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Criteria for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Iceland

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Table of Contents

1. Objectives and Roles	8
1.1 Mission statement.....	8
1.2 Code of ethics.....	8
1.3 Required documentation.....	9
1.4 Possible supplementary documentation.....	9
2. Administration and Organization	10
2.1 Legal framework.....	10
2.2 Required documentation.....	10
2.3 Possible supplementary documentation.....	11
3. Teaching and research and personnel qualifications	12
3.1 Legal framework.....	12
3.2 Academic freedom and freedom of expression.....	12
3.3 Education programmes.....	13
3.4 Personnel qualifications requirements.....	13
3.5 Required documentation.....	13
3.6 Possible supplementary documentation.....	15
4. Admission requirements and student rights and obligations	16
4.1 Legal framework.....	16
4.2 Enrolment.....	16
4.3 Students' rights.....	16
4.4 Required documentation.....	17
4.5 Possible supplementary documentation:.....	18
5. Facilities and services	19

5.1	Services.....	19
5.2	Special needs support.....	19
5.3	Required documentation.....	19
5.4	Possible supplementary documentation.....	20
6.	Quality assurance.....	21
6.1	Legal framework.....	21
6.2	Objectives.....	21
6.3	Internal evaluations.....	22
6.4	Required documentation.....	22
6.5	Possible Supporting documentation.....	23
7.	Learning outcomes.....	24
7.1	Required documentation.....	25
7.2	Possible supporting documentation.....	Vill
	a! Bókamerki ekki skilgreint.	
8.	Finances.....	27
8.1	Legal framework.....	27
8.2	Required documentation.....	27
8.3	Possible supporting documentation:.....	28
	Annex 1: Background and additional information.....	29

Introduction

These guidelines have been prepared for use by education institutions seeking initial accreditation as higher education institutions (HEIs).

HEIs are self-governing education institutions that pursue teaching, research, the preservation and search for knowledge, and creative activity in the fields of science, the humanities, technology, or the arts. The role of HEIs is to contribute to the creation and dissemination of knowledge and skills for the benefit of students and of society in general. The activities of HEIs are aimed at strengthening the fabric of Icelandic society and its position in an international context, an endeavour guided by the interest of future generations. HEIs are centres of knowledge and form part of the international education and science community.

HEIs should provide education to students through teaching and participation in scientific research and prepare them for jobs that require the application of academic methods, knowledge, and skills. HEIs should prepare students for responsible participation in a democratic society. The education provided by HEIs should take into account the needs of society at each time, and its main focus can be either academic or professional.

The administration of a HEIs must ensure that representatives of teachers, students and general staff have the possibility to participate in a consultative forum on academic issues within the institution, and in the development of academic policies.

The Higher Education Act¹ does not specify whether or not applicant institutions must have operated for a certain amount of time before applying for accreditation, and if so what form of operation is deemed appropriate as a basis for evaluation, such as whether the institution must have a certain level and breadth of provision, or whether, self-managed but non-accredited institutions are eligible or only those already accredited by a third party. In the absence of such legal requirements, primary evaluation should take account of current

¹ Act No. 63/2006, as amended. Also referred to as "The HEI Act".

delivery of existing programmes, the relevant quality framework, whether programmes have already been developed to be reviewed for elevation to higher education status and the potential capacity for future levelling up to higher education status.

The scope of initial accreditation is distinct from the regular Institution-wide Reviews (IWR), which are enhancement oriented. However, the institutions seeking accreditation may be requested to have in place a Subject-level Review (SLR) process for a specific period of time. Similarly, once an institution is accredited, the period until it is required to undertake an IWR may be specified.

These guidelines contain descriptions of elements and legal criteria² that are relevant for accreditation reviews and benchmarking and indicates what must be included in an application to make it eligible for consideration by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. To be eligible, an application for accreditation must be backed up by clear, explicit and precise evidence that the institution in question has sufficient and sustainable resources (financial, human/intellectual, physical, and capital) to undertake research and education in the field(s) for which accreditation is sought as well as to provide service to society.

The accreditation process should include the following phases:

- a. A financial sustainability analysis is conducted by the relevant public authorities.
- b. If the outcome of the financial audit is positive, the Quality Board appoints experts to conduct a desk analysis of the required documentation.
- c. A site visit is undertaken once any identified gaps in the documentation have been addressed. If there are too many gaps or shortfalls, the site visit cannot proceed.

The guidelines explain what applicant institutions should include in their applications for accreditation under each of the alphabetic points listed in the Accreditation Rules No. 1067/2006, thus helping them to

² The Bologna-Process obligations as formalised in the Higher Education Act No. 63/2006 and Accreditation Rules No. 1067/2006 form the relevant grounds for all accreditations in the Icelandic Higher Education system.

pursue accreditation while fulfilling both national obligations and those of the European Higher Education Area.

Each section contains considerations on the manner in which applicant institutions may determine the merits of their applications and evaluate if their documentation is up to the requisite standard, prior to its submission. Where appropriate, reference is made to a relevant standard in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).³

The guidelines contain eight thematic sections, each of which is divided into subsections for clarity.

³ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Brussels, 2015.

1. Objectives and Roles

The role of the institution, its aims, objectives and ethics must be clearly expressed in the institution's mission statement

1.1 Mission statement

The role of the institution and the aims and objectives that it intends to fulfil must be stated clearly and in accordance with Art. 2 of the Higher Education Act No. 63/2006 in a mission statement that is published on the institution's website. The mission statement should be suited to the institution's context and should emphasise central aspects of its activities, such as:

- ✓ the educational offer,
- ✓ research, development and innovation activities (RDI),
- ✓ creative, performing and cultural education (where applicable), and
- ✓ engagement and public service, including equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

1.2 Code of Ethics

Every institution must adopt a code of ethics, including rules on the rights and obligations of staff as referred to in Art. 2a of the Higher Education Act. Such a code of ethics should preferably include policies and procedures to ensure fair and ethical behaviour on the part of its governing council, administration, academic and general staff and students. This code should ideally also include an institution statement - confirming its operation with integrity in

- ✓ financial,
- ✓ academic,
- ✓ human resources, and
- ✓ auxiliary functions.

The code should make it clear how the governing council of the institution ensures its independence from undue influence by external parties.

1.3 Required Documentation

The applicant institution must clearly demonstrate in its mission and supporting documents how and with what specific evidence it provides for:

- ✓ all its academic offerings,
- ✓ academic and general staff,
- ✓ students and student services,
- ✓ governance structure and documentation of decisions under the purview of the governing councils,
- ✓ research,
- ✓ the code of ethics.

The documentation should provide details on the management structure and decision-making bodies and processes of the institution.

The mission of the institution, and related documents, should identify its role for qualified prospective students. It should also outline how the institution's academic offerings, student support services and enrolment profiles align with its stated mission.

1.4 Optional Documentation

Mission Statement



- Documentation of the history, development and adoption of the institution's mission statement.
- Documentation that the mission statement is regularly reviewed by the administration.
- Scope of decisions under the purview of the governing council. Documentation that the academic programmes, student support services and planning and budgeting priorities align with the institution's mission.
- List of council members going back at least 3 years.
- Minutes from council meetings going back at least 3 years.

Code of Ethics



- Code of ethics.
- Minutes of the ethics committee going back at least 3 years.
- Documentation of how ethical issues, if any, have been resolved in this forum.

2. Administration and Organisation

The institution's governing council must be shown to have the autonomy to make decisions in the best interests of the institution, its students and staff, in accordance with council policies.

2.1 Legal Framework

The administrative organisation of HEIs is outlined in section V of the Higher Education Act, Arts. 15 and 16.⁴

The administration of applicant institutions is to be entrusted to a governing council and a rector as further provided for in a *lex specialis* or in the charter, statutes or other foundation document of the institution concerned.

The organisation of the applicant institution must be such as to ensure that representatives of teachers, students and general staff can participate in a consultative forum on academic issues within the institution, and in the development of academic policies.

2.2 Required Documentation

An application for accreditation should include documents that demonstrate how the governing council of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interests of the institution, its students and staff, in accordance with council policies.

Furthermore, the applicant institution should be able to demonstrate how its governing council ensures the institution's integrity when taking decisions in matters relating to reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external stakeholders.

Documentation should be provided on how the governing council delegates its day-to-day management of the institution's academic affairs to its administration and faculties.

⁴ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettir2015/Thyding-log-um-haskola-oktober-2015.pdf>

An applicant institution should reflect in its documentation on the efforts made to guarantee the quality of the following procedures:

- ✓ governance according to its charter, statutes or other foundational document,
- ✓ nature of the governing council's deciding powers (consultative or deliberative),
- ✓ administration in general,
- ✓ management of quality assurance,
- ✓ admissions, teaching, learning and assessment,
- ✓ rules governing transfer, progression and graduation,
- ✓ HR policies (procedures for appointment, promotion, review, support, discipline, etc.) for both academic, professional, technical and administrative staff, and
- ✓ student governance.

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2.3 Optional Documentation

Organisation and Administration



- Organisational chart.
- Organisational policies.
- Documents and meeting minutes of different constituent groups.

Organisation and Administration



- Organisational structure.
- Documentation that is reviewed and approved by the institution's governing council.

3. Staff Qualifications

3.1 Legal Framework

Teaching and research should be conducted in a manner consistent with the objectives of the HEI Act. The applicant institution should implement an appropriate protocol for academic freedom of staff in accordance with Art. 2(3) of the HEI Act.⁵

As stated in Art. 17 of the HEI Act, the professional titles of teachers at HEIs should be Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor and Adjunct.

Art. 18 also requires each institution to establish an evaluation committee to assess the qualifications of aforesaid academics as well as research specialists. Only persons holding a doctoral degree awarded by a HEI, or who have attained an equivalent level of knowledge and experience, may be appointed to evaluation committees. Each evaluation committee must include at least one member who is not an employee of the HEI concerned.

The HEI must be in compliance with Arts. 17 and 18 of the HEI Act and fulfil all obligations therein.⁶

3.2 Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

The applicant institution must be able to document its commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of the dissemination and curation of knowledge.⁷ A publicly available version of the institution's policies and procedures should describe how that is achieved, show how the institution's support for research, development and innovation maintains professional standards, and provide oversight

⁵ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettir2015/Thyding-log-um-haskola-oktober-2015.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettir2015/Thyding-log-um-haskola-oktober-2015.pdf>

⁷ The EHEA Rome 2020 Ministerial Communiqué. Annex I Statement on Academic Freedom. - http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_I.pdf

ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behaviour and fiscal accountability.

3.3 Personnel Qualification Requirements

An application for accreditation should contain information about the gender ratio between full-time academic staff and part-time teachers, as well as a justification of how the composition of staff meets the strategic policies of the HEI.

As a rule, the professional qualifications of academic staff should be based on their academic qualifications at the appropriate level. In particular instances related to the field of study, an exception can be made for individual members of staff with other credentials, including but not limited to professional experience, other experiences and/or accounts of merit that arguably prove that they meet the legal requirements for academic members of staff. Documentary evidence should be provided.

No such exception can be made for the position of rector, where it is instead necessary to prove competence in one or more recognised academic disciplines pursued at the HEI concerned, Art. 18(1) of the HEI Act, as confirmed by the opinion of the evaluation committee or by a doctoral degree awarded by a recognised HEI, in addition to professional achievements that have led to the recognition of the person concerned in the relevant area of expertise.

3.4 Required Documentation

The educational programmes on offer should be grounded in an institutional qualification framework based on the National Qualification Framework.

The institution needs to show that it has the academic, professional, technical and administrative staff needed for the provision of effective high-quality programmes and student services that withstand comparison with equivalent HEIs internationally. This includes having sufficient numbers of credentialed academic staff and a core of permanent academic staff to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum, setting out expectations for student performance, and assessment of student learning.

The institution must have the necessary processes and resources to ensure that academic staff are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles, and to support their professional development. Documentation thereof should present the established institutional policies and procedures for ensuring:

- ✓ appropriate qualifications of all teaching staff,
- ✓ the processes for regular evaluation of the teaching and assessment they provide.

Institutions should align their policy on programme design and approval with the descriptions of *ESG standards 1.2 Design and approval of programmes* and *1.3 Student Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment*.

Applicant institutions should describe the process for internal quality assurance, including a reflection on how the design and approval of programmes and courses is carried out and on the inclusion of relevant stakeholders in those processes, including students and external advisors. The reflection should also account for how the student workload and learning outcomes of individual courses and programmes match the number of awarded ECTS credits and levels according to the National Qualification Framework.

When applying for accreditation, one of the core elements applicant institutions should reflect on is the consistency and capacity of their academic personnel. Teaching staff, both permanent and temporary, should possess an academic degree and professional experience relevant to the subject they teach, and at least one level above the level at which they are instructing, in accordance with the levels as prescribed in the National Qualification Framework for higher education in Iceland.⁸

Academic staff teaching general educational courses should hold, at minimum, a master's level degree in a relevant discipline. Academic staff teaching at master's level should hold a doctoral degree and have an established record of research (with the exceptions defined in subsection 3.3).

Faculty leaders who are responsible for managing and overseeing programmes should generally hold the highest possible academic

⁸ National Qualification framework for higher education. Reg. No. 530/2011 - <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?ID=7fa0729e-dacc-47e3-b626-96efb036ef68>

degree in their discipline. They should ensure an appropriate balance between part-time and full-time academic staff.

3.5 Optional Documentation

Teaching and Research



- Policy on the design and approval of programmes.
- Policy on academic freedom and freedom of expression.
- Research opportunities and policies.
- Policy on academic integrity.
- List of research groups.
- Documentation on grants received and research carried out.
- List of qualified research personnel.

Personnel qualifications



- Policy for recruiting, promoting and developing academic staff and general staff.
- Handbooks for employees.
- Detailed curricula vitae for all employees, including academic staff and support staff.
- Faculty handbook.
- Documentation of professional development and training opportunities for staff and faculty.
- Complete faculty list for full-time, part-time and adjunct staff, including information on the highest degree obtained and teaching responsibilities, with evidence of courses taught.

4. Admission Requirements and Student Rights and Obligations

4.1 Legal Framework

Regulations on entrance requirements must be in compliance with Art. 19 of the HEI Act.⁹ Students enrolling at a HEI must have passed the matriculation examination from an upper secondary school or a final examination at the third level of ISQF¹⁰.

4.2 Enrolment

HEIs must ensure that their enrolment requirements at all times correspond to those of foreign HEIs accredited at the same level in an equivalent academic field. The primary expectation should be that the students admitted are able to demonstrate their ability to benefit from the course applied for. The policy should then indicate how this is achieved. HEIs may apply special admission criteria or accept students based on a formal procedure of recognition of prior learning.

All applicant institutions are expected to explicitly state all other admission processes/criteria (e.g., interview/appropriate experience or special entrance test, etc.) The institution should provide documentary evidence thereof in their applications, including the relevant rules, regulations, and criteria.

4.3 Students' Rights

The governing council of each HEI should adopt rules on students' rights and obligations, including the handling of complaints and

⁹ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettir2015/Thyding-log-um-haskola-oktober-2015.pdf>

¹⁰ Icelandic Qualification Framework
(<https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=c5dd71f1-4715-469c-8795-f24f50dfe4db>)

available appeal procedures within the institution, in collaboration with its student union.

4.4 Required Documentation

HEIs should take account of the guidelines contained in ESG Standard 1.4 on *Student admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification* and aim to ensure that documentation of those processes is in accordance with Art. 19 of the HEI Act.

Accordingly, each applicant institution not only has to have in place predefined and published regulations for the admission of students, but also a published regulation for the whole student life cycle. This includes procedures for recognition of non-formal and informal prior learning both before admission and during the studies.

The HEI also needs to guarantee that each student receives the right information on courses applied for, including curricula, assessment methods, teaching methods, and any particular requirements (e.g., placements in industry, study abroad, etc.) for their studies. An applicant institution must also reflect on whether its regulations on student rights are in accordance with rules on mobility within the EHEA and comply with the fundamental values of the EHEA.¹¹

¹¹ ESG, p. 15, standard 1.4. - https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

4.5 Optional Documentation

Admission and Enrolment



- Admission policies for prospective students indicating requirements for institution and programme entry.
- Documents pertaining to recognition of prior learning.
- Data on admissions and progression of students.
- Appeals and complaints policy.
- Teach-Out policy.

Student's Rights



- A sample of academic student organisations and clubs.
- Policy regarding student representation in committees and quality assurance processes.
- A documentation of student appeal procedures.
- Student handbook.

5. Facilities and Services

Services and facilities provided for students and staff must be of a standard that allows the HEI to fulfil its legal role and responsibilities with respect to duties of care.

5.1 Services

Staff members providing student support services should be appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development. The institution must provide the necessary infrastructure and resources to support effective teaching and learning for its students and staff.

5.2 Special Needs Support

HEIs must make provisions to ensure that teaching and special pedagogic support is available to students with disability¹² and to students with mental health or other special needs, *cf.* Art. 19(6) of the HEI Act. Expert assistance and appropriate facilities must be made available as needed.

Wherever possible, students with disabilities should pursue their studies in the same venues as other students. Moreover, HEIs should strive to provide special support to students with specific learning difficulties or suffering from an illness.

5.3 Required Documentation

Institutions should consistently take account of the guidelines in ESG Standard 1.6 on *Learning Resources and Student support* and ensure that documentation of those processes is in accordance with Art. 19 of the HEI Act.

Applicant institutions must demonstrate they are able to provide the full range of support services and resources to students and staff and that

¹² Disability in this context is defined according to Art. 2 of the Act on the services to disabled people with long term support needs, No. 38/2018.

the quality of the services is in line with the institution's mission and objectives. This includes:

- ✓ information about resources such as libraries, computer labs, performance spaces, etc.
- ✓ study facilities and a plan of buildings and location of services on campus,
- ✓ IT infrastructure,
- ✓ human support in the form of tutors,
- ✓ research support,
- ✓ technology transfer services,
- ✓ counsellors and mental health support,
- ✓ career guidance and staff development,
- ✓ other advisory services.

5.4 Optional Documentation

Services



List of student support services such as:

- disability services,
- financial aid,
- advising,
- career counselling,
- IT services,
- etc.

Documentation regarding:

- the registrar's office,
- the student management system,
- examination systems,
- information security and the management of personal information of both students and staff.

■ Information about tutoring programmes.

■ Plagiarism and academic integrity training and procedures.

Facilities



■ Documentation of investment in facilities and technology.

6. Quality Assurance

The institution must demonstrate responsibility for the quality of its programmes, learning environment and support services, and evaluate their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

6.1 Legal Framework

The description of the quality assurance system must be in compliance with Arts. 11 and 12 of the HEI Act and the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework.¹³

6.2 Objectives

Quality assurance of teaching and research at HEIs has the following objectives:

- To ensure that the conditions for the accreditation of HEIs are met.
- To ensure that the National Qualification Framework is complied with.
- To systematically improve the quality of teaching and research, including having the appropriate systems and capacity in place to support the management and monitoring of quality culture, and to ensure the outcomes of QA-informed decision-making, etc.
- To ensure that HEIs exercise responsibility for their own activities effectively.
- To ensure the international competitiveness of national HEIs.

HEIs should carry out systematic quality assurance of teaching and research, in accordance with the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework.

¹³ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettir2015/Thyding-log-um-haskola-oktober-2015.pdf>

6.3 Internal Evaluations

Internal monitoring and evaluation of HEIs and their constituent units should take place at regular intervals and should cover policies and objectives, the content of study programmes, teaching, teaching practices, assessment, research management, research outcomes, working conditions, administration and external relations.

An active participation of staff and students in the internal quality assurance programmes of HEIs should be ensured.

HEIs should publish on their websites the procedures and results of their internal quality assurance programmes.

6.4 Required Documentation

Internal quality assurance includes regular programme monitoring and reviews, and follow-up actions as each review requires. The institution should evaluate all activities that incur credits for students, including student services. The institution should be able to demonstrate a policy that ensures the standards of credits that it accepts in transfer.

As part of its documentation on internal quality processes, the institution should provide its quality assurance policy and handbook, including information about student involvement in governance and QA, the collection and use of student feedback, links between QA activities and decision-making bodies, and examples of the use of internal quality assurance results. The institution should participate in periodic Institution-wide Reviews organised by the Quality Board of Icelandic Higher Education.

The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, defined student learning outcomes, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programmes.

The policy for aforesaid quality assurance activities should be public and form part of the institution's strategic management.

This policy should be in alignment with the Quality Enhancement Framework of the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education, as well as the European Standards and Guidelines from 2015, particularly standards 1.1. *Policy for Quality Assurance* and 1.9 *Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes* and describe in detail how the institution organises its internal control of the quality of teaching and learning.

6.5 Optional Documentation

Quality Assurance



- Quality Assurance Policy.
- Description of the institution's quality assurance system.
- Documentation of the existence of a quality assurance officer and a quality committee as an independent body or as a part of the task of other committees, including minutes of meetings dating back the last 3 years.
- Programme review policy, processes, schedule and guidelines.
- A quality handbook.
- Sample programme review.
- Credit validation process for prior learning.
- Information about student involvement in governance and QA

Quality Assurance



- Internal and external curricular review processes.
- Data on where student go after graduation, employment rates, etc.
- Surveys of alumni.
- Documentation on the participation of faculty, academic administration, governing council and students in programme review processes.
- Meeting minutes and agendas demonstrating departmental use of data with evidence of action taken based on review of data.
- Student survey results and actions taken to address as applicable.
- Collection and use of student feedback.
- Links between QA activities and decision-making bodies.
- Examples of the use of internal quality assurance results.

7. Learning Outcomes

The HEI should publish a summary of the learning outcomes of students at the completion of study, covering all fields of study or subdivision thereof in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework *cf.* Art. 5 of the HEI Act.¹⁴

The National Qualifications Framework defines and describes study programmes and degrees in higher education and defines knowledge, skills and competences for each cycle.

Institutions seeking accreditation should describe learning outcomes for each qualification and demonstrate how the objectives of the description are attained by courses or parts of the study programmes that constitute each qualification.

Furthermore, institutions must specify to which cycle and stage each qualification belongs, in accordance with the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education in Iceland.

7.1 Education Programmes

The education programmes and degree levels should reflect the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution should articulate the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its educational requirements.

Documentation provided by the applicant needs to demonstrate how the institution ensures that courses and programmes are current and up to date and provide learning outcomes appropriate to the number and level of credentials awarded. It should also demonstrate how the institution actively engages students in acquiring, analysing and communicating knowledge, in other words, how teaching, learning and assessment strategies are appropriate to higher education and supported as necessary, and in keeping with the institutional context, by an appropriate active research environment.

¹⁴ <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?ID=7fa0729e-dacc-47e3-b626-96efb036ef68>

7.2 Required Documentation

When assessing the quality of the learning outcomes and the general framework of the study programmes being offered, an applicant institution should refer to ESG standard 1.3. *Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment*.

The institution should pay particular attention to assessment of whether the defined learning outcomes, both at programme and course level, are fit for purpose and ensure that there is a good fit between programme learning outcomes and learning outcomes of individual courses.

As stipulated in the National Qualification Framework, it is essential that learning outcomes for all programmes are appropriate to the level of the individual qualification.

The applicant institution should also describe and provide documentation of how the intended learning outcomes are assessed. The learning outcomes of programmes and courses as well as the manner through which these are assessed should be made publicly available to students well in advance of the start of each semester.

Learning Outcomes



Documentation of the activities of the curriculum council, including list of members, mission statement, example of minutes.

A detailed description of every academic qualification, including threefold learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences), both for the qualification and for all courses and learning routes leading to it.

Documentation of any links or co-teaching activities between bachelor and master's level degrees and the differentiation of student learning outcome by level and how it is assured.

Learning Outcomes



Academic course catalogue.

Documentation regarding the institutional use of ECTS credits and the estimated workload for each credit.

Documentation on the process of developing new qualifications, curriculum and individual courses.

Copy of Diploma Supplement for intended qualifications.

8. Finances

HEI finances must be arranged in a manner that guarantees the fulfilment of all financial obligations and commitments toward students, members of staff, affiliates, corporations and the state. The Ministry is responsible for assessing the financial fitness and operational resilience of an application institution..

8.1 Legal Framework

The applicant institution must outline its form of operation, regardless of whether it is subject to part VIII of the HEI Act, state funded according to other laws, or privately funded.

8.2 Required Documentation

An agreement to review an institution for accreditation does not necessarily have to be predicated on a commitment of public funds. However, for accreditation to proceed, evidence of financial sustainability will nonetheless be required. It is at the Minister's discretion to make funding agreements with accredited HEIs. Institutions that are wholly publicly funded are not exempt from the responsibility to manage their affairs effectively and efficiently.

An applicant institution should always reflect on the organisation of its finances, the planned maximum and minimum enrolment of students into the proposed educational programmes per annum and plans for the development of the programmes.

The number of students should also be put in context with how the programmes will be funded, i.e., the ratio of possible public funding and tuition fees and the amount invested in the programmes, and indicate the source of such funding.

The applicant institution must demonstrate how it intends to ensure that sufficient resources are invested in the programme so as to guarantee successful completion, and provide appropriate calculations, even if approximate, to demonstrate that thought has been put into the cost of and funding for the programme.

As a rule, a HEI should be able to cover the cost of operation for one semester from its own capital without external funding.

8.3 Optional Documentation

Finances



- Proof of financial resources to support academic offerings at start-up and in the future.
- Evidence of financial planning that allocates necessary resources and shows ongoing development.

Finances



- Alignment of academic offerings with the institution's mission and evidence of the institution's long-term commitment.
- Evidence of new or revised policies and procedures that demonstrate commitment and sustainability.
- Policies with regard to an internal resource allocation model, with respect to education and research.

Annex 1: Background and Additional Information

The Bologna Process

Iceland was one of the founding members of the **Bologna Process** in 1999¹⁵. The Bologna Process seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe, including quality assurance, credit transfer and accumulation, lifelong learning, doctoral-level qualifications and joint degrees. The basic framework is three cycles of higher-education [qualifications](#). The qualifications framework, adopted by the ministers at their meeting in Bergen in 2005, defines the qualifications in terms of learning outcomes: statements of what students know and can do on completing their degrees. In describing the cycles, the framework refers to the [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System](#) (ECTS).

The Legal Framework

In Iceland a new Higher Education Act, No. 63/2006, served, among other things, to implement the obligations Iceland had committed to through its participation in the Bologna Process of the European Higher Education Area.

The new Act provided a common legal framework for all higher education institutions (HEIs) which included, amongst others, the process of accreditation of HEIs based on fields of studies and their sub-categories, as defined by the Frascati Manual of OECD.¹⁶ The process of accreditation was put into practice through Rules No. 1067/2006. A different set of rules was issued for the accreditation of PhD programmes.¹⁷

Accreditation Processes

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en

¹⁶ Frascati Manual 2015. Guidelines for collecting and reporting data on research and experimental development - <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264239012-en.pdf?expires=1631048463&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=2CD967716B8A6BF0FD68BABC4D50229>

¹⁷ www.stjornartidindi.is

During the period 2006-2009, all existing HEIs were subject to consecutive accreditation processes of all ongoing fields of studies with the exception of the Academy of the Arts (now University of the Arts), which was accredited in the sub-field of fine arts within the field of Humanities.¹⁸

Quality Board and Quality Council

As part of implementing commitments made through the Bologna Process the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture established the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education in 2010.¹⁹ The Quality Board is an independent, international body, tasked with defining and implementing the Icelandic “Quality Enhancement Framework” (QEF). The QEF’s mission is to safeguard the standards and enhance the quality of Icelandic higher education and the management of research activities. The Quality Board is also regularly commissioned to conduct or oversee reviews on specifically targeted areas of higher education and research.

Another equally important change implemented in 2010 was the establishment of the Quality Council. For the first two years the Quality Council was appointed by the Minister of Education and served primarily as a reference council for the Quality Board. This changed radically in 2012 when the Quality Council was given a central role in sharing good Icelandic and international practice in quality assurance within its membership as well as continuing to advise the Quality Board. Its membership now includes those senior university officers responsible for internal quality in HEIs as well as representatives of the National Union of Icelandic Students (LÍS) and a member of the Quality Board Secretariat. The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation is represented by an observer on the Quality Council.

Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education

The Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) provides an environment within which the HEIs, individually and collectively, secure the standards of all their degrees, and systematically enhance both the student experience and the management of their research. In 2011, The Quality Board created and published a Quality

¹⁸ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/menntamal/haskolar/vidurkenning-a-fraedasvidum-haskola/>

¹⁹ <https://qef.is/>

Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education. Following a cycle of institution-wide reviews, conducted by the Quality Board, the handbook was revised, and a second edition published in 2017 as a new cycle of reviews began. The Quality Enhancement Handbook serves as a guideline on quality assurance for HEIs, both to prepare for external reviews but also to enhance quality culture and internal reviews. It furthermore serves as a reference guide for Icelandic HEIs against EHEA obligations, particularly the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).²⁰

During the last decade, all stakeholders in higher education in Iceland, including HEIs, the Quality Board, the Quality Council and LÍSt - The National Union of Icelandic Students, and the Rectors' conference have made a considerable effort to enhance quality assurance of Icelandic higher education and to ensure that Iceland follows its obligations as a member of the EHEA and the Bologna Process. The Quality Assurance Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education, the rules regarding external quality assurance of teaching and research and rules on the accreditation of PhD studies are all designed to ensure the implementation of the Bologna Process.²¹

Procedures of Accreditation

Less attention and effort have been put into the process of developing the procedures of accreditation in the same amount of detail, and to the extent required by the Bologna Process from 2006. Since 2008, only a handful of applications for accreditation have been submitted to the Ministry responsible for Higher Education. The majority of those have been applications for accreditation of PhD programmes in previously accredited fields of study within existing HEIs.²² Most HEIs in Iceland have focussed on strengthening their educational offers within already accredited fields rather than introducing new ones. These guidelines are intended to strengthen the accreditation process further by providing transparent and detailed information on

²⁰ <https://qef.is/assets/PDFs/Others/QEF2-Handbook-for-website.pdf>

²¹ Reglur um eftirlit með gæðum kennslu og rannsókna No. 1368/2018 - <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=5432dd25-f98e-431b-9d92-e01ea5f0d163>.

²² Reglur um doktorsnám í háskólum samkvæmt 7. gr. laga nr. 63/2006 um háskóla. No. 37/2007 - <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=9e43f819-38e4-4bc4-9466-e77ce98015ae>

the evidence required to support applications for the accreditation of new institutions.

