



# Agricultural University of Iceland

## ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT



NOVEMBER 2024

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

This annual report outlines the progress made on the recommendations from the 2022 Institution-Wide Review (IWR). The Review took place from November 1-4, 2022 and the results were published on April 25, 2023. It also provides a brief summary of key quality initiatives carried out at the Agricultural University of Iceland over the past year, as well as overview for the internal quality assurance (IQA) reviews scheduled for the upcoming 12 months.

# 2

## PROGRESS FOR IMPROVEMENT FROM PREVIOUS INSTITUTION- WIDE REVIEW (IWR)

### Documentation of common operating models - engage faculty, students and stakeholders in relevant phases

Since the last IWR, notable advancements have been made, particularly in improvement initiatives. A consultant was temporarily hired to assist with development activities following the review. One significant outcome of this effort is the creation of a new handbook for the quality management system. Additionally, progress has been made in updating the electronic quality handbook on Sharepoint, which provides an overview of AUI's policies and operational guidelines.

Key achievements include a revised quality policy and foundational quality documents addressing governance and management practices, roles and responsibilities, policy formulation and implementation, goal setting, action plans, follow-up strategies, and the management reviews of the quality management system.

The faculties and various units within AUI have been encouraged and supported in refining their written procedures, contributing to ongoing improvements in AUI's quality and record-keeping systems.

Students involvement in strategy work and decision-making has increased significantly. Feedback from students is now used more efficiently to improve study programmes. Moreover, students actively participate in the University Council, Quality Committee, Ethics Committee, Undergraduate Committee, Graduate Committee, Vocational Education Committee, faculty meetings, and university-wide meetings.

Student representatives are also active in communication and marketing efforts. Meetings are held to gather their views on possible improvements, and they collaborate with the marketing team.

A new staff member has been hired, and one of his assignments is to enhance cooperation with stakeholders for improvements in study programmes, research and innovation, continuous learning and infrastructure. This role also involves new alternative funding opportunities and engaging alumni.

New collaboration agreements have been established, such as with Matis to increase collaboration in food processing and related fields, and with the Environment Agency to enhance cooperation in CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring and climate change. A collaboration agreement with Land & Forest Iceland is under development.

Several meetings with stakeholders from the industries, associations, universities and research institutes have generated new projects and collaboration ideas.

### **Inconsistencies in the Implementation of Quality Processes Between Faculties**

To standardize and enhance the implementation of quality processes across faculties, several initiatives have been introduced.

Firstly, a Quality Council has been established, replacing the previous Quality Committee. This new council, chaired by the rector, includes AUI's executive management and a student representative. It oversees policy implementation and quality system activities, ensuring alignment with university goals and continuous improvement. The council regularly reviews the university's operations to assess the quality system's effectiveness and identify potential improvements.

Secondly, a revised quality policy has been implemented, outlining compliance with the formal requirements for internal quality assurance, as specified in Chapter IV of the Law on Universities (63/2006). This policy serves as the foundation for the university's quality system.

Thirdly, a centralized quality handbook, available on SharePoint, serves as a resource for best practices and quality procedures. Faculties are encouraged to use this handbook to align their processes, promoting consistency and facilitating quality monitoring.

These measures along with training and accountability for faculty heads, aim to ensure consistent application of quality processes while addressing the unique needs of each faculty.

## The Strategy Towards Internationalisation Needs to Be Accompanied by a Bilingual Culture

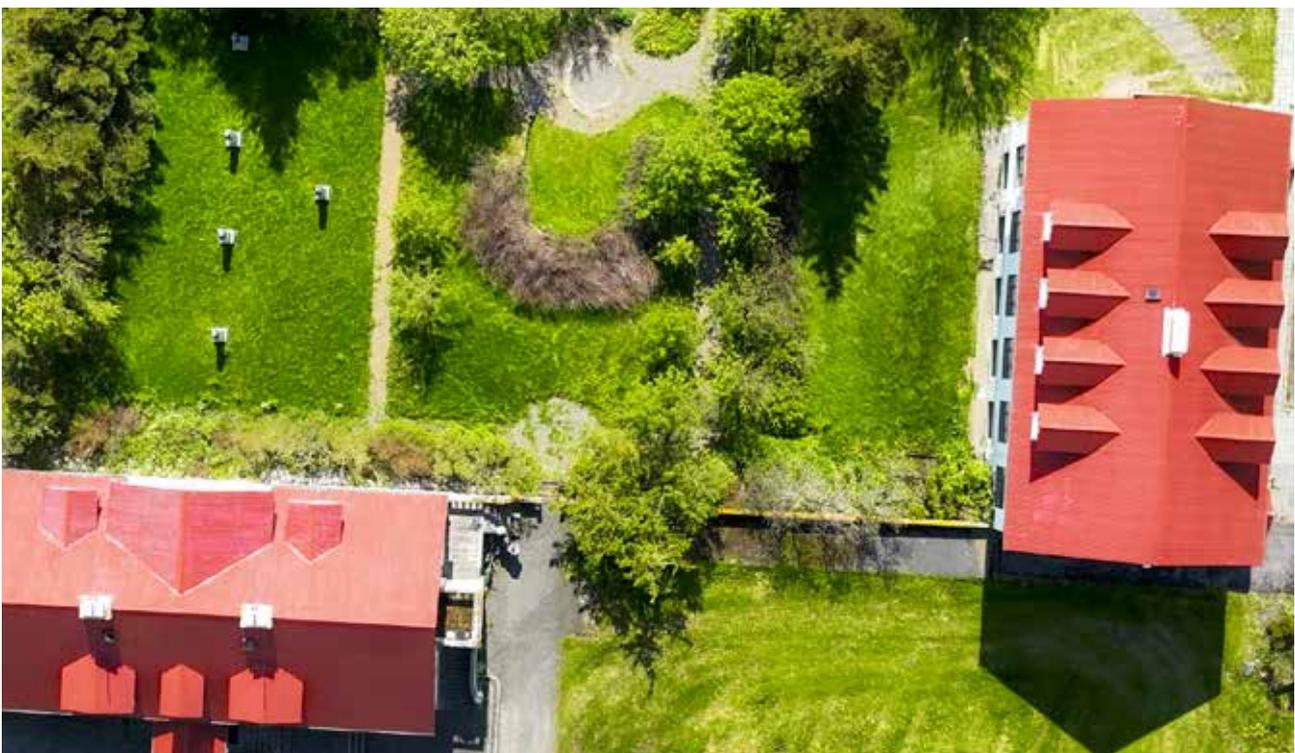
Efforts to promote bilingualism include offering Icelandic courses, ranging from beginner to advanced levels, for foreign employees. The courses have been well-attended and foster better integration among staff. Human resources and quality communications are sent out in both Icelandic and English.

Icelandic staff members are encouraged to enhance their English proficiency. Several have taken courses through Erasmus+, with more planning to do so in the coming year. Staff meetings include bilingual presentations, with slides in both Icelandic and English, and discussions are conducted in both languages. The university website, available in both Icelandic and English, is under review. Also, key university documents are published in both languages. The AUI's language policy is under review to further support these efforts.

## Management of Research

The Research Committee has actively encouraged academic staff to apply for international funding, resulting in larger projects and increased research activities. Individual project management remains the responsibility of project managers; however, follow-up and support from the Research and International Office have been strengthened to ensure deliverables are met, budgets are adhered to, and contractual requirements are fulfilled.

Under a new organizational structure, the Research Council will replace the current Research Committee. Led by the Head of faculty, the council will strengthen research policy, develop the research agenda at the institutional level, and evaluate the impact of research on local society.



# 3

## INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEWS

Based on the feedback from the last IWR, the university has formalized the procedural description for the planning and approval process of new study programmes. This action aims to ensure and verify the quality of both the new programmes and the associated preparation process. In addition, the university has approved formal procedures for the evaluation and regular revision of study programmes. This includes the renewal of the annual review process, alongside the implementation of a checklist for self-assessment and ongoing revision of the programmes. Furthermore, the university has updated and approved the rules governing the undergraduate and graduate committees.

To increase the diversity of teaching methods, teaching tools such as Mentimeter and Canvas Studio have been acquired. AUI's academics have been offered training in the use of these technologies. Furthermore, trainings days were held in August, with presentations from the Teaching Development Director at the University of Iceland and Teaching Advisors from Reykjavík University. As a result, many academics have revised their teaching approaches and incorporated more practical components into their teaching, following feedback on areas for improvement.

An annual review of all academic programmes has been conducted at the university. Such reviews take place at undergraduate and graduate programme committee meetings where students have seats. At these meetings, procedures and checklists for the regular review of academic programmes are followed up. Key student metrics, such as intake, retention, academic progress, and student success, are monitored. In addition, teaching evaluations and attitude surveys from public universities are considered. Furthermore, the alignment of programme structure and teaching with the learning outcomes for each programme is examined, as well as the involvement of students and external stakeholders in the design and delivery of the programmes. Teaching methods and assessment practices are also reviewed, along with support for teachers. The annual review results provide the basis for making changes, or deciding against them.

A review of the bachelor's programme in landscape architecture is underway. Additionally, the potential synergies between teaching in agricultural science and equine studies at the undergraduate level are being explored.

A thorough review of the M.Sc. programme in Planning, started in 2022 and continued in 2023 alongside the project "Strengthening Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Planning Education," funded by the University Collaboration Fund. The project aimed to enhance collaboration between the Agricultural University of Iceland (LbhÍ), the University of Iceland (HÍ), Reykjavík University (HR), and the Iceland University of the Arts (LHI), improving the M.Sc. programme's quality and efficiency. A report published in December 2024 confirmed that interdisciplinary collaboration could improve planning education. An application for continued funding (2025–2027) has been submitted.

Parallel to this project, a review of the competence criteria for the M.Sc. programme in planning was undertaken. This included examining the latest requirements defined by the European Council of

Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU) regarding qualifications for planning professionals and the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) regarding educational qualification criteria in the field. Icelandic local conditions were also considered as a guiding principle.

The revision of the programme focuses on improving students' participation in on-site classes (between sessions with online teaching), encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, and promoting higher-level learning outcomes by increasing their engagement in project work within courses (with a corresponding reduction in lectures and exams). Dialogue in project work has been enhanced by increasing the number of students in core planning courses. To achieve this, efforts are underway to consolidate core courses, which will be offered every other year. These changes have yielded excellent results so far, improving the atmosphere in courses, student participation, engagement in project work, and overall learning outcomes. Work will continue in 2025 on this adjustment to the course structure. Furthermore, efforts have been made to create more room for elective courses that allow students to specialise, such as those offered by partner universities. A student representative was selected this autumn to work with the programme management team to enhance the flow of information and communication between management and students.

In September 2024, an equal pay certification maintenance review was conducted, resulting acceptance with no comments. There is an unexplained gender pay gap of 2.41% in favor of women, which can partly be attributed to varying levels of success among academic staff.

AUI has revised its contingency plan to effectively enable the organization to respond to significant future incidents or situations, whether or not they occur. This effort is being conducted in partnership with Civil Defense.

In the next academic year, the university will prioritize the continued development of new quality processes while further enhancing existing ones, ensuring alignment with the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF3). Additionally, a strong emphasis will be placed on fostering continuous improvement.



# 4

## INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (IQA) REVIEWS PLANNED

A new strategy for the Agricultural University of Iceland, came into effect on January 1, 2024 and focuses on strengthening teaching, research, and innovation with an emphasis on sustainable development, increased international collaboration, and securing funding from competitive grants. The strategy aims to improve the quality of education and teaching, increase the number of graduates, and enhance the university's infrastructure to ensure international competitiveness. Through these efforts, AUI seeks to contribute to value creation and sustainability in Icelandic industries and society.

In an effort to simplify the organizational structure of the AUI, the plan is to reduce the number of academic faculties from three to one starting from the next calendar year. These changes also aim to improve implementation of quality processes and continuity in research and educational offerings.

A new academic Head of Faculty and Head of Teaching will be recruited. The Head of Faculty will lead the academic work of the faculty and be the direct manager of the faculties' employees. The role includes professional leadership, integration of operations, and guiding discussions on policy matters related to research, quality and educational offerings. The position carries responsibility for the employees and finances of the faculty, as well as various administrative tasks.

The Head of Teaching's role is to integrate and support the educational offerings across the study programmes. The Head of Teaching will have an overview and follow up on the quality of teaching in collaboration with the programme coordinators, and handle student-related teaching matters concerning the quality of teaching, progress, complaints, or other relevant issues.

Additionally, a new Teaching Council will take over the responsibilities of the Graduate Studies Committee, the Undergraduate Studies Committee, and the Vocational Education Committee.

AUI will continue advancing its quality system in alignment with the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) quality circle:

1. **Plan:** Define strategies, expectations, and goals.
2. **Do:** Implement plans.
3. **Check:** Evaluate results through internal and external audits.
4. **Act:** Apply improvements where necessary.

