

# Quality Enhancement Handbook

for Icelandic Higher Education

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## PREAMBLE

Managing quality in the world of higher education today is not easy. Providing an excellent learning experience to our students and awarding high standards of degrees does not happen by accident. It takes very skilful shaping and management. The prime objective of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) is to support the autonomous and diverse higher education institutions in this demanding task.

The framework is rooted very firmly in enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. It emphasises the importance of institutions learning from the past in order to improve the future. We can only begin to improve when we have a clear picture of where we are starting from. The systematic gathering and analysis of evidence on all aspects of the student experience is vital. On a secure evidence base, comparisons with relevant benchmarks can be made and policy developed to take us from where we are now to where we would wish to be in the future. These are the basic building blocks of quality enhancement, and are therefore at the heart of the QEF. The various review processes outlined in this handbook are based firmly on these principles. The skilful shaping and management of quality in our universities is rooted in policy and practice, built on evidence and based on reflective analysis.

The Icelandic QEF is predicated on an understanding of the very real challenges involved in managing quality and standards in higher education in 21st Century Iceland. It is simply

unrealistic to pretend that all of our teaching and management of learning is as good as it could be. The real world of higher education internationally has peaks and troughs. Our task is to understand the peaks and troughs, learn from the peaks and try to eliminate the troughs, while moving the whole graph on an upward trajectory. For this to be achieved, we need to be open about our problems. A useful and very positive self-evaluation, whether of a programme or of an entire institution, is one that is open, reflective and based on real evidence. We can then be very confident that enhancement will take place. A self-evaluation based on fiction is useless and represents a complete waste of resources. We can have absolutely no confidence that any improvement will take place. Openness and reflection lie at the heart of the QEF.

The QEF is designed to create a partnership environment that is positive and supportive. Along with the Quality Board, the Icelandic Quality Council, which involves senior representatives of all institutions, will play a key role in this partnership. Not only will the Council have a key role in shaping the nature of the QEF, it will sponsor a wide range of conferences and workshops designed to share good and interesting national and international practice.

We are very grateful for all the formal and informal contributions from colleagues across the sector that have helped to create this Handbook. We look forward to working with you as the contents of the Handbook are brought to life.

*On behalf of the Quality Board,  
Prof. Norman Sharp, chair*

# SECTION 1: Introduction and Principles

## The five cornerstones of the Icelandic approach to quality

### 1 Ownership of quality and standards.

Ultimately, it is only through the actions and practices of the universities and higher education institutions in Iceland that the quality of the student learning experience and standards of their awards can be assured and enhanced. The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education therefore views its prime purpose as being the support of the autonomous Icelandic higher education institutions in their management of quality and standards. Demonstrating that the most zealous guardians of quality and standards are the autonomous higher education institutions themselves – individually and collectively – will be one of the key indicators of success of the QEF.

### 2 Enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and safeguarding standards.

One of the hallmarks of good academic practice is the constant quest for better understanding. That is obviously true in the context of research. It is equally applicable to managing teaching and learning. We are always trying to improve our understanding of the learning processes in higher education and thereby develop more effective ways in which we can manage the experience of our students. The Quality Enhancement Framework in Iceland has therefore been developed to support the institutions, not simply in the basic assurance of quality, but in the continuing enhancement of the learning experience of all students whom they serve. Enhancing the learning experience of students and safeguarding the standards of their degrees and other awards are the ultimate targets of the Quality Enhancement Framework.

**3 Involvement of students.** A defining feature of higher education in all its richness and diversity is its relationship with the boundaries of knowledge. Students, through their higher education experience, discover how knowledge and professional practice have been created and continue to evolve. Students become actively involved in knowledge creation rather than simply being passive recipients of 'facts' that they are required to repeat on demand at assessment. This provides graduates with

the basis for continuing to learn and develop throughout life. Factual knowledge can quickly become obsolete: understanding lays the basis for reformulation, adaptation and continuation of learning throughout life. The nature of learning in higher education therefore fundamentally involves students as partners in the learning process and it is the effectiveness of their learning in which we are fundamentally interested. Given the centrality of this partnership, it is important to involve students also within our quality framework as active participants in the assurance and enhancement of their learning. Students are not simply the objects of the QEF, they are intrinsically partners within the endeavour. It is important to be very clear that along with partnership come significant responsibilities. It is vital that students recognize and fulfil their roles as effective and active participants in the learning process.

### 4 International and Icelandic perspectives.

Higher education is international. Research and scholarship do not observe national boundaries. Increasingly, managing learning is an international activity with web applications and other distance learning technologies developing rapidly. In European terms, the Bologna process is of growing importance. It is important that higher education in Iceland relates positively to this range of European and wider international communities and benchmarks. However, higher education also has vitally important national functions to fulfil and national and local populations to serve. The Quality Enhancement Framework has been developed to balance international perspectives and benchmarks with the specificities of the Icelandic context.

**5 Independence and partnership.** It is vital that the management of the quality framework is, and is seen to be, fully independent. It is also important, however, that the various stakeholders work in partnership within the quality system. Reference is made above to the important role of autonomous institutions and of students within the quality partnership. Equally, governments, professional bodies and employers have legitimate roles to play. The Quality Enhancement Framework has been designed to recognize the very important role of the various partners. However, it is also vitally important that in the implementation of the parts of the quality framework for which it is directly responsible, the Quality Board is able to act with complete independence. These parts of

the quality system must be managed absolutely independently of any vested interest or instrument of control. The Quality Enhancement Framework for Iceland has therefore been developed to encompass, as appropriate, both partnership working and independence of action.

**6** These five founding principles are at the root of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework – the ownership of the autonomous institutions; the emphasis on the enhancement of the student learning experience and the maintenance of the standards of their awards; the role of students in managing quality; the balance of international and domestic perspectives and benchmarks; and, the independence of operation of the Quality Board within an overall context of partnership. The remaining sections of the Handbook will outline the full Quality Enhancement Framework and the ways in which these founding principles have been operationalised.

**7** As explained below (Section 9), the Quality Enhancement Framework will be subject to systematic monitoring and review. As part of that process, every year there will be a national conference in Iceland to share some of the learning points coming out of the operation of the Quality Enhancement Framework. Part of this conference will include an open session where colleagues will be invited to share any points they wish to raise in relation to the Quality Enhancement Framework. Either through the conference, or directly through the secretariat to the Quality Board, there is an open invitation to comment on the Quality Enhancement Framework and its operation. We all have the same goal: to provide the highest quality experience we can to all students served by the Icelandic higher education institutions and to ensure that their awards are consistently of an appropriate national and international standard.

### **A single comprehensive framework**

**8** The development of this Quality Enhancement Framework represents a fresh start in Icelandic higher education. It is of course not starting from a tabula rasa. The universities and higher education institutions have been creating and developing their own internal systems for managing quality and standards for some time. At a national level there has also been a process

of accreditation by subject area enshrined in Icelandic law. Successful accreditation has been a prerequisite for any higher education institution to offer provision in that subject area. Much has been learned through these processes, and that learning has informed the design of this new framework.

**9** The new Quality Enhancement Framework integrates internal and external processes along with accreditation into a single comprehensive model. From the inception of this Quality Enhancement Framework in October 2011, the Government will no longer run a separate accreditation process. By providing a comprehensive integrated approach, the new framework makes efficient use of institutional and public resources and also concentrates efforts on the prime task of enhancing the students' learning experience and safeguarding the standards of their awards.<sup>1</sup>

### **A partnership approach: The Quality Board and the Quality Council**

**10** The Quality Enhancement Framework has been developed in a manner that minimizes bureaucracy. No new offices have been created. Two new bodies have been established: the Quality Board and the Quality Council. These bodies represent two of the essential 'Janus-faced' principles outlined above: independence and partnership. Partnership working and absolute independence of operation are both essential ingredients of our framework.

**11** The Quality Board (the Board) has been established by the Icelandic Government. The membership is entirely international. Its chair and members have been selected on the basis of their individual and collective breadth and depth of experience in the management of quality and standards in higher education. The Board will be entirely independent in its operations. It is the responsibility of the Board to develop and subsequently implement the Quality Enhancement Framework. The Board will make judgments independently and prepare and publish reports of all its reviews. In all of these contexts the Board will act independently from government and institutions. The formal remit and membership of the Board is provided in Annex 1.

<sup>1</sup> Section 7 on accreditation is included for completeness. At this stage, however, this is an outline of the proposed direction of travel. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will be coming to a final view on these matters during the lifetime of this edition of the Handbook. In the meantime existing accreditations will remain live and applications for additional accreditations should continue to be made to the Ministry.

**12** The Quality Council (the Council) has also been established by the Icelandic Government. The membership of the Council includes the Rectors of the higher education institutions (or their representatives), higher education students, and a representative of the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council. The Quality Council is chaired by an independent chair appointed by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. The main responsibilities of the Council include: advising the Board on the development of the QEF; advising on the implementation of the framework; providing support to the higher education sector on the development of internal quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms; sponsoring a range of quality enhancement workshops, conferences and activities; and publishing reports. The formal remit and membership of the Council is provided in Annex 2.

**13** The secretariat for both the Quality Board and the Quality Council is provided by Rannis which is independent of the Government. The secretariat will provide a single point of entry for all enquiries related to the QEF. It provides support for all meetings and events sponsored by the Board and Council. In addition it drafts background papers and reports as required in support of the effective operation of the two bodies.

**14** The Quality Council and Quality Board will work in close partnership assisted by the shared secretariat. The Chair of the Council is invited to attend meetings of the Board and, similarly, the Chair of the Board is invited to attend meetings of the Council. The close partnership between the Board and Council lies at the very heart of the QEF. The Council will be a key advisor to the Board in the development and ongoing implementation and development of the QEF. In addition, the Council will develop programmes of workshops, conferences and other enhancement activities to support the sector drawing, as appropriate, on the findings of the Board's reviews and reports. In all these matters, the Board will provide any support requested by the Council.

#### **Some notes of clarification 1: Quality and standards**

**15** Throughout this Handbook reference is made consistently to the twin aims of enhancing quality and safeguarding standards. Standards in this context refer to the standards of the degrees

and other awards offered by an institution. These standards will be set and safeguarded by an institution including its processes for: defining awards; validating, monitoring and reviewing courses; and, devising assessment regulations and assessing outcomes achieved. These processes in turn will reflect the dynamic nature of the curriculum shaped by developments in knowledge, professional practice, and general employer, professional body and stakeholder expectations. Institutions will use a variety of benchmarks to ensure that the standards that are set through these processes remain appropriate. It is in this context that the Handbook refers to the safeguarding or assuring of standards.

**16** Quality on the other hand refers to the quality of the student learning experience. This will be affected by such factors as the design of the curriculum, the quality of the teaching, the resources available to support learning including the laboratory and IT facilities, the counselling and pastoral support available, library and other research facilities, opportunities for supported reflection, and the design of assessment practices. At the graduate level, the quality of the student learning experience will be influenced significantly by the nature of research supervision, the general context in which graduate students are working, and the opportunities for national and international networking. These, and many other factors, have a direct impact on the quality of the student learning experience. There are many challenges inherent in managing the student experience, and this Handbook seeks to provide a framework that supports institutions in managing and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. As stated above (paragraph 3) it is important to recognise that students themselves have key roles to play as active participants in learning, engaging purposefully with the curriculum and research and development opportunities.

#### **Some notes of clarification 2: Interpreting enhancement**

**17** For the purposes of this Handbook, enhancement is defined as taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students. The concept of 'deliberate steps' implies a conscious strategic policy process designed to manage enhancement in a planned way. It is important to note that this does not always imply the use of additional resources.

Rather it relates to the optimal use of resources to support enhanced student learning.

**18** In order to manage enhancement in a planned way, an institution (or faculty, school or department) will reflect on a number of key questions:

- Where are we now? What does the evidence tell us about our performance in a particular area? (For example: How well are we meeting the learning needs of our undergraduate and graduate students? Is there a wide variety in the needs of different groups of students? What are our progression rates, graduation rates, employment indicators? What is student feedback telling us? How good is our evidence base? etc)
- Where do we want to be in the future? (For example: What are our aspirations? What benchmarks should we use? Do our students/employers/professional bodies want different benchmarks? Are there different national and international benchmarks? etc)
- How are we going to get there? (For example: What policy levers do we have to get us there? What strategies do we need to follow in re-allocation of resources? What staff/student development policies do we need to adopt? What groups internally/nationally/internationally might we usefully co-operate with? etc)
- How will we know when we've got there? (For example: What monitoring and evaluation processes will we use? What indicators of success will we use? How will outcomes be disseminated? etc)
- How does this piece of enhancement fit with our broader Strategic Plan and what will be our next steps?

**19** In general, enhancement is therefore viewed as an ongoing process of reflection on the past in order to plan and bring about a better future. The various elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework (including, importantly, the Reflective Analysis – see below, paragraph 59 and Annex 3) have been designed to support this process.

### **Some notes of clarification 3: Key aspects of the student learning experience**

**20** Throughout this Handbook reference is made to assuring and enhancing the quality

of the student learning experience. This is an extremely broad concept, and it is important that institutions define for themselves the parameters appropriate to their own context, structure and students. The following points are offered in broad guidance. In general, the QEF will focus on those aspects of the student learning experience for which the institution bears a direct responsibility. It is, however, explicitly recognized that alongside institutional responsibilities there are also significant responsibilities for students in relation to active involvement in, and engagement with, the curriculum and associated structures and processes. Some of the obvious elements of the student learning experience include:

- The curricula: the structure, design, aims and objectives of programmes; learning outcomes, assessment strategies and tools etc.
- Effective learning: effective pedagogical support for all students; effective role performance by all staff with responsibilities for teaching and student support at both undergraduate and graduate levels; underpinning of effective staff support and development; supporting students in becoming effective independent partners in learning etc.
- The learning journey: learning to learn; managing transitions; effective counselling and support services; developing of employability skills; career guidance structures; planning curriculum choices etc.
- The learning environment: appropriate and available laboratory and other practical facilities; effective support in IT and Library and other information services; the effective use of blended and other technologically based approaches to learning; the support of effective research networks etc.

### **Some notes of clarification 4: The role of research and scholarship in this Handbook**

**21** The Quality Enhancement Framework relates to teaching and learning provision within higher education. One of the key defining features of higher education is that it relates to the frontiers of knowledge and professional practice and the processes by which that knowledge and practice have been created. Increasingly as we move through the successive levels of undergraduate and graduate provision it is important that student learning is therefore effectively supported by appropriate

scholarship and research. At the doctoral level this necessitates learning and working in an appropriate local research environment that in turn provides links to national and international research networks and opportunities. At all higher education levels, it is important that all students are learning in an appropriate research and scholarship environment.

**22** In looking at the quality of the student learning experience we are therefore very interested in the inter-relationships between research and scholarship, and supporting learning. In this context, the development of, and involvement in, advanced professional practice is embraced by the general terms research and scholarship. The various review and other processes described in this Handbook are therefore designed to look at the various ways in which teaching and learning are informed by, and engage with, research and scholarship. For example, at the under-graduate level, this would include questions such as:

- Is the curriculum informed by research methodologies and an understanding of how knowledge has been, and continues to be, created?
- Are students exposed to current developments in their specialist areas?
- Are students exposed to alternative and competing research perspectives and methodologies?
- Are students exposed to practising researchers in their specialist areas?
- Are students supported in undertaking research activities appropriate to their level of study?

At the graduate level, particularly in relation to doctoral studies, the connection between the research environment and effective learning is obviously of paramount importance where the expectations would be of students being actively supported within a dynamic research environment appropriate to their specialism, linked to national and international research networks.

**23** It is worth highlighting explicitly that the QEF as currently conceived is not itself involved in the direct appraisal of research activity per se. Should the Government require a process for research appraisal to be implemented, either within or without the QEF, the current methodology described in this Handbook would need to be adapted to dovetail with such a development. Any such initiative would be the subject of a separate development and consultation.

### **Some notes of clarification 5: The diversity of the sector in Iceland and institutional collaboration**

**24** Members of the Quality Board have greatly enjoyed visiting and meeting with colleagues from all the higher education institutions in Iceland and associated agencies. The Board is therefore very conscious of the wide variety of institutions in Iceland in relation to size, breadth, specialism, maturity, ownership and location. The Board is also very aware of the rights of access of students to institutions in the public sector and the wider implications of this policy. In designing the Quality Enhancement Framework we have, therefore, been very conscious of the need to create a flexible framework that can relate to and support this variety of institutions. The application of the methodology will be a consistent application of the model but in ways appropriate to each institution. Through this consistent application of the model the outcomes of the review processes will be broadly comparable.

**25** The Quality Board is concerned with the safeguarding of standards and the enhancement of the student learning experience at all of the higher education institutions. The Board is aware of discussions relating to various models of collaboration between the higher education institutions in Iceland. For clarity, however, each institution will be treated by the Board as an autonomous independent institution, fully responsible for its own standards and quality unless there is a relevant change in the legal/constitutional arrangements. Ongoing discussions with the Quality Council will ensure that the Board will remain fully informed on these matters. If required, following full discussion, the application of the model will be adjusted to accommodate any changed circumstances.

### **Some notes of clarification 6: Academic and financial audit**

**26** Part of the diversity of the sector in Iceland referred to above relates to the mix of private and public institutions. The processes outlined in this Handbook relate to a general audit of performance in managing academic affairs, specifically the management of academic quality and standards. While this will involve looking at the general sufficiency and allocation of resources to underpin effective learning and the maintenance of academic standards, the Quality Board will not be undertaking any investigation into the financial health of the institutions per se. Such a task is explicitly outwith its remit.

## SECTION 2: The Quality Enhancement Framework in outline

**27** The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) to indicate how all the various parts of the model fit together. Subsequent sections will provide full details on the individual elements. In developing the QEF, in addition to drawing on the experience of the Board, reference has been made in particular to:

- The General Instructions for Internal and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions (Draft), Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland, July 2010
- Miscellaneous documents relating to legislation on Icelandic Higher Education Institutions and provision
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, European Association of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA), 2009
- Guidelines of Good Practice, International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), 2007.

**28** There are six main elements in the QEF:

- Institution-led reviews at the subject level
- Quality Board-led reviews at the institutional level
- Annual meetings with representative(s) of the Quality Board
- Quality Council-led enhancement workshops and conferences
- Special Quality Board-led reviews
- Continuing and additional accreditation<sup>2</sup>

### **29 Institution-led reviews at the subject level.**

All institutions will be required to conduct regular internal reviews covering each of their subject areas as well as all support services having a bearing on the student learning experience (e.g. library, IT, laboratories, counselling and guidance, registry, human resources etc). These reviews may be organized in ways most appropriate to each institution, but will be required to meet the criteria outlined in Section

3 below. The Board will appoint an external subject expert to participate in each review. Each review will lead to a formal report that will be made available to the Board. The link between institution-led reviews at the subject level and accreditation is explained fully in Section 7 below. (Section 3 below provides full information on institution-led reviews at the subject level.)

### **30 Quality Board-led reviews at the institutional level.**

All institutions will receive an institution-level review, normally once every five years. This review will focus on the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for managing the assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience and for safeguarding the standards of their awards. Essentially, these reviews will be asking the institutions to demonstrate in an evidenced way how they know the learning experience of their students is as good as it could be by Icelandic and international standards, and how they assure themselves that the standards of their awards are comparable nationally and internationally. An important part of the evidence for these reviews will be the reports of the institution-led reviews at the subject level referred to above. Following the Quality Board-led reviews at the institutional level, the Board will publish a report that will include a judgment on the confidence that can be held in the institution's ability to manage its quality and standards. This judgement will also relate to the continuing 'accreditation status' of the institution (see Section 7). (Section 4 below provides full details on the Quality Board-led reviews at the institutional level.)

### **31 Annual meetings with a member of the Board.**

All institutions will have an annual meeting with representative(s) of the Board accompanied by the Board secretary. This meeting will facilitate the free exchange and updating of information between the Board and each institution, and allow the Board to maintain a current appreciation of the developments and challenges within each institution. The outcomes of institution-led reviews will be shared at these meetings together with discussions of progress made in taking forward the outcomes of previous Quality Board-led institutional reviews. (Section 5 below provides full details on the annual meetings.)

<sup>2</sup> Section 7 on accreditation is included for completeness. At this stage, however, this is an outline of the proposed direction of travel. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will be coming to a final view on these matters during the lifetime of this edition of the Handbook. In the meantime existing accreditations will remain live and applications for additional accreditations should continue to be made to the Ministry.

**32 Quality Council-led enhancement workshops and conferences.** A key element in the QEF is the series of workshops and conferences that will be sponsored by the Quality Council. These activities will focus on areas that are identified as being of concern to the higher education sector in Iceland, and will be designed to stimulate the thinking of academics and other higher education practitioners throughout the sector. They will draw on national and international good and interesting practice and, where appropriate, will result in published reports, normally on a specially developed website. In some cases, these workshops and conferences may lead to the production of a set of guidelines in relation to aspects of quality assurance and enhancement related to the QEF. (Section 8 below provides further information on the Quality Council-led enhancement workshops and conferences.)

**33 Special Quality Board-led reviews.** There are a small number of circumstances in which the Board may establish special reviews. In some circumstances an institution may wish to invite the Board to conduct a review of some aspect of its provision. There may be circumstances in which the Ministry may wish to commission the Board to conduct a special independent review, for example of an aspect of provision across the whole sector. There may also be circumstances where the Board itself becomes aware of a legitimate cause for concern in relation to some aspect of higher education provision. In these circumstances, the Board itself may wish to establish a special review. In general, it will be

for the Board to decide whether it is appropriate to undertake any particular special review. (Section 6 below provides full details of Special Quality Board-led reviews.)

**34 Transition arrangements.** For some years preceding the establishment of the QEF, the Ministry has been running a programme of reviews and accreditations, all of which have led to published reports. These reports have contained useful commentaries and recommendations. Progress in relation to these recommendations will be picked up through the annual discussions and, as appropriate, through the institution-led subject level reviews and, ultimately, through the Quality Board-led institutional level reviews. (Sections 3, 4, 5 and 7 below provide full details of these arrangements.)

**35 Continuing and additional accreditation.** It is intended that the accreditation process will be fully integrated within the comprehensive QEF and much progress has been made in this direction as outlined in Section 7 below. The proposed arrangements for accreditation are included in the Handbook for completeness. At this stage, however, this is an outline of the proposed direction of travel. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will be coming to a final view on these matters during the lifetime of this edition of the Handbook. In the meantime existing accreditations will remain live and applications for additional accreditations should continue to be made to the Ministry.

## SECTION 3: Institution-led review at the subject level

### Rationale

**36** Institution-led review at the subject level is a clear demonstration of the institution's own responsibility for the assurance and enhancement of the quality of the learning experience of its students and safeguarding the standards of its awards. The institution is in the best place to judge how it should sectionalise and prioritise its various subjects for review. In some cases, for example, it would make sense in terms of the student learning experience to review Economics provision as a discrete entity where students follow degree programmes in Economics. In other contexts, however, it would be more sensible to review Economics as part of a cluster of Business Studies where students are following programmes in Business Studies. Some institutions may review the comprehensive health of a subject area – including teaching, research, knowledge transfer, funding etc – in a single large exercise. Other institutions may deal with each aspect in separate reviews. In cases where research units contribute to the creation and delivery of the curriculum, then these units should be appropriately embraced within the review process. It is the view of the Board that these are matters that are best decided by each individual institution. Normally, the expectation would be that reviews would follow the broad pattern of the award structure of the institution, which in turn would mirror broadly the student learning journey. The institution is also in the best position to decide on the timing of reviews of different subject areas. Developments in institutional strategy, subject related developments, employment related developments and student-feedback issues will all have an impact on the appropriateness of timing for the review of particular subjects. Again, the individual institution is in the best position to make these judgements. It is therefore for the institution, within the requirements outlined below, to arrange and conduct its own subject level reviews.

### Requirements

**37 Area Coverage.** Whatever the pattern of individual reviews, all subject areas must be included at all levels (graduate and undergraduate) in which awards are made. In general, the subject

divisions for review should be selected to reflect in a meaningful way the learning journeys of current and future students. In general, reviews should embrace all forms of provision, including, for example, taught, research, full-time, part-time, distance learning and work-based provision. Reviews should also include any provision that is undertaken in collaboration with any other institution or partner, either national or international. In addition, reviews should also be undertaken of services that directly impact on the quality of the student learning experience including for example library, laboratories, career guidance, counselling services, and information technology services. It is for the institution to decide whether it is most effective to review such services as separate entities, or whether they should be reviewed in relation to their effectiveness in supporting students within each subject area review.

**38 Responsibilities for collaborative provision.** In general, in any form of collaborative activity the institution making the award is held to be ultimately responsible for safeguarding all aspects of the standard of the award. In any collaborative provision, there should be a collaborative agreement that specifies clearly the responsibilities of each party for the various dimensions of the quality of the student learning experience. Normally, it is the body hosting the student that would carry responsibility for the quality of that experience. However, this should be clearly specified along with responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the quality of the learning experience.

**39 Timing.** All areas should be reviewed at least once every five years. At the outset of the first cycle (October 2011), institutions should produce a plan for their intended pattern of reviews over the first cycle, 2011-2016. A copy of this review plan should be provided to the Quality Board for its approval, and any subsequent amendments notified to the Board.

**40 Involvement of students.** All reviews should actively include students. The outcomes of student feedback mechanisms should form a core part of the review, and the review process should directly involve meetings with students and recent graduates. It is good practice also to include on the review team at least one member who is a current student in the institution. It is important that any student member(s) of the team should be appropriately supported through briefing and training.

**41 Involvement of external experts.** All reviews should include independent external experts appropriate to the breadth and depth of the curriculum and the nature of the provision. There should be a sufficient range of subject expertise and, where appropriate, employment or professional body expertise and experience. The Board will agree with the institution on the appointment of at least one independent international expert (from outwith Iceland) who, in addition to taking a full part in the review, will report to the Board on the robustness of process and continuing eligibility for accreditation in that area. The costs involved in including this member in the team will be borne by the Board. (See Section 7 on accreditation for full details.) It is important to emphasize, however, that it is entirely up to the institution to decide on the overall size and composition of the team, including the total number of national and international experts, to ensure appropriate coverage to support an effective review.<sup>3</sup>

**42 Reports.** All reviews should result in a formal report that includes information on the composition of the team, the review process, the findings, the review recommendations and the institutional follow-up processes. Copies of these reports should be made available to the Quality Board within three months of the completion of each review. These reports will form an important background to the annual meetings with Board representatives and also to the Quality Board-led institutional level reviews.

**43 ENQA.** It is a general expectation that all approaches adopted by institutions to internal review will meet the general requirements of the 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area'.<sup>4</sup>

**44 Institutional quality manual.** The institution should have documented all of its procedures for quality management. Ideally, this will be in the form of a single document. However, in the early stages of implementing the QEF it may take the form of a series of defined papers which, taken together, comprise the quality manual.

### Aspects of the design of reviews

**45 General approach and coverage.** As outlined above, it is for each institution to design the approach and processes for subject level review

that are most appropriate for the structure of the institution and the nature of its provision. In some cases institutions already have well developed systems that meet the requirements of the QEF, while in others further development of systems may be required. One of the Quality Council workshops that will be held in the early implementation phase of the QEF will be designed to develop and share good practice in internal review at the subject level. This activity will lead to the production and publication during 2011-2012 of guidelines of good practice in institution-led subject level review. The approach to these reviews and the associated evidence base is for each institution to decide. It would be a normal expectation, however, that each review would include, amongst other things, evidence on, and consideration of:

- Programme/Course description
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategies
- Application and enrolment rates
- Progression rates
- Graduation rates and time to graduation
- Employment/further study statistics
- Indicators of relevant environment of research, scholarship and/or advanced professional practice (see paragraph 46 below)
- Staffing and staff development
- Student feedback and subsequent actions
- Support services effectiveness
- Development and enhancement strategies

The above list is intended to be indicative and is certainly not exhaustive. In addition, as indicated above, reference could usefully be made to the section on internal reviews in the ENQA Guidelines<sup>4</sup>. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will require submission of a standard data set from all higher education institutions. This data set will be harmonised with the institutional requirements to support their subject level reviews and with the Board requirements for institutional level reviews. The following paragraphs in this section provide further details on key aspects of subject level reviews. Supplementary guidelines for good practice will be created in workshops in Iceland during 2011-2012.

**46 The link between research and teaching.** The QEF is focused on the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions.

<sup>3</sup> This applies to travel and accommodation but excludes fee. Institutions are however free to offer a fee to international experts but they will have to carry the cost themselves.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition20(2).pdf)

However, one of the fundamental aspects of learning in a university environment is engaging with the processes by which knowledge is created and developed. It is thus important that the student learning experience is linked to appropriate scholarship and research activities within the institution. In these subject-level reviews, it is important that review activity includes an examination of the extent to which teaching and learning is being appropriately supported by the research and scholarship activities of the institution in that particular subject area. While this is important in relation to all learning in higher education, it is increasingly important in the final stages of undergraduate provision and, especially, at graduate levels where a full involvement in a research environment would be expected. Where a research unit (or equivalent) contributes to the creation and delivery of the curriculum or student experience, that contribution should be included as an integral part of the review process.

As indicated above (paragraphs 21 and 22), in general there would be an expectation that subject-level reviews considered evidence in relation to questions such as:

- Is the curriculum informed by research methodologies and an understanding of how knowledge has been created?
- Are students exposed to current developments in their specialist areas?
- Are students exposed to alternative and competing research perspectives and methodologies?
- Are students exposed to practising researchers in their specialist areas?
- Are students supported in undertaking research activities appropriate to their level of study?

**47** At the graduate level, particularly in relation to doctoral studies, the connection between the research environment and effective learning is obviously of paramount importance where the expectations would be of students being actively supported within a dynamic research environment appropriate to their specialism linked to national and international research networks. Subject-level reviews should reflect carefully on evidence in this area.

**48** At an institutional level, this link between teaching and research will be further explored across the institution in the context of the Quality Board-led institution level reviews.

### **49 The safeguarding of standards of awards.**

Reviews should include an explicit focus on how standards of awards are defined and maintained. In the course of review, this would include for example, looking at the nature of intended learning outcomes, the appropriateness of learning materials and approaches, assessment instruments and their outcomes together with the external benchmarks used as comparators. In this context, subject related benchmarks (e.g. post-graduate opportunities or employment records in professional practice) as well as more generic benchmarks (e.g. the Icelandic Qualifications Framework, the European Qualifications Framework) may be useful and important.

### **50 The effectiveness of annual monitoring.**

Reviews should place a significant emphasis on the effectiveness or otherwise of annual monitoring arrangements that would routinely include elements such as student survey data together with data on student recruitment and selection, progression and achievement. Good practice in this would also involve benchmarking against other provision, both within and outwith the institution. Effective annual monitoring provides useful evidence to support course teams in both short-term fine tuning of provision and in laying the foundations for more medium-term planning, linked possibly to the periodic review process.

**51 Making it better.** The QEF is designed primarily to support the enhancement of the student learning experience. It is important that all of the processes within the QEF are focused on improving the future rather than sterile box-ticking of the past. This applies in particular to the review processes, which should always be concerned with learning from the past in order to improve the future. It is therefore important that the processes of institution-led subject level review should be challenging in this regard. For example, receiving effective student feedback is a necessary but not sufficient condition for improvement. The key issue is what is done with the feedback: what changes does it lead to and how effective are those changes? Similarly, the review process itself should lead to recommendations for improvement that are systematically followed through and monitored. Also, it is helpful to have systems that lead to the sharing of good practice discovered through reviews with other courses, departments or faculties within the institution.

## SECTION 4: Quality Board-led reviews at the institutional level

### Rationale

**52** The institutional-level review process is designed to support the institutions in reflecting on the relative successes of their enhancement of quality and safeguarding of standards, and in formulating their future strategies for providing their students with the best possible learning experience. These reviews should therefore become a valuable resource to support institutional strategic planning processes. The Quality Board-led review is also designed to provide independent external assurance that the public, current and future students, the government, employers and other stakeholders can all have confidence in an institution's ability to provide students with a high quality learning experience and to award degrees that are worthy of a higher education institution in Iceland. The Board-led reviews will also meet the requirements of the ENQA Standards and Guidelines and the expectations of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies of Higher Education.

### The review cycle

**53** The review cycle will last five years: four years in which reviews are being conducted and a fifth year to reflect on the outcomes of the cycle, plan any revisions to the process, and undertake a variety of enhancement activities. Normally, an institution will therefore receive a Board-led review once every five years. In the first cycle, Board-led institutional reviews will be conducted during 2011–2015, and the year 2015–16 will be a year of reflection and preparation for the next phase of the Quality Enhancement Framework. A timetable for reviews in the first cycle will be published in 2011.

### The review teams

**54** The review teams for each institution will be appointed by the Quality Board. The Secretariat and student member will always be Icelandic. Other team members will be drawn from senior academics internationally and may include an Icelandic academic where all criteria for membership can be satisfied. All team members will be required to undergo training arranged by the Board.<sup>5</sup>

**55** Review team members who are academics will be appointed on the basis of appropriate experience in managing quality in university-level institutions. They will also currently be, or recently have been, a senior member of staff of a university or related body. To be considered for appointment a candidate should not normally have been retired for more than five years. Each higher education institution in Iceland will be asked to identify overseas peer institutions from which they would think it appropriate that the Board would seek to appoint a reviewer. These might be institutions against which the Icelandic institution tends to benchmark itself. In addition, in the spirit of the driver of enhancement, they could include overseas institutions that the Icelandic institution would wish to emulate.

**56** Review team members who are representing student interests will normally be current students registered on undergraduate or graduate courses in an Icelandic higher education institution. No student will participate in a review of their own institution or any other that they have previously attended or at which a close family member is employed. All members will be required to sign a declaration indicating no conflict of interest. Students will remain eligible to participate in reviews up to the first anniversary of their final graduation. Nominations for students to join the pool of student reviewers will be invited from the student associations of all the Icelandic higher education institutions.

**57** Following the procedures outlined in the preceding two paragraphs (paragraphs 55 and 56), the review team appointed to undertake a particular institutional review will therefore comprise members appointed for their senior expertise in higher education quality and standards management together with appropriate general institutional management experience. No institutional team will be smaller than four persons with the precise size in each case being determined by the size and complexity of the review. All teams will include one student member. Normally, the team will include at least one member of the Quality Board who will chair the review team. In addition, a member of the Board secretariat will serve as secretary to the review team. Normally, the team will also include individuals whose general area of subject expertise is relevant to the accredited areas the team will wish to sample as part of the

<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will review the Rules on Quality Control of Teaching and Research in Higher Education Institutions No. 321/2009 during the lifetime of this edition of the Handbook, e.g. Art. 8 on the implementation of external evaluation.

review process. The institution will be asked to comment on the proposed membership of a team in relation to any potential conflict of interests. Following this stage, the team members will be confirmed and invited to serve.

### The review process

**58** The review process consists essentially of five standard elements: submission of a Reflective Analysis by the institution; consideration of the Reflective Analysis and its evidential base by the review team; a visit to the institution by the review team; production of a report; and, follow-up activities designed to follow through the outcomes of the review. To ease communication between the Board and the institution throughout the review process, the institution will be asked to identify an individual who would be the main point of contact for the Board in relation to review activity. In most cases this might be the senior member of staff with responsibility for managing quality matters.

**59 The Reflective Analysis.** The Reflective Analysis is intended to be exactly that: the considered reflections of the institution on the evidence of its performance in the past period. In many ways the production of the Reflective Analysis is one of the most valuable aspects of the whole process. The Reflective Analysis provides a valuable opportunity for the university community to collate the evidence of its past performance, collectively consider together what the evidence is indicating in relation to various benchmarks and plan future strategies to enhance the learning experience of its students and safeguard the standards of their awards. A good and valuable Reflective Analysis is open, evidence-based and evaluative. A poor Reflective Analysis lacks evidence, lacks any real evaluation and analysis and is defensive, while also perhaps making extravagant claims of excellence. Annex 3 provides notes of guidance on the Reflective Analysis, including the inclusion of an illustrative case study. The Board will issue separate guidelines offering some illustrative examples of case study material. However, it is important to note that the institution is entirely free to select a case study that best illustrates its own approach to assuring and enhancing quality and/or safeguarding standards.

**60 Initial consideration of the Reflective Analysis.** The Reflective Analysis will be submitted to the Board secretariat who, in consultation with the Chair of the Quality Board,

will decide whether the Reflective Analysis provides an appropriate basis to support the continuation of the review. Where significant problems are identified with the Reflective Analysis, the institution would be asked to revise its submission. Most commonly this would occur where a Reflective Analysis did not include a sufficient evidential base to support the review process. The Reflective Analysis will then be distributed to the review team members along with copies of the reports of the institution-led subject level reviews together with the reports of the Board's nominated international participants in subject level reviews. Review team members will study this material and identify initial matters they wish in particular to pursue and also any further documentation they would wish to have available either in advance of or during the visit. The review team chair will collate these points and requests and communicate them to the institution, feeding back responses, as appropriate, to the review team members. On the basis of these interactions, the review team chair will agree with the institution a programme of meetings for the visit of the review team. Annex 3 provides further information and guidance on the production of a Reflective Analysis. In addition, this will be a topic of an early Quality Council Workshop.

**61 The Review Visit.** The outline of the review visit programme will be agreed with the institution in advance of the visit taking place. Visits will normally last between three and five days. All review visits will start with the programme for the first half-day being given over to the institution. The purpose of this is to give the institution an opportunity to provide the review team with whatever experience it considers would assist the review team fully to understand the nature of the institution. This might take the form of a series of presentations or discussions. It could take the form of demonstrations or visits or observations. It could take the form of a tour of facilities. It is for the institution to decide what it thinks would be most effective in conveying to the review team the nature of the institution, its students and its teaching and learning. The precise time allocated to this, up to half-a-day, will be agreed in advance and built in to the visit programme. Beyond this first session, while there will be some significant areas of commonality, the details of the visit programme will vary. This will depend on the matters of particular interest to review team, and also, to some extent, on the size and complexity of the institution. The visit,

and indeed the whole process, is designed to be a dialogue between colleagues: it is not an 'inspection'. The programme of meetings will be agreed with the institution. The headline issues raised by members of the review team in their initial reading of documents will be shared with the institution at the outset. As the visit proceeds, the review team secretary will share headline thinking with the institution periodically, usually at the end of each day. Each review visit schedule will include a slot set aside for anyone from the university community to meet with the review team. Each visit will conclude with a 'wash-up' meeting usually with the senior group of institutional staff to allow final clarification of any points that remained unclear to the team at that stage. The review team will not attempt to provide a summary of conclusions at this stage: these matters are complex, and the team will wish to reflect on the evidence they have been presented with during the visit and in the documentation. However, within two weeks of the end of the visit the team will write to the Rector to provide the headline outcomes of the review together with the team's provisional judgement. A full draft report of the review will be sent to the institution for comment as soon as it is available. Annex 4 provides an indicative timeline within which all these stages will normally occur.

### Producing the review report

**62** Following the visit, a report will be drafted by the review team secretary in consultation with the members of the review team. A first draft of the report will be signed-off by the chair of the review team and then distributed to all review team members who are required to comment, amend as appropriate, and ultimately sign off. The review team secretary will then prepare the second draft, which is signed off by the review team chair and sent to the Rector of the institution. The institution will be invited to comment on the draft report in relation to:

- matters of factual inaccuracy, and/or
- misunderstandings arising from factual inaccuracy

In the light of comments received from the institution, a third draft of the report will then be prepared by the review team secretary and signed off by the review team chair for transmission to the Quality Board and copied to the Rector.

**63** The Quality Board will meet to consider the third draft of the review report. The Rector of the institution concerned will be invited to join this meeting at one point. This will allow the Rector the opportunity to comment on the review in general and the report in particular. This will also provide an opportunity for the Board and the rector to have a discussion on key points raised in the report. Following the departure of the Rector and further discussion of the draft report, the Board will then confirm the final version of the report for publication.

**64** The structure of the review reports is likely, normally, to follow broadly the outline suggested for the Reflective Analysis in Annex 3 to this Handbook.

### Judgements in the report

**65** The QEF is built on a foundation of the secure management of quality and standards by the autonomous Icelandic higher education institutions. It is, therefore, important that the QEF should provide a clear expression of the level of confidence that everyone can have in the robustness of this foundation. This is very important to diverse audiences, including: the particular university community itself; the rest of the Icelandic sector; current and future student populations; the Icelandic Government and society; and, international audiences. To this end, the reports from the Quality Board will conclude by offering a summary judgement on the confidence that can be held in the ability of the institution to manage effectively and securely both the quality of the learning experience it provides to students, and the standards of the degrees and other qualifications it awards. Review teams will express their level of confidence in the institution's management of quality and standards in one of four forms: **full confidence, confidence, limited confidence or no confidence**. The first three of these categories are considered to indicate a performance which meets a minimum confidence threshold or greater. The final category of **no confidence in the management of quality and standards** is regarded as a failing judgement i.e. an approach to managing quality and/or standards by an institution that does not meet minimum threshold requirements. In general, these judgements are very significant. To declare confidence in an institution's processes and procedures for managing quality and standards provides a very significant reassurance to both the university community itself and also to external stakeholders – both national and international.

**66** An expression of **full confidence in the management of quality and standards** indicates that the evidence demonstrates that the institution is very secure and systematic in its comprehensive management of quality and standards and is likely to maintain this level of security in the future and indeed be in a position to continue to systematically enhance future provision. A judgement of **full confidence** will normally require a sustained history of uniformly positive outcomes from a range of review activities. For these reasons, it is unlikely that judgements of **full confidence** will be given in the first cycle of the QEF.

**67** A judgement of **confidence in the management of quality and standards** will be given where the evidence indicates that the institution is systematically managing its quality securely and safeguarding the standards of its awards on a firm evidence base, and there is confidence that this will continue in the future. In addition, such an institution will, in general, be using the outcomes from its quality management processes to systematically enhance quality. Within an overall judgement of **confidence** there may be areas where the management of quality is not yet fully effective, but not to the extent of posing a fundamental threat to the overall quality of the student experience or the standards of their awards.

**68** Where the evidence indicated that there were factors which, in a more fundamental way, limited the confidence that could be held in the institution's management of either current or future standards or quality, then a judgement of **limited confidence in the management of quality and standards** would be given. It is important to note that a 'limited confidence' judgement is not a judgement of failure, but it does indicate that improvements must be made in order to safeguard the learning experience of current and/or future students and/or secure the standards of their awards.

**69** In cases where there appeared to be significant limitations on the institution's ability to manage its quality or standards, then a judgement of **no confidence in the management of quality and standards** would be given. In such a case there will be substantial evidence of a serious and fundamental weakness in the institution's ability to safeguard standards and/or to maintain an acceptable quality of provision.

**70** In each category of judgement except **full confidence in the management of quality and standards**, where the evidence suggests that it would be appropriate to do so, teams may distinguish in their judgements between the management of quality and the management of standards, and also between the current management of quality and/or standards and the likely future management of quality and/or standards. A judgement of **full confidence** will only be given where a team can maintain this level of confidence in relation to both quality and standards, and that this level of confidence can be applied to the present and future.

#### Follow-up activities

**71** In all cases, it is intended that the review report will serve as an important and useful document in continuing strategic and operational planning within the institution. In relation to the Quality Board, the follow-up activities will depend on the confidence judgement reached.

**72** In cases of **full confidence or confidence in the management of quality and standards**, the requirement is that the institution produces a written year-on report on the first anniversary of receipt by the institution of the final version of the report. This year-on report will be discussed at the next annual meeting with the Quality Board representatives, and will normally be published on the Board's website alongside the original review report. The purpose of the year-on report is to indicate how the main points raised in the report have been taken forward by the institution and to provide an updating in relation to any major changes in the institution that would have a bearing on the matters raised in the report. It is important to note that the year-on activities are not conducted in the context of a compliance culture. It is for the institution to reflect on its report and decide on appropriate follow-up actions and activities.

**73** In cases of judgements of **limited confidence in the management of quality and standards**, the institution will be asked to produce an action plan that will address how the weaknesses identified will be remedied. The action plan should be submitted to the Quality Board secretariat within two months of receipt of the final report. The Quality Board, normally in consultation with the institution, will make a judgement on the potential adequacy of the action plan to address the identified weaknesses. In the event of an action plan being deemed inadequate, a representative

of the Quality Board (together with a member of the secretariat) will meet with the Rector or senior representative of the institution to agree a speedy resolution. In the event of a failure to agree an action plan, the Board will report to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture that it is unable to fulfil its obligations in this particular context. Once agreed, the Board will monitor the implementation of the action plan, and, on successful completion, will issue a brief report that would be published on the Board website alongside the original report.

**74** In cases of judgements of **no confidence in the management of quality and standards**, the Board would be dealing with an institution that is clearly failing in significant respects. In such cases, an urgent meeting would be arranged between the institution, the Ministry of Education,

Science and Culture and the chair of the Quality Board. In these circumstances it would be for the Ministry to decide on the most appropriate way forward.

#### **The environment for enhancement**

**75** Having outlined the consequences of various outcomes in the preceding paragraphs, it is important to re-emphasise that the QEF is establishing an environment of enhancement where the institutions, Quality Council and Quality Board are all working in a supportive partnership to enhance the quality of all provision. In the vast majority of cases the supportive and developmental environment created by the Council and Board will build on existing strengths to ensure that the outcomes from these processes are generally positive.

## SECTION 5: Annual meetings with representatives of the Quality Board

### Rationale

**76** It is beneficial to have relatively frequent contact between institutions and the Quality Board so that the Board develops good institutional relationships. It is important that the Board understands each institution and is kept up to date in relation to institutional developments and pressures. Equally, it is important that the Board has an opportunity to update institutional colleagues in relation to Board activities. The annual meetings are a mechanism to provide this channel of communication and to provide an ongoing point of contact between the institution and the Board. One of the important principles of the QEF is 'no surprises' – the maintenance of an open dialogue between the Board and the institutions. The annual meeting offers an important opportunity for the institution to discuss in an informal context both areas of relative strength and weakness in the management and enhancement of quality. While a very important element within the overall QEF, these meetings are not a formal part of the review and judgement processes of the QEF.

### Operation and format

**77** The timing of these meetings will be arranged to be mutually convenient for both the institution and the Board representatives. The meetings will normally last up to half a day – but can be longer by mutual agreement. It is entirely up to the institution to decide who will meet with the Board representatives. It is helpful if the group is relatively small to maintain informality. The group could include the senior member of staff responsible for managing the quality system, the senior member of academic staff responsible for academic quality and standards and a student – perhaps a senior officer of the student association. The small group of Board representatives will normally include the

identified Board contact for that institution and a member of the Board secretariat. The agenda for these meetings is flexible and will be agreed in outline in advance. The agenda will normally include an update on any developments in the institutional quality system and any other significant developments. It would routinely include discussion on the outcomes of institution-led subject level reviews undertaken that year. In the years surrounding the Board's institutional-level review, discussion would normally touch on matters related to preparation for, feedback on, or follow-up to the review.

### Documentation and records

**78** With one exception, there is no need to produce any documentation or papers specifically for these meetings. It may be that the institution would wish to share existing papers or documents for information with the Quality Board representatives, but this is not a requirement. Similarly there will not be a formal record of the outcomes of discussion. Following the meeting a file note will be made by the Board secretariat of the topics discussed. This is purely for Board information and to assist in planning the next annual discussion. These file notes will not form part of any formal record and will not be available to review team members. The file note will be shared with the institution.

**79** The one exception to the requirement for documentation is the 'year-on report'. This is a report that the Board asks all institutions to produce on the first anniversary of receipt of the final version of the report of their Quality Board-led institutional level review. This year-on report should indicate how the institution is responding to its review report. The year-on report will form the basis of discussion at the annual meeting that year which will be timed accordingly. If the institution so chooses, it could produce a draft of the report for the annual meeting and produce a final version following the meeting. That is entirely for the institution to decide. The final version of the year-on report will be published on the Board website alongside the original review report.

## SECTION 6: Special Quality Board-led reviews

### Rationale

**80** There are a small number of occasions when the Board may carry out special reviews outwith the normal cycle of Quality Board-led institutional level reviews outlined in the preceding section. There are circumstances where an institution may request a review, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture may request a review, or where the Quality Council or the Quality Board itself may wish to initiate a review. In such cases, special reviews would be devised and conducted fit for the specific purpose intended. The general principles that would be followed in such cases are outlined briefly below. It is anticipated that such reviews would be rare.

### Institution-commissioned reviews

**81** In general it is not the role of the Board to undertake reviews for institutions other than as indicated in the preceding sections. Indeed the Board is keen to support the continuing development of effective and robust internal quality management systems. The Board for example would not be able to accept a commission to review a department(s) that the institution was considering for closure. That is, of course, the business of the institution. However, there might be an exceptional set of circumstances (e.g. significant and relatively widespread elements of systemic failure) where it was difficult or impossible for an institution to undertake a particular review itself. In these circumstances, the Rector should contact the Chair of the Quality Board to arrange an early informal and confidential discussion to explore matters. Any such review that was undertaken would be specifically designed for purpose and would be paid for by the institution concerned. The Board however would be entirely independent in both its reviews and reporting in such circumstances. Reports from such reviews would not be published by the Board.

### Ministry-commissioned reviews

**82** There may be occasions when it would be appropriate for the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to commission a special review from the Board. It is envisaged that this would be in relation to Ministry responsibilities

for the overall shape and operation of the higher education system. For example, there could be a requirement for an overall review of teacher training in Iceland. In such cases, special reviews would be designed and executed by the Quality Board. Such special reviews would be funded by the Ministry. However, the Board would maintain full independence in its review activities and reporting. It would be agreed with the Ministry in advance whether the Board would publish the reports of such exercises.

### Quality Council initiated special reviews

**83** The Quality Council might decide that it required to collect systematic evidence on an aspect of provision across institutions. For example, as part of its support of enhancement it might wish to survey student or employer feedback systems across Iceland. In such circumstances it might be appropriate to commission a special Quality Board review. Requests for such special reviews would normally be discussed initially between the chairs of the Council and Board to agree a broad methodology, timescale and funding. Normally, the reports of such reviews would be published by the Council, either independently or jointly with the Board.

### Quality Board initiated special reviews

**84** There may be circumstances in which the Board might itself wish to initiate a review. For example, there could be circumstances where the Board would wish to take a broader look across the higher education system at a particular dimension that had system-wide characteristics. An example of this might be the provision of distance learning. Alternatively, the Board may require to look in more detail at a particular aspect of an institution's provision. This would arise for example where a legitimate cause for concern in relation to the quality of provision and/or the standards of awards had been raised concerning some particular provision. In such circumstances it is important for the reputation of the whole system that action can be taken to either refute unfounded allegations or remedy identified problems. It is anticipated that such special reviews would be infrequent. These special reviews may require specific funding, probably from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Special procedures will apply to these reviews. The trigger for such reviews could include apparently well founded media coverage or widespread

negative well founded comments from students or employers. The intention to initiate such a review would be discussed with the chair of the Quality Council and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The first stages in such reviews would be to establish the precise nature of the alleged problem and to confirm that the allegations were well founded i.e. in context had

a reasonable evidence base. Once, and only if, this had been established, a review of the alleged problem area would be undertaken as soon as practicable. Where a legitimate cause for concern had been established and a full review undertaken, the Board would normally publish the associated final report.

## SECTION 7: Continuing and additional accreditation

*This section on accreditation is included for completeness. At this stage, however, this is an outline of the proposed direction of travel. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will be coming to a final view on these matters during the lifetime of this edition of the Handbook. In the meantime existing accreditations will remain live and applications for additional accreditations should continue to be made to the Ministry.*

### Rationale

**85** All institutions have been granted accreditation to provide defined subjects at defined levels under the previous Icelandic arrangements for accreditation. These accreditation outcomes are carried forward into the new QEF arrangements. Under the new arrangements, the Quality Board is responsible for making recommendations to the Minister of Education, Science and Culture regarding continuing and additional accreditations. This section outlines how decisions regarding continuing and additional accreditation will be managed and also introduces the new category of a self-accrediting institution.

### Continuation of existing accreditations

**86** The reports of the existing accreditation exercises, in addition to the recommendations regarding accreditation, included commentaries and recommendations that were very useful and important. Progress on how these recommendations have been taken forward by institutions will be discussed during the annual meetings and subsequently in the Quality Board-led reviews. It is expected that, as appropriate, institution-led subject level reviews will also address the issues raised in the accreditation and other previous Ministry-led reviews.

**87** The continuation of existing accreditation in each subject area will be through the processes associated with the institution-led subject level reviews. As indicated in Section 3 (paragraph 41) above, institutions will appoint international experts to the review team. The Board will agree with the institution on the appointment of at least one independent international expert (from outwith Iceland) who, in addition to taking a full part in the review, will report to the Board in

relation to the robustness of the review process, and continuing eligibility for accreditation in that area. The costs involved in including that member in the team will be borne by the Board (see footnote to paragraph 41). The Board will maintain a cumulative record of these reports for each institution and link them to the reports from the Board-led reviews at the institutional level for each institution. In the light of the evidence that is then available to the Board, following the confirmation of the report of the institution level review for each institution, a recommendation will be made to the Minister regarding the continued accreditation at that institution. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will then inform the institution regarding continued accreditation. It should be noted that, during the first cycle of the QEF, this procedure cannot be fully operational since institutions will not have had the opportunity to complete a full cycle of reviews at the subject-level. For the first cycle, therefore, the recommendation from the Board to the Ministry on continuing accreditation will normally be made on the basis of only the institutional level report.

### Additional accreditations

**88** An institution will apply for additional areas and/or levels of accreditation to the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. The Minister will then seek advice from the Quality Board. The Board will then establish a subject panel to undertake a special accreditation process. Where the additional accreditation relates to an area in which the institution already has some provision, the accreditation process will normally be run in tandem with the institution-led subject level review in that area. This will help to minimise additional demands. Essentially, this process will expand on the process outlined in paragraph 87 above, but will usually involve more than one subject expert and there will be slightly greater reporting responsibilities to the Board. Normally, the Board will make recommendations to the Minister regarding additional accreditations following the availability of the Quality Board-led institutional level review i.e. on the same timescale as for re-accreditations outlined in paragraph 87 above.

**89** Where an institution is applying for accreditation in an entirely new subject area, on receipt of the request from the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, the Board will appoint a complete team of subject experts to undertake a full review of the proposal. The team

will report to the Board who will in turn make a recommendation to the Minister, again taking into account the outcomes of other subject level and institutional level reviews.

### Self-accrediting institutions

**90** The QEF is based firmly on the principle of supporting institutions in the robust management of enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and securing the standards of their awards. It follows from this that if an institution can clearly and consistently demonstrate the robustness of its quality processes over two or more cycles, it would be in a position to manage its own processes of accreditation – both in relation to re-accreditations in existing areas and in relation to potential new areas. This represents a very significant mark of confidence in the institution's quality systems and operational and strategic management. Such a status will only therefore be considered where there is very clear evidence to justify such confidence. Normally, only institutions consistently receiving judgements of **full confidence in their management of quality and standards** in their Quality Board-led institution level reviews would be eligible for consideration as self-accrediting institutions. Because of the need to establish a consistently excellent record in managing quality and standards over a period of time, self-accrediting status will not be considered

during the first cycle of operation of the QEF. When appropriate, the Quality Board will make recommendations regarding self-accrediting status to the Minister of Education, Science and Culture in the light of the track record of an institution's quality reviews – both subject level and institution level. Where there is evidence of careful, pervasive, consistent, evidence-based management of quality and standards based on solid institutional structures over time, the Board will recommend to the Minister that the institution should be granted self-accrediting status. Self-accrediting institutions will of course remain full participants in the QEF with its framework of reviews. Where the evidence indicated that confidence could no longer be maintained in a self-accrediting institution, it would be recommended that the status be removed.

### Scope of self-accreditation

**91** Normally, the scope of institutional authority within self-accreditation status will be limited to the broad subject domain(s) in which accreditation has previously been granted. In addition, self-accreditation authority should not extend beyond the highest level of award for which the institution has already received accreditation. Any self-accrediting institution wishing to exceed these limits would proceed as indicated above in paragraphs 88 and 89 for additional accreditation.

## SECTION 8: The Quality Council

### Rationale

**92** The structure of the Quality Council and the Quality Board has been created to reflect and to embody the fundamental principles of the Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic higher education. The key role given to the Quality Council reflects the fundamental ownership of quality and standards by the autonomous higher education institutions and their students, together with a strong presence of Icelandic structures and cultures. This is mirrored by the international and independent structure of the Board. Together, the Council and Board provide a powerful platform for assuring and enhancing quality and safeguarding the standards of the awards of Icelandic higher education. Their activities taken together reflect the pressures and priorities of Iceland, but continue to locate the quality and standards of the higher education system firmly in a global context.

### Structure

**93** The membership of the Quality Council is rooted in the higher education institutions of Iceland involving the Rectors of the seven institutions. It is important that the Council is able to take an overarching perspective on the whole higher education sector in Iceland. The chair of the Council is therefore independent, appointed by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. Elsewhere in this Handbook it is made clear that students are perceived as key partners in higher education and in managing the quality and standards of provision. The membership of the Council therefore includes two student representatives. Higher education plays a fundamentally important role in the development of science and technology, and the Council also therefore includes a representative of the Science Committee of the Science and Technology Policy Council. Finally, the secretariat for the Council (and for the Board) is provided by Rannis which is independent of Government and also brings with it considerable expertise and valuable insights from other related evaluation processes in Iceland. The current membership of the Council and contact details are given in Annex 2.

### Activities

**94** The Quality Council has very recently been convened and is in the process of agreeing its initial programme of activities. When available this will be widely distributed. The following items are therefore illustrative of the kinds of activities in which the Council will be engaged.

**95** One of the key functions of the Quality Council is to advise the Board on the development and implementation of the QEF, and this Handbook is one of the first fruits of that interaction. The Council will advise and provide feedback to the Board on progress as the various elements of the QEF unfold during the first cycle. The Council and Board will jointly host an annual monitoring conference, which, amongst other things, will share annual outcomes from the monitoring of the operation of the QEF. The Council will play a crucial role in advising on developments for the second cycle of the QEF.

**96** In addition, the Quality Council will play a leading role in supporting the enhancement of teaching and learning. It will organize workshops and seminars on aspects of the QEF.

**97** The Quality Council is likely also to develop a series of activities focused on aspects of teaching and learning that pose challenges across the sector. In some cases these topics will be identified by the Council itself, while in others the topics may be generated from the outcomes of the Review activities. These topics might include for example:

- Assessment
- Developing graduate attributes
- Problem-based learning
- Student-centred learning

**98** In many cases, these activities will be designed to share good and interesting practice from across Iceland. In other cases international practitioners will be invited from overseas to share their expertise.

**99** All the enhancement activities of the Quality Council will generate valuable material to support individual and institutional initiatives. The Council will collect and publish this material on its website. It is also intended that the Council website would provide international cross-referencing to

other websites providing associated materials. In appropriate circumstances, the outcomes from these workshops may contribute to the development of guidelines to support the implementation of various aspects of the QEF.

**100** In general the Council is keen to maintain a dialogue with the sector and to shape its activities in accordance with the needs and wishes of practitioners. Please do keep in touch with the Council secretariat.

## SECTION 9: Monitoring and review

### Rationale

**101** It is important that the QEF should practise what it preaches by itself engaging in evidence-based reflection! The following paragraphs outline the approach to monitoring and review of the QEF.

### Annual monitoring

**102** All formal interactions in the Board-led institutional reviews will be formally monitored through brief questionnaires. All review teams will be given a questionnaire relating to their training and preparation for reviews and to the support received during reviews. Similarly, all institutions will be asked to provide information on their review experience – before, during and following review. This information will be collated and shared with the sector both on our website and through an annual feedback conference. Feedback will also be sought on the effectiveness of the annual discussions and on all conferences and workshops sponsored by the Quality Board or Quality Council.

**103** There will be an annual conference for the sector organized jointly by the Quality Council and Quality Board at which outcomes from our monitoring will be fed back to the sector and additional contributions invited.

**104** In addition, there will be regular interaction with the Quality Council which has a defined role in providing feedback to the Quality Board on the operation of the QEF.

**105** Where the monitoring evidence indicates that it would be desirable to make minor changes to the QEF, this would be undertaken by the Quality Board following consultation with the Quality Council. Any such minor change would be documented and published as an annex to the Handbook and distributed to all institutions.

### Review

**106** Following the first cycle of institutional reviews (i.e. during 2015-2016) a full review will be undertaken, drawing on evidence from the accumulation of the annual monitoring process, a survey of the institutions, discussion with the Quality Council, discussion with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and feedback given at a QEF Review Conference to be held during 2015-2016. As appropriate, a 2nd Edition of the QEF Handbook will then be devised and published.

### PS

**107** Keep in touch. The paragraphs above outline the formal feedback mechanisms. However, we would be very pleased to receive feedback and comments at any time. This can most easily be provided through the secretariat to the Board at [qef@rannis.is](mailto:qef@rannis.is)

# ANNEX 1: The Quality Board membership and remit

## Membership

**Prof. Norman Sharp (Chair), Independent, ex Director QAA Scotland, Scotland**

**Dr Barbara Brittingham, Director, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, USA**

**Prof. Tove Bull, Professor and ex Rector, University of Tromso, Norway**

**Dr Jean-Marie Hombert, Research Director, University of Lyon, France, and ex-Director of Social Sciences and Humanities, CNRS, France**

**Prof. Rita McAllister, Independent, ex Vice-Principal, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland**

**Dr Frank Quinault, Independent, ex Director for Teaching and Learning, University of St Andrews, Scotland**

Secretary to the Quality Board: Magnús Lyngdal  
Magnússon, Deputy Director, Rannis

## Remit

The remit of the Quality Board will include, under commission from the Minister of Education, Science and Culture:

- Designing the methodology for the external assurance and enhancement of quality and standards for recommendation to the Minister following consultation with the Quality Council.
- Publishing a handbook of the methodology to be implemented for the external assurance of quality and standards.
- Overseeing the execution of the agreed scheme for the external assurance of quality and standards.
- Publishing reports on the outcomes of the quality assurance processes.
- Consulting with the Quality Council in relation to methodologies for external quality assurance.
- Advising the Quality Council and Minister on internal approaches to quality assurance and enhancement.
- Reporting to the Minister and the Quality Council on the outcomes of the external quality reviews.
- Advising the Quality Council on the enhancement implications of its activities.

## Language

The normal working language of the Quality Board, its panels, sub groups and working parties will be English. The prime language of its reports and any publications will be English with translations provided as appropriate.

## ANNEX 2: The Quality Council membership and remit

### Membership

**Prof. Aslaug Geirsdottir, University of Iceland, chair, appointed without nomination**

Deputy: Prof. Vilmundur Gudnason, Director, Icelandic Heart Association and University of Iceland, appointed without nomination

**Rector Kristin Ingolfsdottir, University of Iceland, nominated by the Rectors Conference**

Deputy: Prof. Jon Atli Benediktsson, Vice-Rector, University of Iceland, nominated by the Rectors Conference

**Rector Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Reykjavik University, nominated by the Rectors Conference**

Deputy: Prof. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Reykjavik University, nominated by the Rectors Conference

**Rector Hjalmar H. Ragnarsson, Iceland Academy of the Arts, nominated by the Rectors Conference**

Deputy: Ms. Jona Finnsdóttir, Administrative Director, Iceland Academy of the Arts, nominated by the Rectors Conference

**Rector Agust Sigurdsson, Agricultural University of Iceland, nominated by the Rectors Conference**

Deputy: Prof. Asa L. Aradóttir, Agricultural University of Iceland, nominated by the Rectors Conference

**Rector Bryndis Hlodversdottir, Bifrost University, nominated by the Rectors Conference**

Deputy: Prof. Jon Olafsson, Bifrost University, nominated by the Rectors Conference

**Rector Stefan B. Sigurdsson, University of Akureyri, nominated by the Rectors Conference**

Deputy: Ms. Sigrun Magnusdóttir, Head of Quality Assurance, University of Akureyri, nominated by the Rectors Conference

**Rector Skuli Skulason, Holar University College, nominated by the Rectors Conference**

Deputy: Associate Prof. Gudrun Thora Gunnarsdóttir, Holar University College, nominated by the Rectors Conference

**Prof. Magnus Karl Magnusson, University of Iceland, nominated by the Science Committee (of the Science and Technology Policy Council)**

Deputy: Prof. Sigrun Adalbjarnardóttir, University of Iceland, nominated by the Science Committee (of the Science and Technology Policy Council)

**Garbiella Unnur Kristjansdottir, student, nominated by the University of Iceland's Student Association**

Deputy: Jens Fjalar Skaptason, student, nominated by the University of Iceland's Student Association

**Aldis Geirdal Sverrisdottir, student, nominated by the Student Association**

Deputy: Bjorn Atli Axelsson, student, nominated by the Student Association

Secretary to the Quality Council: Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon, Deputy Director, Rannís

### Remit

The remit of the Quality Council will include:

- Advising the Quality Board on the methodology of external quality assurance.
- Advising the Quality Board on the implementation of the system of external quality assurance.
- Supporting the sector on the development and enhancement of internal quality mechanisms.
- Sponsoring a range of activities (workshops, seminars etc) to support the sector in enhancing the quality of the student experience in Icelandic higher education.
- Producing a range of publications drawing on, inter alia, the reports of the Quality Board designed to support the institutions in enhancing the student experience.

### Language

The normal working language of the Quality Council will be Icelandic.

## ANNEX 3: Guidelines for the production of a Reflective Analysis

### Background

**1** The compilation of a Reflective Analysis is in many respects the most valuable element in the whole Quality Enhancement Framework. It is through the Reflective Analysis that the university community comes together to collate evidence about its performance and achievements, reflect on what the evidence means, and, plan its future enhancement and strategy. In many cases these activities will be happening already as part of the institutional processes for operational and strategic planning. It is certainly intended that the process of compiling a Reflective Analysis becomes an integral element within institutional quality management and planning processes as opposed to being an 'added extra' imposing an unnecessary burden on an institution.

**2** The guidelines in this Annex are intended to be exactly that: guidelines and not instructions. It is for each institution to decide how it wishes to approach the Reflective Analysis to best meet the requirements of its own context. Nonetheless, however it is compiled, in order to fulfil its function it is important that it is genuinely reflective (i.e. is analytical of the evidence of the past), is evidence based (i.e. avoids unfounded extravagant claims) and is comprehensive in its coverage.

### Length of a Reflective Analysis

**3** There are no penalties for documents that are either particularly long or short. To some extent, the right length will vary between institutions and the range of provision. It is likely that 'the right length' may also be different for an institution at different times depending on the complexities of recent developments and challenges. In general, it is unlikely that a well-constructed Reflective Analysis would exceed 50 pages, and it might be considerably shorter.

### Style of a Reflective Analysis

**4** In general it is helpful to avoid too much description. Where institutional policies, structures or approaches need to be described reference can be made to separate documents that can be submitted along with the Reflective Analysis. This would usually be the case, for example, in relation to general committee structures, statements of policy, or quality assurance processes that are

documented in a Quality Manual or series of papers.

**5** It is most helpful if, rather than extensive description, the Reflective Analysis focuses on analysis. Clear statements of the available evidence (either in the text or attached in annexes, or indeed in associated submitted documents) should be given followed by analysis. In the analysis it is helpful to be evaluative in relation to institutional expectations and, as appropriate, in comparison to national and international expectations and benchmarks. It is helpful also to indicate the intentions regarding future policy and practice that follow from the analysis.

### Characteristics of a good and a bad Reflective Analysis

**6** A Reflective Analysis that is very unhelpful both to the institution and in the context of the QEF is one that is largely descriptive, makes little use of evidence and is peppered with unsubstantiated extravagant claims. A good Reflective Analysis that will be of real value to the institution is one that is, as far as practicable, evidence based, analytical and openly self-critical. As the Preamble to this Handbook makes very clear, it is recognized that managing higher education quality and standards in 21st Century is extremely challenging. Even the very finest world-class universities recognize room for improvement and further development. That is the very nature of the world we inhabit. A worthwhile Reflective Analysis will reflect that complex reality.

**7** As far as the Board is concerned, the Reflective Analysis is a confidential document. The open recognition of weakness where it occurs is an indicator of strength. It indicates an effective quality management system. The lack of recognition of weaknesses that subsequently become apparent during review processes indicates the reverse: a quality system that would justify little confidence.

### Authorship of the Reflective Analysis

**8** It is for each institution to decide on the authorship of the document. Experience indicates that, irrespective of whose hands are on the keyboard, the most valuable documents emerge from very wide discussion and debate across an institution. In some cases, a bottom-up approach has been taken with contributions from Course Boards (or equivalent) and service areas funnelling up through schools and faculties to senior management levels. In other cases, a more top-down approach is taken with senior management

laying out a broad initial framework, which is then developed and critiqued throughout the institution. However it is achieved, involvement of the broad institutional community is important.

**9** In compiling the Reflective Analysis it is particularly important that there is a full involvement of students in the process.

**10** However the document is prepared, it should be signed off and submitted to the Quality Board by the Rector.

### Additional Material

**11** As indicated above, the institution should submit along with the Reflective Analysis any pre-existing documents that will help the review team to understand the institution and to interpret the evidence and analysis contained in the main document. This is likely to include any quality manual (or group of papers describing the quality system), the current strategic plan and any current operational plans, and the current prospectus(es).

**12** The Reflective Analysis should contain an Annex of all the evidential material that has been used in compiling the document and which, potentially, will be available to the review team, either in advance of or during the review.

**13** It is important for the Quality Board to state clearly that only documentation submitted to the Board or review team through these formal channels (i.e. along with the Reflective Analysis or directly between the institutional contact and review team/Quality Board secretariat) will be considered within the review process. No member of the review team or Board will be able to accept any material submitted by any other route.

**14** It is for the institution to decide the most convenient form in which to make material available. It may, for example, be most convenient to make material available electronically, either on a disc or by granting access to sections of the institution's database.

### Content of the Reflective Analysis

**15** It is requested that every Reflective Analysis includes a Case Study and also an Annex listing the evidence base used in the process of compiling the Reflective Analysis and potentially available to the review team. Other than these elements it is for each institution to decide on the

content and structure that is most appropriate in its own context.

**16 Case study.** Each Reflective Analysis should include a Case Study to provide an illustration of the institution's strategic and/or operational management of quality enhancement in action. As with the rest of the Reflective Analysis, it would be helpful if, in addition to describing the particular example, the presentation of the Case Study included an analysis of what the institution was seeking to achieve and an evaluation of the extent to which goals have been achieved. It would be particularly helpful if, where appropriate, the Case Study cross-referred to other sections of the Reflective Analysis. The Case Study can be submitted as an annex to the Reflective Analysis or as a separate document, or indeed in any appropriate accessible format appropriate to the nature of the Case Study. (Separate guidelines will be produced by the Quality Board offering some possible examples of case study material.)

**17 Indicative section headings for the Reflective Analysis.** The following sections are suggested as one possible outline structure for a Reflective Analysis. These suggestions are purely indicative and are certainly not intended to be exhaustive:

- **Introduction** including a statement of the current context, mission and structure of the institution together with an indication of any planned future strategic developments. The introduction might also make reference to the outcomes of recent external quality processes including accreditations. This section might also usefully highlight how the Reflective analysis was put together and the extent to which staff, students and externals have been involved in the process. A brief guide to supplementary material might also be useful together with a reference to the role of the Case Study.
- **Safeguarding Standards.** This section could helpfully provide an analysis of the effectiveness of institutional processes used to define and safeguard standards including: the effectiveness of validation and review processes; the use of learning outcomes; the effectiveness of assessment practices and processes; the use of benchmarks. As above, this section could cover processes at the institutional level as well as subject/course/faculty based processes.

- **The Student Learning Experience.** This section could helpfully provide an analysis of the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms for managing: student recruitment and, where appropriate, selection; student retention and progression; student feedback; the management of the student learning; the supervision of research; the development of graduate attributes and employability; the learning environment including student support services, IT, libraries etc; the equality of opportunity in learning for all students; staff development etc. This section is likely to refer to processes and structures at both institutional level and subject/course/faculty level.
- **Managing enhancement.** This section could helpfully include an analysis of: the institution's strategic approach to the management of enhancing the quality of the student learning experience; the use of external and internal reference points in the management of enhancement; the

institution's approach to the collation and dissemination of good practice etc.

- **Conclusion.** The concluding section could helpfully reflect, building on the previous sections, on the overall effectiveness of the institutional management of quality and standards including commentary on: the effectiveness and use of management information systems; the effectiveness of the overall institutional approach to managing and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience; the effectiveness of the institution's approach to safeguarding standards; and, the possible directions of future developments.

Please note that the above is intended only as an indicative outline of a possible structure and topics for a Reflective Analysis. It is by no means definitive or exhaustive, and institutions should adopt the structure that allows them to most effectively provide an analysis of their management of quality and standards.

## ANNEX 4: Timeline of stages in the Board-led Institutional reviews

### Submission of Reflective Analysis

#### **3 Months**

Reflective Analysis confirmed as appropriate to allow review to proceed.

Review team feed back initial impressions to review team chair.

Review team chair communicates overall impressions to institutional contact together with any requests for further information, and agrees provisional programme for visit in advance of visit. Visit starts with private meeting of review team for one day. This concludes with confirmation of programme for visit and requests for any additional material.

Visit – normally 3-5 days in institution. First half-day's programme decided by institution. Final

meeting generally a 'wash-up' with senior staff. No conclusions given by review team. Private meeting of review team for up to one day to agree conclusions and overall headlines of report.

#### **2 Weeks**

Headline letter sent to institution.

#### **4 Weeks**

Draft report sent to review team for comment.

#### **3 Weeks**

Review team secretary sends draft report to institution for comment.

#### **8 Weeks comments back from institution**

Final draft prepared and meeting of Quality Board to agree final version with confirmed judgement. (Rector invited to attend for part of this meeting).











