim laboratory arrangements and close cooperation with industry partners. DAFB operates a long-term selective breeding programme for Icelandic Arctic charr and collaborates with industry partners such as the aquaculture companies Samherji and Matorka on genetics and production-related research. These collaborations include research conducted in company facilities using breeding programme fish. The department regularly hosts several international research interns who participate in ongoing projects. The departmental faculty actively participates in BIODICE (biodice.is), which aims to promote greater awareness and understanding of biodiversity in Iceland. Through this advisory and research projects related to conservation of biodiversity have been developed. Most commonly research at the department is conducted through active research collaboration with scientists and industry partners, both Icelandic and international. Collaboration with external partners is further strengthened through workshops and joint activities, for example within the Erasmus+ BRIDGES programme, which brings together industry representatives, students and researchers.

Research in DRT is characterised by a strong international networks and close cooperation with local operators, municipalities and national institutions. Through these partnerships, staff and students can carry out applied research in real-world settings.

The department has been successful in international funding of variable projects in the recent years. This includes for example grants from The US National science foundation in a collaboration the UMass Boston and Horizon Europe in a collaboration with Natural resources institute (Luke) in Finland, Umeå University in Sweden, Greenland institute of natural resources in Greenland, Nofima in Norway, Aalborg University in Denmark and Touch TD Ltd in the UK.

The department applies for a number of international grants on a yearly basis, while opportunities for tourism and event management research grants are limited on a national level. A three-year research project, granted by The Icelandic centre for research (Í. Rannís), has just been finished and variable other projects are ongoing.

Recently, external funding from the National science foundation has enabled a specialist and graduate students from the United States to work with DRT, further strengthening research activity and international exchange. A master-level student from this project was recently awarded the Barbara E. Luedtke book award for academic excellence in historical archaeology. The department regularly participates in Erasmus+ mobility programmes and variable innovation projects and international academic networks.

DRT is a member of The Icelandic Tourism Research Centre (ITRC) which is a cooperative project between the UI, UNAK and HU. The ITRC's board is mandated by representatives from the three universities as well as representatives from The Icelandic tourist board and The Icelandic travel industry association (Icelandic Tourism Research Centre). Further, DRT is a formal member of the Icelandic tourism cluster (www.islenskiferdaklasinn.is).

Academic staff of DRT have variable roles on advisory boards and formal committees for Icelandic governments and within the system of the Icelandic tourism industry. This includes for example the advisory board for data gathering and research in tourism which advises The Icelandic tourism board on its research strategy.

DRT's staff sits on editorial boards on international peer reviewed journals such as The Scandinavian journal of hospitality and tourism and Journal of arctic tourism and commonly serve as reviewers of academic papers and chapters for different journals and publishers on an international level.

Academic staff of DRT have gained international and domestic recognition for their work. As an example, a recently retired staff member was this year rewarded with The Order of the Falcon which is the highest honor awarded by the Icelandic state. This was awarded for research and contribution towards preservation of the Icelandic turf building heritage. Another member of DRT's academic staff has recently been nominated for the title of visiting research fellow at the University of Highlands and Islands – Island studies hub.

The department maintains Iceland's largest specialised tourism library, which supports both research and teaching in areas of rural development, event management and tourism.

Across HU, regular seminars, lab meetings and the small academic community support ongoing academic dialogue and close interaction between staff and students. Students are involved in research through supervised projects at bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels, sometimes in collaboration with other universities. Mandatory internships across programmes frequently lead to applied research projects, many of which are supervised by professionals from relevant sectors, including alumni. Strong stakeholder relations support this research environment across disciplines. In addition, the University engages in public outreach activities.

Departments have collaborated on several research and innovation projects in the recent years, for example on the NICH (DRT & DES) and on wild and farmed arctic charr as a tourism product (DRT and DAFB). Strengthening such collaborations between departments through interdisciplinary research is an opportunity for all the departments.

Despite these strengths, several challenges remain. Institutional procedures and facilities for data management and innovation could be further developed. Despite the efforts of the DAFB to keep research going in temporary housing and through industry collaborations, these temporary facilities have affected research capacity in the department, and structured institutional support for researchers remains limited. The absence of an internal research fund restricts opportunities for early-stage research projects. Establishing the University system with UI will provide researchers at HU opportunities to apply for internal funds at UI.

2. Documented procedures are in place to ensure the responsible conduct of research, research integrity and adherence to research ethics. The HEI engages with, and encourages, open science and the use of repositories for open data.

Evidence

- STE-003 Hólar University 's Research policy
- STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology
- STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science
- STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism
- REG-003 Hólar University code of ethics

At the departmental policy level, research integrity and data responsibility are addressed through concrete procedures and research policies. These policies place strong emphasis on data quality, documentation, storage and archiving. Responsibilities for data handling are clearly assigned to project leaders and supervisors. Further, supervision agreements for student research include provisions on data management during and after projects. These procedures aim for ensuring that research data are of high quality, traceable and suitable for long-term use and reuse.

Reflection and analysis

HU has documented procedures on support responsible research conduct, research integrity and ethical standards at departmental level, while work is ongoing to strengthen these frameworks at the institutional level. Research activities are guided by both departmental policies and a revised institutional research policy which articulates core values such as academic freedom, scholarly integrity, responsible research practices and open science

HU engages with open science primarily through participation in national research infrastructure. HU is part of Gagnís (DatICE), the national Dataverse-based repository, which operates in accordance with the FAIR guiding principles for scientific data management (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable). Through this participation, HU has access to a shared national platform for data archiving and open access, supporting transparency and responsible dissemination of research outputs. Currently, as Gagnís is still under development, HU is encouraging researchers to archive their research data in this depository and plan to conduct a workshop to inform researchers about the procedure. In addition, the HU is using the CRIS in Iceland called IRIS, the national research information system, and ongoing work focuses on improving metadata quality and visibility of research outputs.

Support for ethical awareness and responsible research practices is further provided through institutional collaboration and information sharing. Presentations and guidance on electronic data management and archiving have been made available to staff, and dialogue with national research infrastructure providers continues. These activities support staff and students in understanding expectations related to data stewardship, open science and research integrity, even though practices are currently implemented primarily at the departmental level. Ethical considerations are especially important in research involving animals as is done in both DAFB and DES. HU codes of ethics address this, and animal welfare is also regulated by the Icelandic food and veterinary authority (i. MAST). HU has an animal welfare committee, which mandate needs to be strengthened to adhere to, establish and enforce animal welfare guidelines.

Despite these implemented and initiated measures, further development is needed. While departmental procedures for data management and research integrity are well defined in some academic fields, an institutional framework remains to be established. Institutional procedures for open science, data management and innovation are not yet fully standardised, and national guidelines for open science are still in the process of being formulated. Continued work on policy development, coordination and staff support is therefore required to ensure consistent implementation of responsible research practices across all departments.

- 3. Documented procedures are in place to promote and support staff in the production of discipline-appropriate research and innovation outputs and in the pursuit of external research funding. The procedures should include support for the needs of early career researchers.**

Evidence

- STE-003 Hólar University 's Research policy
- STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology
- STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science
- STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism

Reflection and analysis

HU supports research activity across all academic departments through a combination of longstanding departmental practices, institutional support structures and international collaboration. These arrangements help academic staff to produce research outputs and to engage with external research funding. At the same time, HU recognises that formal support structures, especially for early career researchers, need to be developed at institutional level.

Regular lecture series and seminars are organised in all departments. These seminars are open to staff, students, national and international collaborators and in many cases industry and other stakeholders. They provide opportunities to present research, discuss results and strengthen research cultures within each discipline. International academic exchange, for example in conferences and visiting scholars and opportunities to take sabbaticals, further supports research output through staff mobility. This staff mobility is often funded through Erasmus+ and Fulbright grants.

Research support is complemented by access to library and information services. HU owns a library and has access to electronic resources through the nationwide access. In the fields of tourism and event management, HU has the most extensive library in Iceland. Since January 2026, HU library management has been contracted to the National and university library of Iceland (Í. Landsbókasafn). Furthermore, staff and students have access to support for information retrieval, academic resources and digital services through the UI Center for Writing. After the university system with the UI will be established, access to databases and research-related support services is expected to expand further.

The development of research knowledge, dissemination and grant applications among staff and graduate students is closely linked to research activities in each department.

Institutional and departmental research policies address academic freedom, research quality, visibility and the archiving of research outputs. Departmental policies provide discipline-specific procedures and follow-up, while a revised institutional research policy aims to bring these principles together and improve coordination across departments. Practicums that are part of programmes in all three departments allow students to apply academic and research skills in professional contexts and often result in research outputs. At the graduate level, HU academic staff supervise both Master's level students, who are enrolled in diverse programs, and doctoral candidate students, who are most often formally enrolled in the PhD programmes at the UI. In addition, HU staff co-supervises master's and doctoral level students who are enrolled at other universities. Doctoral candidates and postdoctoral fellows contribute to departmental research environments through collaboration, participation in seminars and dissemination of research.

Information about external research funding opportunities is distributed within the departments, between individual staff and shared through the research manager at institutional level. Courses on international grant applications offered by the Icelandic Centre for Research (Í. Rannís) are made available to researchers at HU, and relevant information is distributed by the research manager. Additionally, international funding and project opportunities are promoted through established networks coordinated by the international coordinator.

Despite these measures, important challenges remain. Support for early career researchers is not structured at institutional level and depends largely on informal mentoring and individual departmental practices. Although external research funding is encouraged, limited institutional resources are available in terms of workload reduction, dedicated time

or administrative support for completing complex grant applications. Research funding activities and international networks are therefore often driven by individual initiative rather than by coordinated institutional support. Strengthening central support structures, particularly for early career researchers and grant development, remains a key area for further development.

- 4. The HEI sets its direction for future development of research and innovation activities based on analysis of its own operational capacity and strengths as well as the needs of external partners.**

Evidence

- STE-003 Hólar University 's Research policy
- STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology
- STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science
- STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism

Decisions of which direction research at HU will be going is primarily taken within departments or by individual academics. Each department maintains its own research policy.

Reflection and analysis

In regular department meetings, as well as through departmental IQA, research priorities are regularly re-evaluated. These policies are developed collectively by academic staff and provide a framework for research activities within each field. Decisions about research directions are therefore largely collegial and discipline driven.

In DAFB research directions are set forward in the departmental research policy, which is presently being revised. The policy sets the departments basic values regarding research, and how research activities can be built up through departmental and central administration support. The research in the department is diverse and include both applied researches conducted in close connection with the aquaculture industry, and more basic research which often focuses on studying wild nature. All research in the department is done in close collaboration with domestic and international partners, both from academia and industry. The changes in facilities of the department have especially affected the applied research of the department, which relied heavily on our high-tech research station. The department has high hopes for a build-up of facilities, which is foreseen in the next couple of years. Furthermore, all research activities of the department are dependent on external research funding. Access to domestic funding for research in aquaculture has been

greatly reduced in the last years, and competition for basic research funding is as well always getting more competitive. It is therefore necessary for the department to seek new international funding opportunities, as now funding may be quite sporadic and commonly highly trained and qualified academics in the department find themselves without funding.

In DES, research priorities are discussed among academic staff and are closely connected to developments within the Icelandic horse sector.

In DRT, the direction of research is necessarily often influenced by limited opportunities within external research funding programmes and international collaboration networks. Individual researchers frequently identify and develop research topics based on available funding schemes and research partnerships. Similar dynamics apply across the University, where research directions may be shaped by the priorities of funding agencies and international programmes, including large collaborative grants such as the European Horizon projects.

Despite these existing structures in the different departments, several challenges influence the development of research directions. Research priorities are often shaped by the availability and thematic focus of external funding programmes rather than by dedicated institutional funding. In some cases, national research funds that previously supported specific research areas have been discontinued or merged into broader funding programmes. Limited institutional resources for equipment, infrastructure and co-funding requirements can also affect the ability of researchers to pursue certain research opportunities, including the ability to apply for large international grants with reasonable chances for application success.

Further development may therefore require stronger institutional support for strategic research development, including clearer alignment between departmental research priorities and external funding opportunities, and improved support for infrastructure, equipment and co-funding of research projects.

- 5. Research and innovation activities contribute to the betterment of society. The HEI collects relevant information regarding the societal impact of research and innovation, and this information is used in the further enhancement of these activities.**
- 6. The HEI seeks to enhance the societal impact and reach of its research and innovation. It has defined goals for such enhancement and strategies for achieving them, supported by its management system.**

Evidence

- STE-003 Hólar University 's Research policy
- STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology

- STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science
- STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism

Reflection and analysis

Research activities at HU are closely connected to society and to the industries related to the university's academic fields. Many research topics emerge from practical needs within sectors such as aquaculture, tourism and the Icelandic horse industry. Originally, the focus was on applied research, but later more basic research has been developed at the university. The research activities of HU build on strong cooperation with representatives working in the fields of study of the university, many of which are former students. This connection continues to influence both research themes and collaboration with external partners.

The research activities of DAFB are of high societal impact. The department does not systematically map out such impact. However, the impact of the research activities can be assessed indirectly. Below we will give two examples of this.

- A) The department has developed, improved and maintained a breeding programme for Arctic charr. This program is operated in close connection to the industry and is led by a board that includes industry representatives, ensuring that research results and breeding decisions are relevant to the sector and contribute to practical applications. There has been a clear improvement made through the breeding, creating faster growth and later maturity, which has greatly impacted the aquaculture industry in Iceland. Presently a high percentage (80 -90%) of all Arctic charr in aquaculture in Iceland (who is the world leading producers of this species) originates with the HU Breeding program.
- B) The department has conducted various studies regarding understanding the origin and maintenance of biodiversity. These studies have to large extent focused on the origin of biodiversity within species, and the importance of incorporating process thinking and ecosystem approaches to conservation. Because of this, academics from the department participated in creation of the before mentioned BIODICE, where professor of the department, Skúli Skúlason, chairs the board. Furthermore, academics of the department have been sought out to work on various boards, governmental committees and working groups that deal with mapping and conserving biodiversity and the use of nature's resources. In addition, collaboration projects have also resulted in public outputs, including exhibitions and presentations connected to international research partnerships.

In DES research interacts closely with national and international organisations connected to the Icelandic horse. Academic staff contribute as advisors and lecturers to organisations such as the Icelandic horse association, trainer associations and the international Icelandic horse federation (FEIF). Research results are shared through public lectures, professional

seminars and collaboration with riding schools and horse associations. Large national events such as NIHC also create opportunities for research dissemination and dialogue with people working with horses in very different fields (veterinarians, trainers, international competitors, breeders, scientists) In addition, conferences and symposia on topics, such as equine-assisted services, contribute to knowledge exchange between researchers, practitioners and the wider public.

In DRT staff collaborate with regional actors, tourism organisations, event organizers and farmer associations. These collaborations include representatives of the tourism industry, joint research projects with other scientists and contributions to public discussions about tourism development and land use where local tourism operators and farmers attend. Research results are shared through public lectures, symposia and publications aimed at a broader audience. Examples include collaborative publications such as the book *Humans, horses and events management* ([Humans, horses and events management | CABI Books](#)), which presents an international research on the NIHC, where contributions were made e.g. by: The Icelandic horse association, FEIF, the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, HU DES, The Icelandic food and veterinary authority (*í. MAST*), and fellow researchers from a number of European universities.

Across the university, outreach activities also include public lectures, seminars, conferences, appearances in media outlets like radio and TV, newspapers and participation in national events such as “University Days”. Communication channels such as the university’s website and social media platforms are used to present research results to a wider audience. These activities contribute to public awareness of research conducted at HU and further strengthen the relationship between the university and society.

Despite the many activities with societal relevance, the collection and evaluation of information on societal impact is currently limited. While examples of outreach and collaboration are visible, systematic documentation at institutional level has not been fully developed. The first step that has been implemented to capture societal impact of research is through annual monitoring of departments, which includes reflection on societal impact of research. This will allow HU to collect data on those activities and provides the basis for identifying future priorities and strengthening the societal impact of research across the university.

Support for outreach and communication activities is also provided through a project manager for public outreach that was temporally hired in 2025 as part of the preparations for the university system with UI. This position supports the communication of research activities to a broader audience, helping to ensure that research conducted at the university reaches relevant communities and stakeholders.

- 7. Documented procedures are in place for managing, developing and updating stakeholder relations and collaboration networks in relation to research and innovation.**

Evidence

- STE-003 Hólar University 's Research policy
- STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology
- STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science
- STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism
- VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies

Reflection and analysis

Documented procedures for managing and developing stakeholder relations and collaboration networks are primarily embedded within the three departments at HU. Collaboration with external partners is closely connected to the applied nature of the university's fields of study, where research activities often emerge from practical needs within the Icelandic horse sector, aquaculture industry and rural tourism development. These relationships have historically developed through long-term cooperation among academic staff, industry actors, public institutions and alumni working in these sectors.

Within DAFB collaboration has developed through the academic interests and personal connections of each academic. The department and the university support the development of such networks through both support for attending scientific meetings and workshops and through clear procedures regarding sabbatical stays. Furthermore, the department maintains active discussion on collaboration with industry partners. This is partly done through the Arctic charr breeding program. The department is as well in active discussion with the Icelandic food and biotech R&D (*Í. Matís*) regarding taking over their research on development of aquaculture feeds (will be done in our new facilities). The department actively participates in industry related conferences and workshops as well as maintaining active discussions with individual companies, regarding possibilities for research collaboration. There is a need to further develop this and approach this in a more systematic way with the development of the MSc program in sustainable production in aquaculture, where students will be in the need of research projects.

In DES, stakeholder collaboration is extensive. Academic staff maintain regular contact with national and international organisations connected to the Icelandic horse. Staff frequently contribute as advisors, lecturers and collaborators to professional seminars and conferences. A recent development is the establishment of the Academy of the Icelandic Horse, a formal collaboration between HU, AUI and the Institute for experimental pathology at Keldur. The academy aims to strengthen collaboration in equine and equine-veterinary sciences and to develop a shared digital platform connecting students, alumni, researchers and industry representatives. This platform is intended to support knowledge exchange, initiate research collaboration and strengthen long-term networks within the sector.

In DRT, collaboration networks are maintained through close interaction with regional actors, tourism organisations and municipalities. Practicums of students out in the industry play a significant role as most study lines of DRT include few weeks of practicum. Researchers regularly engage with practitioners through meetings, joint projects and professional events related to events, tourism development and land use. Stakeholder relations are further supported through participation in national advisory structures, including the governmental advisory board on tourism data and research.

Across the University, stakeholder engagement is also supported through internships and collaborative research projects involving external partners. Many of these partners are alumni of HU who now work in relevant sectors and maintain professional connections with the institution. At present, however, alumni relations are not yet organised through a formal institutional framework.

While collaboration networks are strong and well established within departments, the documentation and systematic management of these relationships at institutional need further development. Partnerships are often maintained through individual researchers or departmental practices rather than through coordinated institutional procedures. Further development may therefore include improved documentation of collaboration networks and stronger institutional structures stakeholder analysis and engagement as well as on alumni engagement in research activities.

- 8. Documented procedures are in place to manage the recruitment, monitoring and support of postgraduate research students and the awarding of postgraduate research degrees. Student representation arrangements for postgraduate research students are in place.**

Evidence

- REG-002 The study rules
- VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies

Reflection and analysis

Documented procedures are in place for managing the recruitment, supervision and evaluation of postgraduate research students at HU. HU does not operate its own doctoral program and supervises PhD students in collaboration with UI following regulations and procedures there. HU offers programs at master 's level in all three departments. Procedures on recruitment, monitoring and support of postgraduate studies are defined in the HU study rules and the manual for graduate studies.

Applications to master's level programs are submitted through the university's application system and are reviewed by the graduate committee in cooperation with the relevant

departments. As part of the application process, applicants must submit documentation of previous studies. For some programs, a preliminary research proposal is required, which is developed with the prospective supervisor. The graduate committee evaluates applications, appoints or confirms the supervisor and establishes the student's master's committee following recommendations from the departments. Through this process, the academic suitability of the project and the availability of appropriate supervision are assessed before admission.

Each postgraduate student is assigned a supervisor from the academic staff of HU at the beginning of the program. The supervisor is responsible for monitoring the academic progress of the student. In many cases the supervisor also acts as the main research advisor for the master's thesis. Where appropriate, external experts may participate in the supervision or examination process, particularly in specialized research fields.

Monitoring postgraduate research progress takes place through several formal mechanisms. Students develop study plan research plans early in the program in consultation with their supervisor. During the research phase, the student meets regularly with the supervisor and records progress in accordance with the supervision agreement. The master's committee evaluates the progress of the research project and assesses whether the student may continue in the program. These procedures ensure that research work is monitored and that academic standards are maintained throughout the program.

Research projects at the master's level are assessed through a formal evaluation process. The final thesis is reviewed by a master's examination committee, which includes an external examiner. Students present their research in a public lecture followed by a closed exam. The committee evaluates both the written thesis and the exam, and the outcome determines whether the degree is awarded. Following successful completion, the final thesis is submitted to the University and deposited in the national open repository Skemma.

Support structures for postgraduate students also include administrative assistance from the DRiAA and support for international students through the international coordinator. Feedback from student representatives and departmental committees contributes to the ongoing development of postgraduate programmes.

Although these procedures provide a structured framework for supervising master's research, further development may include strengthening institutional coordination of postgraduate research support and expanding opportunities for postgraduate research collaboration within national and international research networks. Further clarification is also needed regarding procedures for recruiting and employing funded postgraduate students, including responsibilities related to contracts, salary arrangements and administrative coordination between departments and central administration. At present, practices vary between projects and departments, particularly regarding whether students are formally employed by the University or receive grant-based funding.

Summary

The reflection of the effectiveness statements for evaluation theme II – Research and innovation results in the following examples of good practices, areas for enhancements, documented procedures that need to be developed, revised or completed; and areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with HU.

Good practices to highlight:

- Strong discipline-specific research environment and collaboration networks
- Active strategic management of research within departments, as evidenced by their research policies.
- Close connection maintained with the industries related to HU academic fields

Documented procedures that need to be developed, revised or completed:

- Procedures for open science, data management and innovation
- Develop a university-wide framework on data management and research integrity
- Development of formal research support structures, particularly for early-career researchers and procedures for recruiting and employing funded postgraduate students

Enhancement areas:

- Facilities and infrastructure

Areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with UI:

- Access to internal research funds

3.3 Evaluation Theme III – The Quality System and Strategic Management

This theme addresses the development and effectiveness of the quality management. This includes the functionality of the quality management system, the use of data and student feedback, and links to strategic planning and management, across all institutional activities.

1. The HEI maintains an effective quality management system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement of all operations. The quality management system builds on the quality policy, which is made public and forms a part of its strategic management.

Evidence

- STE-001 The Quality Policy and description of the quality management system

The Quality policy was revised in 2026 and describes the Quality management system at HU. The policy was written so that it can still function as a quality policy for a unit within a larger institution after the establishment of the university system with UI, with minor revision.

The Quality management system rests on three pillars that form a cycle for continuous improvements of operations:

- The institutional strategic plan
- The Quality manual
- Internal monitoring and review

The statements of the quality policy are:

- Hólar University complies to the quality requirements made for Icelandic Universities
- The quality culture is participative and inclusive
- The quality management system forms a cycle for continuous improvements
- Management of Hólar University is strategic, and decisions are evidence-based
- The Quality manual describes planning, operations and improvements
- The University performs regular and ongoing monitoring of its operations and programs, and uses the results of evaluation for enhancements

Reflection and analysis

The new Quality policy is in the process of implementation. The institutional strategy is being revised and is planned to be set in place in the beginning of 2027. Documented procedures that are currently available are being collected and published in the quality manual. A mapping is being done of policies, rules and procedures that need to be developed or revised. Revision of institutional approach to IQA has been in development following the guidelines published by IAQA in fall 2024. Some aspects of the new institutional approach IQA have been developed and implemented while others are in development.

The Quality policy includes the following action plan for the 2026-2027 schoolyear:

- The revised strategic plan for Hólar university campus will be ready by the beginning of 2027.
- Ongoing monitoring of departments and programs will be conducted. Research management will be reviewed.

- Key policies, rules and procedures on quality management, teaching, learning, research and innovation will be published in the quality manual by the end of the 2026-2027 school year.
2. The HEI maintains documented procedures with respect to planning, delivery and enhancement of activities that relate to education, research and innovation, and societal engagement. These procedures are designed to be fit for purpose, run in a cyclical manner and address relevant support services and facilities for staff and students.

Evidence

- STE-001 The quality policy and description of the quality management system
- VLR-001 The management of documented procedures
- REG-001 The study rules
- STE-002 The research policy
- STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology
- STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science
- STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism
- VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies

Documented procedures on activities that relate to education, research, innovation and societal engagement are published in the quality manual. Policies are also made available on the university website. The procedure for the management of documented procedures describes the process of drafting, consultation, approval, communication and revision of documented procedures.

Analysis and reflection

The procedure for the management of documented procedures describes the process for creation, decision-making and revision of documented procedures.

Documented procedures are being collected and reviewed for publication in the quality manual. The following procedures are currently being revised:

- The procedure for the development and revision of study programs
- The procedure for internal monitoring and reviews

During the 2026-2027 school year it is planned to revise / develop key procedures on quality management, teaching, learning, research and innovation that have not been developed or need revision.

3. There is evidence of clear linkages between the quality management system, strategic management and evidence-based decision-making.

Evidence

- STE-001 The Quality policy and description of the quality management system

The quality policy describes how strategic management is one of the three pillars of the quality management system. The other two pillars are the quality manual and internal monitoring and reviews. The three pillars of the system form a cycle of continuous improvement. The policy describes how data and internal monitoring and reviews are used for decision making and enhancement of operations.

Analysis and reflection

The revised quality policy was approved in May 2026 and is in the process of implementation.

A strategic plan was set in 2021 and was valid until 2025. The strategic themes were societal engagement, teaching and learning, research and innovation, human resources and governance. When the current rector came into position in 2022 it was evident that it would not be possible to focus on full implementation of the strategic plan, as there were urgent matters that needed to be prioritized and addressed first. Mold had been discovered in the main building and the department of Aquaculture and fish biology lost access to facilities they had been using for research and teaching. The university had expensive duties additional to those covered by the financial model for universities, so too much of the budget was going to things other than fulfilling the role of a university. Those duties included local administrative activities, maintenance of facilities and land not used by the university and services to tourists and residents. Due to the size of the university, capacity for the support services needed for quality operations and support services of a university were limited, both in numbers of employees and in expertise.

Significant work has been done to address those issues. To enhance support services HU initiated a conversation with UI on increased cooperation, which has resulted in the work towards establishing a university system. There has also been emphasis on increasing expertise in support services with recruiting. HU has also initiated discussions with the government and the municipality to find solutions for the local administrative duties and services. A committee led by the Prime Minister's office is now working on arrangements for

the administration of the area. In May 2026 the government and Skagafjörður municipality signed an agreement on infrastructure, maintenance and development of the area.

Although it was not possible to fully focus on implementation of the strategic plan for 2021-2025 there has been work done resulting in progress in the focus areas of the strategic plan. In the establishment of the University system, there will be enhancement in many of the areas related to the strategic themes, as HU will get access to UI 's shared infrastructure and support services for staff and students which includes research services, infrastructure for teaching and learning, technical services, expertise, human resource services and more.

The strategic plan was valid until 2025. It was decided to postpone working towards a new strategic plan while negotiations and preparations on the University system were going on with UI. Work towards the strategic plan for Hólar as a university campus within a university system started in beginning of 2026, and a new strategy will be set in place in the beginning of 2027. Progress analysis of the previous strategic plan is used as part of the preparatory analysis for the new plan, as well as the results from this Self-evaluation and results from workshops with students and staff.

4. Effective management structures and committees, with clear roles and responsibilities, are in place to oversee procedures. This includes the monitoring and communication of actions arising from these procedures.

Evidence

- REG-002 The operational rules
- STE-001 The Quality policy and description of the quality management system
- VLR-001 The management of documented procedures

The operational rules describe management structures and committees, and roles and responsibilities of those committees. The procedure for the management of documented procedures describes the procedure for creation, consultation, approval and revision of documented procedures in the quality manual. Heads of departments are responsible for procedures that are specific to the activities of the departments. They are also responsible for strategic planning for the departments, monitoring the activities and procedures and communicating actions arising from the procedures.

Analysis and reflection

The roles and responsibilities for the quality management system have been in discussion. A quality manager was hired in the fall of 2024 and the Quality committee formed. The procedure for the management of documented procedures was approved in May 2026.

However, the operational rules have yet to be revised to coordinate with the new procedure. It was decided to wait with revision of the operational rules as it is evident that more changes will be needed when the University system will be established and the rules for the whole university system will be revised.

The procedure for IQA is in development.

5. The quality management system, including policies, regulations, procedures and instructions, is maintained and periodically reviewed.

Evidence

- STE-001 The Quality policy and description of the quality management system
- VLR-001 The management of documented procedures

The procedure for the management of documented procedures describes procedures for creation and revision of different kinds of quality documents, such as rules, policies, procedures, instructions and checklists. All quality documents are published in the quality manual, and rules and policies are also published on the University website. All quality documents are regularly reviewed, policies and rules are reviewed every five years or if changes are in external requirements that affect the rules or policies. Procedures are reviewed every two years.

Periodic reviews of units and programs will be part of the institutional IQA procedure that is being developed. Since the establishment of the quality enhancement framework for Icelandic universities in 2011 the quality management system has been reviewed periodically both at institutional and departmental level in reflective analysis and subject level reviews.

6. Through its quality management system, the HEI utilises appropriate metrics and data, which are systematically collected and addressed. This includes data on student performance, progression, and student or staff concerns and complaints, as well as student representation and feedback on the needs and learning experiences of students.

Evidence

- STE-001 The Quality policy and description of the quality management system

The quality policy states that internal monitoring and reviews of operations is ongoing and periodic. Metrics, data and feedback is used in internal monitoring.

Analysis and reflection

Data on student performance and progression are used in the ongoing monitoring of departments and programs, as well as student feedback. Student feedback is gathered via focus groups, surveys and committee representation. Students have also been included in strategy workshops. Staff have opportunities to provide feedback via employee review meetings, staff meetings, workshops and representation in committees.

Documented procedures on institutional IQA are in development. Formal procedures on complaints from students and staff need to be developed, and that will be coordinated with UI. Procedures and services of the division of human resources at UI will be implemented for HU staff when the University system will be established. This includes procedures for staff concerns and complaints.

7. The HEI makes meaningful and appropriate use of external expertise in its quality assurance as and when required.

Evidence

- SLR report for DAFB in QEF2
- SLR report for DES in QEF2
- SLR report for DRT in QEF2

External expertise was included in in the QEF2 subject-level reviews of all departments, and the reviewers made valuable feedback for the departments.

Analysis and reflection

Documented procedures on IQA are being developed, and they will include guidelines on the use of external expertise in quality assurance.

HU has had meaningful cooperation and shared learning with experts at other Icelandic universities, for example in quality management, human resource management and financial management.

8. Quality culture is participatory and inclusive, and there are opportunities for staff, students and external stakeholders to participate in the enhancement of activities in a purposeful manner. Documentation of and guidance on quality assurance is made accessible to all staff and, wherever appropriate, to students. Staff are kept aware of their individual responsibilities in relation to the quality management system.

Evidence

- STE-001 The Quality policy and description of the quality management system
- VLR-001 The management of documented procedures

The quality policy states that quality culture is participatory and inclusive. The policy promotes participation through consultation in defining procedures and opportunities to participate in strategy formation and internal monitoring and review. It also emphasizes communication of new procedures and changes in the quality management system.

Reflection and analysis

The quality policy was approved in May 2026 and is in early stages of implementation. Developing quality culture will take time and focused work. Steps have been made in the 2025-2026 to offer opportunities for participation for students and staff. A major initiative was implementing focus groups for students in all study programs. Staff was consulted on the quality policy and will be consulted making policies and procedures in the quality management system. Staff and students participate in workshops and consultation for making the strategic plan to be set in beginning of 2027.

Quality reports are published on the university website.

- 9. Public information regarding the quality management system and actions arising from quality reviews is available, transparent and up to date.**

Evidence

- STE-001 The Quality policy and description of the quality management system
- VLR-001 The management of documented procedures

Reflection and analysis

Policies and rules are made public on the university website, including the Quality policy and information on the quality management system. The procedure for the management of documented procedures includes information on how regularly quality documents are revised and how they are published. Annual quality reports are available on the University website and on IAQA website.

10. Documented procedures are in place for the recruitment of full-time, part-time and sessional staff.

Evidence

- REG-004 Rules on hiring and promotion of academic staff
- REG-005 Rules on hiring and promotion of riding instructors
- REG-002 The operational rules
- STE-007 HU Human resource policy

Documented procedures on recruitment of staff include the operational rules that describe the process for hiring the rector, the rules on hiring and promotion of academic staff and rules on hiring and promotion of riding teachers and the HU Human resource policy. Together, these documents define responsibilities, advertising procedures, qualification requirements, assessment processes, selection committee procedures, appointment decisions and promotion pathways for the staff that the rules apply to. Recruitment procedures are based on national legislation governing public employees and higher education institutions and are applied across the university.

Reflection and analysis

Documented procedures on hiring and promotion of academic staff and riding teachers are in place. HU staff will become employees of the university system when it will be established and UI already has documented procedures on recruitment that will be adopted at Hólar university campus.

Like other public institutions, HU primarily follows Act No. 70/1996 on the rights and obligations of state employees when hiring staff, whether for full-time, part-time, or temporary positions. In addition to the general provisions set out in the Act, several regulations have been issued that further define specific aspects of the recruitment process, including:

- Regulation No. 100/2019 – Rules on the advertisement of vacant positions
- Regulation No. 351/1996 – Rules on the form of employment contracts and the obligation to inform employees about terms of employment
- Regulation No. 1432/2022 – Rules on supplementary salary payments to general state employees
- Regulation No. 655/2024 – General code of ethics for state employees
- Regulation No. 490/2019 – Rules on the employment terms of directors/managers

- Regulation No. 491/2019 – Rules on supplementary salary payments for directors/managers
- Regulation No. 1600/2023 – Rules on advisory committees assessing the qualifications of applicants for managerial positions
- Regulation No. 1185/2024 – Rules on severance agreements with employees of state institutions

The governmental financial management authority (í. Fjárfýsla ríkisins – FJS) handles salary payments for state institutions. To ensure compliance with laws and regulations and maintain consistency toward employees and institutions, the government operates an internal advisory and guidance service.

Managers and HR personnel can therefore access guidance materials and templates through the Government human resources portal (í. Mannauðstorg ríkisins). The governmental financial management authority also provides consultations with legal advisors regarding employment matters and the rights and obligations of employees and employers. HU has made regular use of these guidance and advisory services.

Examples of practical documents that HU has utilized from the Government human resources portal include a recruitment process checklist and templates for letters concerning termination of employment.

11. Documented procedures are in place to support the wellbeing, equality and non-discrimination of all staff, regardless of contract or job type.

Evidence

- STE-002 Equality policy
- REG-002 The study rules
- STE-007 HU human resource policy
- STE-008 Policy and response plan on bullying, harassment and violence
- REG-006 Rules on travel abroad
- REG-003 Hólar university code of ethics

HU's equality policy was approved by the University council on May 16th, 2024. The plan stipulates that equality considerations shall guide all activities at HU. The goal of the policy is for the university to combat discrimination and maintain equal treatment of students, staff and others working on behalf of the university.

The study rules describe the framework within which students operate. They include a description of students' right of appeal. Clear study rules foster a shared understanding of

the main aspects of the student framework and consistency in case handling and services for students.

The Human resources policy was approved by the University council on September 23rd September 2014. The goals of the HR policy are to:

- Ensure that Hólar University fulfils its lawful role and meets the legitimate expectations placed on the university and its staff
- Attract competent and motivated employees who dedicate their efforts to the university
- Express Hólar University's intention to be a good workplace
- Ensure the best possible working conditions for staff and opportunities to grow and thrive in their roles
- Make management more systematic
- Ensure that staff are well informed about their tasks and obligations

The HR policy will be reviewed considering the changes accompanying the establishment of the university system.

The Policy and response plan on bullying, harassment, and violence at HU was established in April 2021 and is based on the Act on Working environment, health, and safety at work No. 46/1980 and the Regulation on measures against bullying, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, and violence in the workplace No. 1009/2015. The response plan sets out a defined process if such matters arise. With the establishment of the university system, the policy and response plan will be updated and reviewed. A significant advantage of those changes is that case processing is carried out in cooperation between UI and Hólar university campus. This creates a certain distance and reduces the risk that personal relationships within small operational units will adversely affect decisions and follow-up.

Rules on travel abroad apply to travels abroad and reimbursement of related costs. These rules are intended to ensure equal treatment of employees and that decisions about travel are made in an impartial and transparent manner.

HU maintains a Safety committee, as required by law. The committee organizes various measures regarding working environment, health, and safety and seeks to maintain an overview of the needs of staff and the workplace in these areas.

Reflection and analysis

The following legal requirements are in place to support the, equality and non-discrimination of staff

- Act No. 7/1998 on hygiene and pollution prevention guarantees employees certain minimum health and environmental protections in the workplace. Supervision of these matters is carried out by municipal health authorities and, where applicable, the Environment and energy agency.

- Act No. 46/1980 on Working environment, health, and safety in workplaces. The Act and the regulations based on it contain provisions concerning requirement of buildings and facilities, disease prevention, escape routes, minimum rest periods, measures against bullying, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, and workplace violence, as well as the registration, investigation, and follow-up of workplace accidents and safety incidents. Safety representatives operate under the act.
- Act No. 150/2020 on Equal status and equal rights irrespective of gender and Act No. 86/2018 on Equal treatment in the labour market establish a clear framework regarding employee rights and employer obligations in these matters. Compliance with these laws is supervised by the Administration of occupational safety and health and the Directorate of equality.
- Act No. 80/1938 on Trade unions and industrial disputes provides for the right of individuals to establish and participate in trade unions. All employees of HU are members of trade unions. Union representatives are elected by coworkers belonging to the same trade union. The role of union representatives is to safeguard the interests of union members, ensure compliance with laws and agreements, and act as a liaison between employer and employees.

HU operates in accordance with the above-mentioned laws and the applicable collective agreements in force at any given time. Necessary improvements regarding welfare, safety, and occupational health are implemented based on inspections and reviews carried out by supervisory authorities such as the Administration of occupational safety and health and the health inspectorate.

12. Documented procedures are in place to identify any development needs relating to staff skills and expertise and to support the required development of all staff.

Evidence

- REG-004 Rules on hiring and promotion of academic staff
- REG-005 Rules on hiring and promotion of riding instructors

Rules on hiring and promotion of academic staff were approved on May 2nd 2023 and are published on HU website. The rules clarify career progression and are intended to encourage academic staff to be active and successful in their work at the university. Evaluation of advancement is based on a comprehensive professional assessment of performance and achievements in research, teaching, administration, and service to HU and society.

Rules on the hiring and promotion of riding instructors were approved on 21 December 2015 and set out the framework governing the recruitment and advancement of riding

instructors at HU. The rules will be reviewed following the establishment of the university system.

Summary

The reflection of the effectiveness statements for evaluation theme III – The quality system and strategic management results in the following examples of good practices, areas for enhancements and areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with HU.

Good practices to highlight:

- The revision of the Quality policy and description of the quality management system. The procedure for management of documented procedures was also defined.
- Focus groups with students of each study program were implemented in the 2025-2026 school year and are now part of ongoing monitoring activities.
- Development and implementation of annual monitoring of departments.

Enhancement areas:

- Complete the development or revision of the documented procedures required for the QEF3 framework

Areas that need to be attended to in implementation of the University system with UI:

- Aligning procedures in human resource management with the procedures of UI

4 Conclusion

4.1 Good Practices

This self-evaluation shows the following key good practices to highlight:

1. Initiative for closer collaboration with University of Iceland, resulting in establishing the University system. This provides HU with access to UI 's shared infrastructure and services and will greatly enhance operations.
2. Initiative in discussion with authorities on improved facilities and work towards separating University activities from local administration.
3. Establishment of the quality committee in September 2024. The committee connects all key managers of the University and works cooperatively towards

strategic planning and follow-up, development of the quality management system and reviewing internal monitoring activities.

4. Development and implementation of the annual quality survey and focus groups with students of all study programmes to better capture student voice and feedback. Development and implementation of annual monitoring of departments and programs
5. The revision of the Quality policy. The new policy describes a quality management system that consists of three connected pillars: Strategic management, Quality manual and internal monitoring and review.
6. Significant enhancement of participation in collaborative and interdisciplinary projects in research and teaching. Strong stakeholder engagement within departments who maintain strong links with industry and national and international collaboration networks. The report discusses examples of stakeholder engagement in development of new study programmes in all departments
7. Strong discipline-specific research activities in all departments
8. Significant steps in rebranding and marketing of Hólar University as a response to IWR20

4.2 Enhancement Areas

This self-evaluation points towards five key areas for enhancements. The first three relate to the fourth one – formalization of procedures. The establishment of the University consortium with University of Iceland has the potential for enhancement of all these areas, but it is important that they are attended to specifically for the campus in Hólar. Enhancements regarding the fifth theme on facilities and infrastructure are largely dependent on decisions by authorities, while the university seeks to collaborate with authorities towards solutions.

1. **Student support and engagement.** A recurring theme in internal monitoring and reviews is the need to enhance student voice and engagement and to promote student wellbeing and equality. Significant steps have been taken as described in the report, but there is still need for enhancement. An enhancement project in this area is in early stages of development, and self-evaluation tools have been explored as well as examples of enhancements by other universities. The project is planned to include as participants students and academic staff from all departments as well as staff from support services.
2. **Staff support and morale.** Feedback from staff shows the need to pay significant attention to staff support and morale. The management team is committed to work towards enhancements and is cooperatively working towards an action plan. The

team had a workshop on June 9th, 2026, to formally start this work, although preparations started as soon as results came from an external survey that is conducted on human resources of Icelandic institutions (í. Stofnun ársins)

3. **Policy on teaching, learning and assessment.** Teaching staff have suggested the need for pedagogical training and support in how to engage with the emergence of artificial intelligence. A recurring theme in student feedback is that increased consistency in teaching and assessment would be helpful, for example on how the Canvas learning platform is organized. To engage with this feedback, it is planned to work collaboratively towards a policy of teaching, learning and assessment. The work will include external pedagogical training as well as collaborative workshops and will engage the resources provided at UI 's centre for teaching and learning.
4. **Formalization of procedures and strategic management.** It is evident from the reflection on the evaluation themes and internal monitoring that significant work is needed to enhance the formalization and documentation of procedures. Various procedures and guidelines have been developed and are used by staff, but there is a need for them to be collected to a single platform, managed and communicated. The revision of the Quality policy with the accompanying procedure for the management of documented procedures is a step in this direction. The Quality committee systematically works towards the documentation of procedures. This work will be coordinated with strategy and quality team of UI.
5. **Facilities and infrastructure.** There is an evident need for enhanced facilities for research and teaching. Working with authorities toward enhancement of facilities has been a significant focus of the rector, and enhancements of facilities are included in the governmental financial plan. The rector will continue this focus.

5 Supporting Documentation

Supporting documentation are organized according to the chapters they relate to. The following table lists the supporting documentation for each chapter of the report. It also notes the type of document and information on where the document is published or saved (the IWR panel receives their copies directly). The quality manual is temporarily stored in a filing system on a Microsoft Teams site and is available to all staff. After implementation of the University system the quality manual will be moved to the Quality manual of UI where Hólar campus will have a dedicated space for its documented procedures.

The documents marked with orange will need to be translated or finalized before submitting.

| 1.1. Overview of the self-evaluation process | | |
|--|-----------------|---|
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| Quality Committee meeting minutes | Meeting minutes | Internal Teams site for the Quality committee |
| STE-001 Quality Policy and Description of the Quality Management System | Policy | HU website Quality manual |
| 1.2. Institutional background, profile and mission | | |
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| Strategic Plan 2021–2025 | Strategy | HU website |
| REG-001 The operational rules | Rules | HU website Quality manual |
| Institutional key data and statistics | Report | Internal Teams site for the Quality committee |
| 1.3. Current developments | | |
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| Act on Public Universities | Law | Parliament website |
| a memo from the Ministry of culture, innovation and higher education to the parliament committee of Judicial affairs | Memo | Parliament website |
| Strategic Plan 2021–2025 | Strategy | HU website |
| Results from strategy workshop with staff | Report | Internal Teams site for staff |
| 2.1. Learning from previous IWR | | |
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| QEF2 Institutional Wide Review Report (2019) | Report | HU website |
| Year-on Report (2022) | Report | HU website |
| Annual Quality Report 2024 | Report | HU website |
| Annual Quality Report 2025 | Report | HU website |
| VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies | Manual | Quality manual |
| STE-001 Quality Policy and Description of the Quality Management System | Policy | HU website Quality manual |
| 2.2. Learning from internal reviews | | |
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| Subject Level Review – Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology | report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Subject Level Review – Department of Rural Tourism | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Subject Level Review – Department of Equine Science | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Annual Quality Survey results 2025 and 2026 | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |

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|--|---------------|--|
| Student Focus Group Summaries 2026 | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Student support services review 2026 | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Institution of the Year results 2026 | Survey | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Report for annual monitoring of DAFB 2026 | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Report for annual monitoring of DES 2026 | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Report for annual monitoring of DRT 2026 | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Results from strategy workshop with staff | Report | Internal teams site for staff |
| Results from strategy workshop with students | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| 3.1. Evaluation Theme I – Learning and Teaching | | |
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| STE-001 Quality Policy and Description of the Quality Management System | Policy | Quality manual HU website |
| VLR-002 Procedure for Planning, Preparation and Revision of New Study Programs | Procedure | Quality manual |
| REG-001 Operational Rules | Rules | Quality manual HU website |
| VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies | Manual | Quality manual |
| REG-002 The study rules | Rules | Quality manual HU website |
| VLY-001 Academic calendar for Ugla registration system | Guidelines | Quality manual |
| The course catalogue | catalogue | HU website |
| 3.2. Evaluation theme II – research and innovation | | |
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| STE-003 Hólar University 's Research policy | Policy | Quality manual HU website |
| STE-004 Research policy of the Department of aquaculture and fish biology | Policy | Quality manual HU website |
| STE-005 Research policy of the Department of equine science | Policy | Quality manual HU website |
| STE-006 Research policy of the Department of rural tourism | Policy | Quality manual HU website |
| REG-003 Hólar University code of ethics | Rules | Quality manual HU website |
| VLY-002 Manual for graduate studies | Manual | Quality manual |
| 3.3. Evaluation theme III – The quality system and strategic management | | |
| Document | Document type | Availability |
| STE-001 Quality Policy and Description of the Quality Management System | Policy | Quality manual HU website |
| VLR-001 Management of Documented Procedures | Procedure | Quality manual |
| REG-001 Study Rules | Rules | Quality manual HU website |
| STE-002 Research Policy | Policy | Hólar website |
| REG-004 Rules on Hiring and Academic Promotion of Academic Staff | Rules | Quality manual HU website |
| REG-005 Rules on Hiring Riding Teachers | Rules | Quality manual HU website |
| Subject Level Review – Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology | report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
| Subject Level Review – Department of Rural Tourism | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |

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| Subject Level Review – Department of Equine Science | Report | Internal teams site of the Quality committee |
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