

## Subject-Level Reviews across the Icelandic Higher Education System: From knowledge to action

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## Overview

- Subject-Level Review (SLR)
- Sector-wide view of higher education
- Common challenges of academic units
- From knowledge to action



## What is a Subject-Level Review?

- “...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”
- Self-review of academic unit
  - Psychology
    - Faculty of Social Sciences (UNAK)
    - Faculty of Psychology (Uoi)
  - Faculty of Life and Environmental Sciences at Uoi (Tourism Studies, Geography, Biology)



## What is a Subject-Level Review?

- Requirements:
  - Area coverage (all degrees, all levels)
  - Responsibilities for collaborative provision
  - Timing (1 per 5 year cycle)
  - Involvement of students
  - Involvement of external experts
  - Formal report handed in to QB with findings and **follow-up processes**
  - ENQA
  - Institutional quality manual



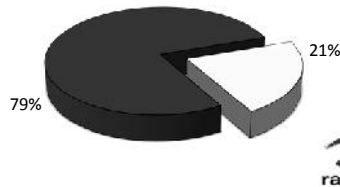
## What is a Subject-Level Review?

- Should contain 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
  - Staffing and staff development
  - Student feedback and subsequent actions
  - Support services effectiveness
  - Development and enhancement strategies



### Overview of Progress

- Total SLRs to be turned in: 58
- SLRs completed to date: 46
- SLRs in progress: 12



### Sector-Wide View of Icelandic HE

- 40 pages on average + annexes
  - When complete: approximately 2,300 pages + annexes
- SLRs not made public as a rule
  - Except IAA by internal decision
- BUT: Opportunity to compile a sector-wide analysis/assessment of all academic units in Iceland
  - QB Secretariat
- This work has started
  - Preliminary outcomes
  - Lessons learned
  - Feeds into QEF2



### Some Best Practices

- Comparisons to other units within same HEI and with other HEIs
- Network of Public Universities in Iceland
  - Resource sharing
  - Collaboration in research and teaching
- Close collaborations with industry
- Joint degrees (national/international)
- International research collaboration
- International visiting professor programs
- International practicum experiences



### Some Best Practices

- Formal junior faculty mentoring programs
- Start-up funds for research for new hires
- Standing committees on Learning Outcomes
- Formal mechanisms for tracking Master's and Ph.D. student progress
- Custom surveys
- Checklists, scorecards, and quality project management tools



Table 1: Content of the programme description

	Yes	No	Referred to
Qualification awarded			
Level of qualification			
Specific admission requirements			
Specific arrangements for recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal, and informal)			
Qualification requirements and regulations			
Profile of the programme			
Key learning outcomes			
Occupational profiles of graduates with examples			
Access to further studies			
Course structure diagram with credits (60 per full-time academic year)			
Examination regulations, assessment and grading			
Graduation requirements			
Mode of study (full-time, part-time, e-learning...)			



Dim.	Goal	Measure
Research	1-5 ISI articles per year per position	Number of ISI articles per position
	35 research points per year per position	Number of research points per position
	2 postdoctoral scholars at the department at any time	Number of postdoctoral scholars
	Grants from competition funds	Amount per position
Teaching	2 doctoral students graduated per year (3 study 'ng at any time)	Number of doctoral students
	10 MS students graduated per year	Number of graduated MS students per year
	Survey on student satisfaction by The Social Science Research Institute (BS students, MS students, graduated students)	Absolute values and changes between surveys
Service	(Measure of graduated students in the market place)	Measure not developed
	Service with, and impact on, local and international society	Measure not developed
Service	Connection with industry and innovation	Number of members from industry participating as advisors to student theses per year
		Number of theses partly serviced at institutes and companies out of <input type="text"/> per year




Dim.	Goal	Measure
Research	1.5 ISI articles per year per position	Number of ISI articles per position
	35 research points per year per position	Number of research points per position
	2 postdoctoral scholars at the department at any time	Number of postdoctoral scholars
	Counts from competing funds	Amount per position
Teaching	2 doctoral students graduated per year (8 studying at any time)	Number of graduated doctoral students per year
	10 MS students graduated per year	Number of graduated MS students per year
Service	Measure of graduated students in the market place	Measure not developed
	Service with, and impact on, local and international society	Measure not developed
	Connection with industry and innovation	Number of members from industry participating as advisors to students/theses per year
		Number of theses partly written at institutes and companies outside of _____ per year

**Number of ISI articles per position**

**1.5 ISI articles per year per position**

Changes between surveys




Recommendations Reference to SLR chapter

Accountability Deadline

Expected outcome

List of metrics and deliverables

Recommendation	Ref.	Responsible	Deliverables	Expected outcome	Deadline	Resp.
A mechanism needs to be set up to ensure that graduate students meet with their supervisor regularly, and hold meetings with their whole committee at least once a year.					Oct. 15	Graduate Studies Committee



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Oct. 15

Graduate Studies Committee




### Strategy in SLRs

- Confusion between *Action Plans*, *Priorities*, and *Vision Statements* at unit level in SLRs
- Calls for action generally lack
  - Descriptions of specific steps
  - Milestone dates and deadlines
  - Deliverables
  - Identification of data that can inform on progress towards goals
  - Accountabilities
  - Resources




### Sample Action Plans/Priorities/ Vision Statements

- Example 1:
  - To monitor [...] programmes by many different means: by using surveys, and listening to students, teachers and other staff members, and our partners, as well as the community that we serve
- Example 2:
  - To strengthen the department's teaching community
  - To provide a rich and creative environment for learning and teaching
  - To support innovative teaching methods that can enrich [...]
  - To ensure active international relations by participating in collaborative projects, encouraging student and teacher exchanges
  - To strengthen the staff/teacher training
  - To strengthen relations with the professional field



### Sample Action Plans/Priorities/ Vision Statements

- Example 3:
  - Education towards a BS degree should meet international standards and provide the background needed for admission of students to graduate studies at the best foreign universities
  - Availability of essential courses should be secured, if needed through collaboration with other university departments and/or institutions outside the university
  - Programmes offered to foreign exchange students should be strengthened, e.g. with summer schools, and open to students residing in Iceland



### Strategy in SLRs

- Benchmarking largely absent at unit level
  - Degree and course design
  - Comparator metrics (grant money, publications)
- Data used inconsistently to inform strategy
- Lack of follow-up of previous external reviews/accreditations
- Lack of plans for follow-up of issues identified in SLRs



### Common Challenges across SLRs

- High faculty:student ratios
- Overtime teaching
- Little professional development of junior staff
- High percentages of
  - coursework taught by sessional staff
  - practicum coursework (i. verknám) supervised by sessional staff
- Master's level studies
  - Underresourced
  - Not appreciated as an independent study level



### Common Challenges across SLRs

- Lack of mechanisms for unit heads to respond to staff issues
  - Course assignments
  - Course evaluations
  - Limited productivity
- Unclear processes for monitoring master's and doctoral-level student progression
- Lack of special monitoring of international students
- Lack of resources for in-unit student advising/counselling
  - General support services vs. discipline-specific academic advising



### Challenges related to Learning Outcomes

- Student dissatisfaction with teaching strategies
  - „Too many lectures“
  - May be a methodological or perception issue
- Student dissatisfaction with methods of assessment
  - „Too many exams, too little formative assessment“
- Few reports of matching assessment to learning outcomes
- Few reports of use of grading rubrics
  - Transparency in grading



### My observations about the SLR process

- Need for more consistency in SLRs (to a degree)
- Quality Enhancement Handbook is not prescriptive for SLRs
  - No wonder that there is considerable variability across SLRs
  - No wonder that units do not know what were are looking for, in terms of strategy, action plans, etc.
  - Some benefits to that approach
- Opportunity for general guidelines in QEF2
  - Submission guide for SLRs (not prescriptive)
  - Training/consultancy from Quality Council and Secretariat



### Further Suggestions for SLRs in QEF2

- Sample statistics
  - Intake rates for programs
  - Exceptions to requirements for program entry
  - Second year retention rate
  - Time to degree in undergraduate
  - Time to degree in graduate
  - Total number of students and FTEs
  - Number of tenured lecturers.
  - Students per tenured lecturers (ratio)
  - Student satisfaction
  - Sessional staff data
  - Experiences of international students
  - Alumni data/feedback



