Quality Board
for Icelandic Higher Education

<p align="center">**Guidance Note:** *Handbook* **paragraph 49**</p>

<p align="center">**Research in Subject-Level Reviews (SLRs)**</p>

<p align="center">Approved by the Quality Board on 4 March 2019</p>

Preamble

Notes of Guidance are issued by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education following consultation with the higher education institutions, LÍS (the National Union of Students in Iceland) and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC). They are offered for guidance to amplify statements contained in the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education* (the *Handbook*). They are designed to clarify expectations and promote transparency as well as equity and consistency of practice across the sector. Please note, however, that the *Handbook* in all circumstances remains the definitive statement on the QEF. Any enquiries related to this Note of Guidance should be referred to the Manager of the Quality Board (secretariat@qef.is).

This Note relates to paragraph 49 of the *Handbook*.

OVERVIEW TABLE OF THE 5 DIMENSIONS OF THE CORE MODEL

From the Handbook: Reports on research in the core model
Units (Departments, Schools etc.) should include in their subject level review (SLR) reports or commentaries on the quality of their management of research using the four dimensions outlined below. Where the overall SLR unit has been further subdivided for the evaluation of research, these reports should be included as separate elements or combined as the institution feels appropriate and useful. The format of the section of the report dealing with management of research should be determined by the institution, but in every case should conclude with an Action Plan. It may be, for example, that a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) framework could prove to be a useful starting point for the analysis section of the report, followed by the concluding Action Plan.

From the Handbook: Conclusions on management of research in the core model

No judgements are made in relation to either teaching & learning or research in SLR Reports under QEF2. The conclusions in both areas normally take the form of Action Plans. In relation to the quality of the management of research, the institution-wide review (IWR) will conclude in terms of commentaries on the four dimensions of research, but under QEF2 no judgement will be passed on the institutional management of research.

Explanatory note regarding the Table below

The table below has three columns. The first contains what is presented in the QEF2 Handbook. The second (central) column contains explanatory notes to guide anyone submitting a Subject Level Review report. The third gives further details of the types of material that might be included and an indication of length. It is important to note that the review of research management in QEF2 does not form part of the overall quality judgement. This is exploratory and should not deflect from the main analysis of teaching leaning and assessment.

This is the text contained in the QEF2 Handbook	Explanatory notes	Typical text for inclusion might include …
a. Research strategy.		
Does the unit have a research strategy? **How does it relate to the institutional strategy?**	If there are written strategies publicly available, reference can be made – usually a web link – with a brief outline of contents. If there are no written strategies it might still be possible to make explicit any implicit approaches to, and assumptions about, research in the unit. If a unit does not have an explicitly formulated research strategy, it may wish to discuss in some detail how the institutional strategy is followed through with at the level of that particular unit. This is an opportunity to emphasise particular missions and unique selling points and the alignment of unit and institutional strategy. This would also be the section to note if interdisciplinary research is emphasised in the strategy, and whether research has been mainstreamed into an overarching strategy.	*Brief outline of the University and its research strategy – around 100 words plus links to relevant web pages* *Brief outline of how the unit relates its own research and research strategy to the University strategy – around 100 words plus relevant links to website pages.*

How realistic is the strategy?	Does the unit or institution benchmark itself against others? On what basis are benchmarks identified and how are they used?	*Brief outline of how the unit benchmarks itself – around 100 words.*
	How realistic the strategy is will depend on a number of factors. For example, is it affordable, is it properly resourced, do its demands exceed staff capacity, is there are track record of achievement that supports the strategy? Does the strategy "maximize capability beyond capacity"?	*Brief description of how the strategy is realistic, noting for example, appropriate policies, levers and monitoring; physical research infrastructure; qualified staff; postgraduate community; budget for research, including internal resources and competitively won grants. Rather than include detailed text here, this could reference sections below where some of this will be described in more detail.*
Does the strategy link research to teaching?	At undergraduate level, this is likely to be made explicit in teaching strategies rather than those for research. Descriptions of the links between teaching and research might include short statements about practical research training and students' research projects; and the use of original research reports in teaching. There may be opportunities to describe how teaching in the unit draws on research activity in the subject including, when possible, the research carried out in the unit. It is helpful if development of *research mindedness* year-by-year can be highlighted. If available, extracurricular research opportunities such as summer research	***Research in undergraduate degrees*** *This could be a bullet point list of about 200 words. Describe research training and development through the programmes; make reference to any programme and module handbooks, with weblinks. Are there any research internships outside the credit bearing programme?*

	internships for undergraduate students should be discussed. At postgraduate level research is integral to the degree. It is important to describe how third cycle research degrees are structured and their quality assured. Opportunities for postgraduate students to work outside academia could be included, as well as eduation in research ethics. The quality of the research student research training experience should be commented on. Are there collaborations across institutions to support this as well as multidisciplinary research?	*Research in Masters degrees* *This could be a bullet point list of about 200 words. Describe research training and development through the programmes; are there different types of Masters degree with variable amounts of research? How are these approved and regulated? Make reference to any programme and module handbooks, with weblinks* *Research in Doctoral degrees* *This could be a bullet point list of about 200 words. Describe research training and development through the programmes; how are they funded? How are students examined? Make reference to any programme and module handbooks, with weblinks.*
What policies serve as a lever to support the strategy?	This question relates to supporting policies, usually at a University level, that help individuals or groups do research properly, giving guidance and setting regulations and parameters for how research must be done. Many policies will relate to nationally or internationally agreed frameworks.	*This does not need extensive text. It could list the types of polices, with weblinks to them. For example there might be policies for Research Integrity, Researcher Development, Ethical Review, Open Access Publication, Occupational Health & Safety, Staff Wellbeing, Equality & Diversity. There are also supra-national policies such as the EU HR Excellence in Research policy.*

How is the strategy supported at unit and institutional levels?	There is likely to be overlap between unit and institution reporting here, describing for example facilities provided centrally that benefit research in a unit as well as practices within units that do so.	*This could include brief statements (50-100 words) about such things as Budget, Library, Physical Infrastructure, Career Progression, Graduate Students, Workload Models and any Local Practices that exist. Weblinks should be used to direct readers to relevant information.*
Is strategy effectively monitored?	There are various ways in which research strategy can be monitored, within a unit and centrally within the University. This will include prospective work (*how is the strategy being developed, how will it align with the University or national priorities?*) and retrospective work (*are staff comfortable with the strategy, are formal or informal targets being met, is the strategy delivering?*).	*This could include a brief note about overarching monitoring strategies (50-100 words) followed by bullet point lists of how these in practice relate to staff individually; the unit as a whole (are there for example any professional accreditations that review strategy?); and monitoring of the whole institution. Mention should be made of any Key Performance Indicators or other metrics that are used.*
Is the research environment designed to support the strategy?	Environment and strategy are necessarily synergistic. Effective research requires appropriate buildings, kit and people. What is required in this section is a commentary on how these are managed, supported and developed. It should explain how the unit is making best use of what it has and any immediate concrete plans to improve it. Inevitably any unit can claim that more resources would help improve its research. **This section is not to be treated as an opportunity to plead for**	*The research environment is created by people operating within a physical infrastructure. As such it would be appropriate to relate this explicitly to:* *(1) People: how are appointments made? What staff development is there? How are graduate students and postdoctoral fellows supported? How is external networking managed?* *(2) The physical environment – any further comments over and above what was described above in strategy support.*

	more resources. The focus should be on organisational and structural factors.	
Does the research strategy take account of issues of equality, including gender?	Are there policies or practices within the unit or centrally within the University that deal with equality and diversity?	*Describe any legal frameworks and awards that are available and have been won, with weblinks as required.*
b. Management of research outputs.		
This refers to the unit's mechanisms for monitoring and managing the quality of its research outputs. The quality of outputs should be defined in relation to the application of good practice methodologies and the critical robust judgements, directly or indirectly, of respected peers or users of outputs who are in a position to make informed professional judgements of quality. This dimension will be refined as experience develops, including through the input of the REAC, and will also draw on the outputs of research (at least in the vast majority, if not all, cases) recorded on the CRIS system. The question to be addressed is how do academic units evaluate and manage the quality of their research output? In some cases, perhaps the majority, the first part of this question is already at least partly addressed through the current framework described in the paper 'Evaluation system for public higher education systems' and applied in many institutions. In addition, there is an interesting established	This is about quality control not comparative judgments of excellence. **Research outputs** are defined by subject and will necessarily differ across them, but be recognizable to experts in the field, locally and internationally. The process may or may not involve bibliometrics. **How are research outputs managed** once they have been produced? This might include outputs of multidisciplinary research and multi-institutional research, with both national and international collaborators. **Is there an institutional repository** for archiving and open access?	*This might include brief descriptions of:* *Describe briefly what the research outputs for the unit are – publications, artefacts, what?* *Briefly describe (100 words) of any internal review and support strategies for developing research outputs.* *Are the research outputs and any supporting material (data from experiments, analysis of creative process, archive materials) open and accessible? A short sentence or two describing this would be sufficient.*

evaluation framework for the evaluation of research outputs within Reykjavik University which aims to separate the evaluation of research quality from publication counting. There is also a useful framework applied in the Icelandic Academy of the Arts. It is appreciated that none of these frameworks currently apply universally in Iceland, and these examples are meant to be illustrative of the resources available to institutions when evaluating the management of their research outputs. It is important to note that this approach is adopted in order that research achievements in a wide variety of areas (including production and performance) may be celebrated. This obviously includes, but is not limited to research outputs traditionally measured through international bibliometric or similar techniques. There are many different kinds of legitimate research outputs to be celebrated, the 'quality' of which can be benchmarked in a variety of ways – e.g. informing and taking account of the views of SLR externals, external stakeholders, professionals in the field, the business or professional community, policy makers etc. The second part of this question relates to how institutions manage the quality of their outputs by strategic allocation of resources and through staff development.	**Judgment of research quality** could involve consultation (inside or outside the unit) with independent researchers. It is important to be able to demonstrate how **strategic resource allocation and staff development** supports the production of good outputs.	*If quality of student research is monitored formally, how is that done? How are the rights and responsibilities of the student and the unit/institution managed in terms of student participation in research?* *Brief descriptions (around 200 words overall) of, for example: what development programmes support the production of good research outputs; where do resources for research come from and how are they allocated; whether or not graduate students are expected to produce research outputs and how their development is supported.*

c. External support.		

External support should include both additional research funding (i.e. in addition to that received as part of the block grant), and also support in kind. It will include both cash and non-cash forms of support. External funding will include the competitive funds secured through the Icelandic Government's various bidding processes. It will also include EU funding and all other funding from international sources as well as commercial funding both national and international. Support in kind will include all non-cash external support received including equipment, personnel, buildings etc. (Handbook p. 16)	**This section should include grant activity over the last five years.**
	Units could detail what external support they receive, as grants or as in-kind support. It would be appropriate not just to list these but also to comment on what the unit does proactively to secure external support – not just what grants exist but how are they won. This might include methods to help improve the quality of submissions to grant awarding bodies and contacts made with external agencies (government or private) to develop targeted research support.
		This could include a list of actual grants awarded over a defined period (the last six years for example). If there are multiple grants it would be helpful to append a spreadsheet that included:
		    Date of award
		    Duration of award
		    End date
		    Award value
		    Awarding agency
		    Principal Investigator name and affiliation
		    Co-investigator names and affiliations (if different to the PI)
		    Award title
		    Any other salient information including staff/students employed as part of the award
		
		University and Unit support mechanisms for grant seekingcould be outlined in brief bullet point lists. Are there goals at the unit level for applying for and/or securing grants?

d. The impact of the unit		
… refers to the reach and significance of the research output of the unit. Impact is to be interpreted broadly to include impact on: the subject area; on policy and practice related to the subject area; on significant developments in culture; and, importantly, on the local, national	**Impact** has become an integral part of research evaluation internationally. It is important that Iceland adopts an approach to impact that is compatible with its understanding elsewhere but which also suits itself. As such, units should be very inclusive in what they write. Impact can be	*This section should not be much longer than approximately 500 words. Bullet points lists, references to material elsewhere and simple text are appropriate.*

or international economy or society more generally. In all the above areas, local, national and international dimensions should be considered. Impact also includes the external reach of the unit through for example researcher national and international mobility, external consultancies in academic or professional contexts, external advising roles etc. (Handbook, p. 16)	considered as part of Knowledge Exchange which can include: **Public engagement**, including for example talks open to the public and communications through the media. **Pathways to Impact** can also be included here: what plans does the unit have to deliver impact from specific projects?	*Public Engagement might cover lectures, online materials, radio and TV, engagement in particular outreach programmes.* *Pathways to Impact describe how impact is planned, covering for example: who is effected and with what reach and significance; the means for disseminating research outputs to interested audiences; engagement outside the University with relevant bodies; how relevant bodies might adopt the research findings in their work; potential benefits to the relevant bodies and their end-users; and indicative dates.*
	Impact – the demonstrable contribution excellent research makes to society and the economy. The measurement of impact is not an exact science because it can involve so many things – policy, culture, manufacturing, health and so on. Case studies can be developed for analysis eg by subject experts and comparison with case studies from similar subjects. Reach and significance are important in comparing case studies: how many people were effected over what range?	*Impact that has been achieved could be described in similar terms, relating the impact to academic work that had been done – that is "this particular research output led to this demonstrable change". Descriptions of impact can highlight reach (how far does it spread – locally, nationally, internationally? Lots of people or a handful of specialists) and significance (how important was it – a niche specialty of wide-ranging applicability)?*

	Consultancy – will include work that has impact (demonstrable change to society and the economy) but which has no specific underpinning research. General – units can if they choose to include material that might not fit into the above categories but which they believe has value to Icelandic society and beyond.	*Brief description of how unit staff have delivered demonstrable change but without a basis in particular research outputs – that is "our general expertise led us to be asked to undertake work which produced this demonstrable change".*
e. Exceptional blue-skies research.		
It is sometimes the case that particularly exciting and innovative forms of/areas of research open up which are difficult to encapsulate within existing paradigms for recognizing the significance of research. It is important that these are captured within research evaluations and these areas should simply be identified separately if they do not fit appropriately into the above framework. (Handbook, p. 16)	As well as offering the opportunity to include material that would otherwise be excluded, this section might include outputs of whatever nature that are thought to have been particularly important, broadly defined to include anything considered important within the subject under review.	*This section should be kept relatively brief (250 words) and can include anything that the unit thinks should be highlighted, with a clear rationale for inclusion.*