

Iceland University of the Arts

Report for Annual Quality Dialogue

December 2024



LISTAHÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Iceland University of the Arts

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Introduction

This report outlines the progress on recommendations and areas of improvement from the previous Institutional-Wide Review (IWR). Initially, it provides an overview of recent developments at IUA, noting that the past year has been eventful on multiple levels. Subsequently, it presents a summary of the progress made since the submission of the Year-On Report in November 2023. The report begins with an overview of recent developments, followed by a summary of the four key tasks identified as enhancement priorities in the IWR. Finally, it provides a progress update on the fourteen areas highlighted in the review. Of these, four are considered closed, five are in the final stages, and the remaining five are still being actively worked on.

Recent Developments

Kristín Eysteinsdóttir came into the Rector position on August 1st, 2023. In her first year in office, she introduced a new charter for the IUA and a new mission statement for the years 2024-2028 which was launched on August 1st, 2024. Additionally, new ideas about future housing were announced this fall. However, the most significant developments occurred in the spring of 2024 when IUA was able to offer prospective students, tuition-free admission.

New Charter

The previous charter was implemented in 2021. In 2023, indicators suggested that the current charter was not reaching its full potential, prompting a decision to reflect on its structure, goals and expectations. An extensive revision was undertaken, involving all key administrators of IUA in a comprehensive dialogue. The analysis revealed that due to the number of layers and administrators, the authority for decision-making was unclear, and communication channels were unnecessarily long.

The primary objective of the new charter is to give administrators clear authority for decision making and sufficient capacity for strategic planning within their respective fields. It aims to clarify the responsibilities of Deans and Managers, simplify the organizational structure and streamline management processes. The three schools introduced to IUA's charter in 2021, namely the School for Academic Development, the School for Architecture, Design and Fine art, and the School for Performing Arts, Music and Film, have been discontinued. Currently, the seven Deans of Departments (formerly Heads of Departments) report directly to the Rector. Additionally, two Vice-rectors, i.e. Vice-rector for Teaching and Learning and Vice-rector for Research, have been appointed to focus on and foster developments of these two areas. The IUA's support



service have been restructured and centralized, and a new Office of Community and Sustainability has been established to enhance IUA's outreach and sustainable practice.

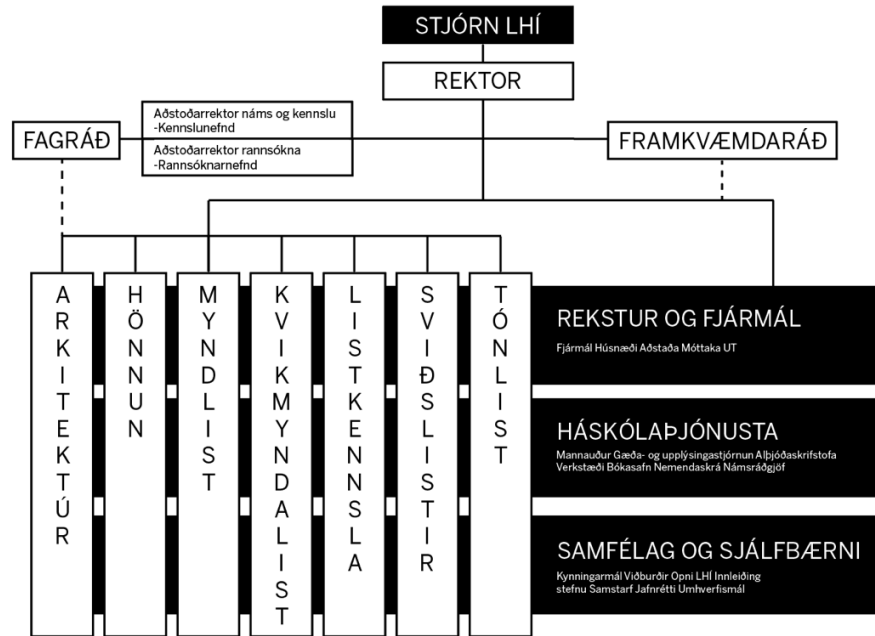


Image 1: The new organizational charter for the Iceland University of Arts, launched August 1st, 2024.

New Mission: Expanding Reality

The mission statement for the years 2024-2028 was introduced and launched in August 2024. *Expanding Reality* is the title of the new mission, which refers to the role of art, encapsulating IUA's purpose and providing refreshing inspiration. The mission statement was developed throughout the academic year 2023-2024 in a broad dialogue with the university's staff and students. The primary focus of the work was to define the shared goals for the coming years and clearly map out the steps needed to take to achieve them. The guiding principles of the new strategy are threefold, and under each are three main objectives, i.e. nine in total. Under each main objective, there are carefully defined and scheduled actions that will enable IUA to implement the strategy effectively over the next four years. The new strategy emphasizes creative thinking, diversity and being a driving force in an ever-changing world.

The objectives are:

- To strengthen the core of the study programs while implementing increased study flexibility and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration between departments.



This approach aims to enhance the possibilities for a diverse combination of studies for the leading artists of the future.

- To be at the forefront of lifelong learning and societal discourse about the arts, promoting cooperation and establishing collaboration agreements with stakeholders and cultural institutions.
- To strengthen the university's research activities by providing greater support for researchers, increased flexibility of research time for academic staff and diverse dissemination options.
- To be a university for all, eliminating any obstacles to access.
- To create a learning and working environment characterized by inclusion and equity.
- To be a desirable community, leading in teaching and learning with an emphasis on progressiveness, responsibility and care.
- To achieve recognition to start doctoral studies at the university.
- To develop course offerings at the graduate level in dialogue with the art communities and industries with a focus on innovation.

Each objective is accompanied by a carefully defined action plan and is assigned to an individual, or group, responsible for overseeing and ensuring progress. The objectives are prioritized each spring for the forthcoming academic year, with a select few designated as “must-wins”. This approach establishes a clear focus on completing the necessary actions to achieve the objectives throughout the mission statement's duration

Future Housing: A new Direction

Latest development regarding IUA's future campus took a significant turn last September when the government introduced a new possibility to offer IUA the building that currently houses the Technical College in Reykjavik. For the sake of simplification, this building will hereafter be referred to as the Technical College. Prior to this development the aim was to unite the seven departments and support services in Reykjavik's old Customs Building in the city centre.

An analysis of both options has been conducted, and three crucial factors made the Technical College a more feasible option: lower building costs, shorter timeline and sustainability viewpoints.

- It is estimated that the Technical College will be available to the university around 2029, whereas the Customs Building is anticipated to be accessible to IUA somewhere between 2032 and 2035. The primary uncertainty lies in the fact that



the Technical College is waiting for a construction of a new building in Hafnarfjörður and these developments are in the early stages.

- The demolition and construction required for the Customs Building is evidently more costly than adapting to the Technical College. For IUA, a higher construction costs translate to increased housing and operational expenses in the future.
- The Customs Building would require extensive demolition to be reconstructed in a manner that aligns with IUA's operational needs. These adaptations are anticipated to maximize the building's capacity on the site, potentially limiting future expansion options.
- Conversely, the Technical College requires less invasive modifications with no demolition needed. The building is already somewhat larger than the Customs Building in terms of equipped and usable square meters and currently houses custom workshops and other spaces that require only minor adjustments. Additionally, there is potential for future expansion around the current building providing IUA with room to grow on the site.
- In relation to sustainability, the fact that approximately 35% of the Custom Building needs to be demolished is a significant concern. Contemporary perspectives in design and architecture regard this as a notably negative environmental factor. Not only does the demolished material need to be disposed of appropriately but the new construction and equipment required to execute the plans also contribute to pollution. Additionally, the site is located in the downtown centre and access for equipment is limited, making the process foreseeably invasive.

When the option of adopting the Technical College's building arose, the sensible thing was to reassess all available options. The factors mentioned above convinced the IUA's board that shifting the plans and move away from the Custom Building and focusing on the Technical College was the most appropriate course of action for the future of IUA.

Registration Fees instead of Tuition Fees

The aforementioned clarification is indeed promising and serves as a positive indicator for the future of IUA. However, it is essential to highlight the long-anticipated abolition of tuition fees. In February of the previous school year, the Ministry of Higher Education offered a specific financial contribution to the three universities in Iceland that operate as self-governing institutions. In exchange, these universities would eliminate their tuition fees and only require a set registration fee from their future students. The university board welcomed this offer, and from the fall 2024, enrolled students paid significantly less than their previous colleagues to attend the IUA. For instance, the



tuition fees for the school year 2023-2024 ranged from 341.000 ISK to 527.000 ISK, per semester, whilst the registration fee for the whole school year 2024-2025 was 75.000 ISK. This issue has for long been a critical matter of equal rights for both students and administration. By charging only a set registration fee, a certain level of equality has been achieved, laying the groundwork for greater inclusivity among future students.

Other Developments the past year

The Ministry's incentive, Universities Collaboration (IS Samstarf háskólanna) continues to shape academic development. Following the last round of allocation, IUA has become a participant in seven initiatives spanning topics such as innovation in university activities, collective developments in administration, support services, infrastructure, and universities third mission practice.

The new funding model released by the Ministry for Higher Education last year has created a channel for a new way of thinking within both the IUA and the Ministry. For instance, the funding model has highlighted a mutual understanding of the importance of evaluating research output in a manner that best suits artistic research. Currently, there is an active dialogue between the IUA and the Ministry on formulating an evaluation system that can serve as a measurement aligned with the funding model.

IQA developments the last year

Since the last annual dialogue, the Department of Design has completed its internal quality assurance (IQA) reviews and is formulating an updated course catalogue for the next school year. Updated curriculum will be published according to IUA's rules on the first day of teaching in January. Among the changes made is the adjustment of all courses to a 5-10-15 ECTS format but that is a direction all departments are taking as a part of IUA's action to coordinate programme structure across the institution.

The Department of Architecture finished an IQA for both study levels in spring 2024. The results of this quality assessment will be implemented in the curriculum in the fall of 2026.

The Department of Music continued a full restructure of the department's first cycle level programmes. The decision to do so results from an internal review and auditors' recommendations from the departments SER's from 2012 and 2018 that indicated that its structure was unnecessarily complicated, study programmes could be merged and number of small courses reduced to offer better clarity and stability for the student perspective. The work is ongoing with the aim of starting one new study programme in the autumn 2025 and the fully reviewed first cycle curriculum in 2026, offering three bachelor programmes. This current school year there are eleven programmes which



makes it evident that the new structure will be a certain simplification when the process will be completed.

Other IQA reviews this coming year will be taking place in the Department of Arts Education and BA Programme in Acting.

Also, currently, a revision on internal research assessment procedure to align with the new IRIS portal is taking place. A review of best practice examples from benchmark institutions has been conducted, and the plan is to implement this alongside IRIS during the spring semester.

Areas for improvement

In chapter 9 of IUA's 2021 IWR Report: *Managing Enhancement*, the IUA illustrated an overview of four tasks identified as enhancement priorities. Below is a status update on those priorities:

1. Quality Management

Building on solid foundation, there has been increased awareness and unity regarding quality work within the university. The quality handbook which preserves the institutional memory of the university, is introduced to all new staff members and has become increasingly integrated into the school's operations. Furthermore, significant effort has been made to define and collect key figures used in decision-making processes.

2. Implementation of the School of Academic Development

With the introduction of the new institutional charter, the operation of the School of Academic Development (SAD) has been abolished, and the functions previously under its purview have been reorganized under new leadership. The management of research now falls under the leadership of the Vice-Rector for Research, while the management of teaching and learning is now overseen by the Vice-Rector for Teaching and Learning. Additionally, the support operations that were formerly managed by SAD, including workshops and labs, the library and the international office, are now centralized under the newly formed Office of University Services. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the goal of these changes is to provide each of these units with a clearer focus and leadership.

3. Revision of Academic Employment, Positions and Roles

The task was to undertake a comprehensive revision of academic positions. This was completed with two main changes to the framework and one change currently in its final stages:



The replacement for the categorization and validation of teaching with a new model for calculating and distributing hours, where all teaching is categorized based on the same parameters, namely the numbers of ECTS and the number of students.

The addition of evaluating teaching and academic achievements into the rules on academic qualification. Furthermore, the formulation of a framework for evaluating research output is being finalized.

4. Future vision for a new University Building

As previously discussed in this report, the Icelandic government has recently introduced a new possibility to offer the IUA as the future home for the university. A future building for the whole of the IUA will remain the primary focus of IUA leaders until the matter is fully resolved.

Progress update

In the IWR Report fourteen areas for improvement were also highlighted by the review team. Enhancements have already been made in four of these areas, which are now defined as closed. Five areas may be considered in the final stages, while the remaining five are still open. The following section provides the status of those areas that have not yet been fully finalized and are being worked on in various capacities.

Highlighted Areas considered to be in Final Stages

Increased Allocation for Infrastructure

‘The Iceland University of the Arts should urgently develop transparent and responsive mechanisms for resolving near unacceptable deficiencies in essential amenities, presently adversely impacting student experience (e.g., lack of chairs/desks), and for ensuring effective communication to staff and students of timelines and progress/remedy of such deficiencies.’

Old equipment and furniture for student/staff have been renewed in all buildings. In the summer of 2024, the Architecture department, Design department, Arts education department, and much of the centralized services moved into a new location at Stakkahlíð 1. This move represents a significant improvement from the Þverholt building, which has now been vacated. In the fall of 2024, the IUA board decided that a stronger cash balance will be partly used to increase both short-term and long-term investments in infrastructure, facilities, and equipment.

All departments are provided with a minimum of two opportunities annually to participate in the IUA’s capital planning process. This includes prioritizing purchases for equipment, furniture and other necessities. The capital plan, along with other key decisions



regarding facilities, is communicated to staff and students through annual meetings, staff meetings and student information sessions. Additionally, students and staff are encouraged to contact the Managing Director, Head of Facilities, and Service Coordinators at any time with ideas, suggestions, and comments regarding facilities and amenities.

Societal Impact and Engagement Supported by Evidence

‘The leadership of the Iceland University of the Arts should collect, review and systematise data on the institution's societal impact and engagement, and alumni successes, in partnership with stakeholder group members in order to form a collective voice of advocacy that is supported by evidence.’

The development of a dashboard for a synchronized collection of key statistics across the University is currently underway. The technical execution for publishing the dashboard is being developed.

Feedback Loop and Communication

‘Programmes, Schools and Support Services should develop simple mechanisms for demonstrating to students that their feedback has been acted upon (for example 'you said, we did' posters), thereby 'closing the feedback loop'.

In the autumn of 2022, the university implemented a new internal web portal, ‘Ugla’. This portal facilitates the sharing of information and notifications between students and staff. Since the spring 2023, Students pulse surveys have been conducted biannually, with the results published in Ugla and notifications sent to students via email. According to one of these surveys, students have indicated that email are the most effective method for conveying important information. Monthly meetings between the Rector and student council representatives have proven to be a valuable platform for providing feedback to students. As of November 2023, students have had a representative in the Academic council, as well as on other committees, such as the Teaching committee and the Research committee, and the School Councils.

Despite significant improvements in communication channels, students still report feeling inadequately informed about university matters.

Research Strategy

‘Develop a Research Strategy that establishes an inclusive concept of artistic research, respectful of academic freedoms, and setting out how staff and possibly future doctoral students will be supported with appropriate time for research activity, and where appropriate, grant applications’.

In 2022, the Research Committee of the Academic Council undertook a comprehensive revision and integration of research strategies from various department into a unified



IUA strategy for research. This strategy encompasses overarching aims, guiding principles, and detailed action steps. Current developments focus on updating this research strategy to align with the new IUA strategy.

Fixed terms in context of sustainable research culture

'In the context of building a sustainable research culture, the Iceland University of the Arts should review its approach to fixed-term (e.g., 10 year 4+4+2) academic appointment contracts in consultation with staff, and evaluate the efficacy and wellbeing impacts of the process of (re-) appointment as a staff term approaches its contractual end date.'

The dialogue within the IUA is ongoing. While most of the opposing viewpoints among faculty members can be considered reasonable, they remain conflicting. Currently, there is some distance between these views, indicating that the dialogue will continue for the foreseeable future.

Highlighted Areas considered to be still open

Monitoring of Programs

'The leadership should establish annual monitoring of programs to include monitoring and review of performance indicators and student feedback on the quality of learning provision. This will provide the Academic Council with clearer 'touchpoints' to monitor enhancement in between Subject-Level Reviews'.

In September 2022, the IUA introduced more informal and frequent monitoring of learning provision as part of its internal quality assurance processes. This new annual monitoring complements the existing processes, which include a five-year monitoring and revision of programs, a five to seven year interval for subject-level reviews, and the Institutional review taking place within each QEF cycle.

This development has been further advanced by assigning a support service team to develop a method for using statistics to measure developments within the departments. The team is currently formulating which statistics should be used, the timing for data collection and how to make this information accessible. The aim is to regularly collect data to monitor indicators of departmental trends, and determine if actions are needed, as well as to gather more versatile information.

Equality Action Plan

'The Iceland University of the Arts should develop an equalities action plan detailing the proposed approach and timeline for prevention of racial stereotyping; creation of safe and confident space for students and staff in a post 'MeToo' learning environment; inclusive practice to enable students with additional support needs of all types to flourish in the institution; and communicate clearly the channels for report and support of violations.'



The IUA is currently revising its equity policy and action plan. The new policy aims to take more proactive steps towards promoting inclusion, diversity, and equity, aligning with the university's new overall strategic objectives. As of the fall of 2024, a part-time inclusion officer has joined IUA staff to assist the equality committee in finalizing this policy.

Creation of an institutional assessment and feedback plan

'An institutional assessment and feedback plan should be created by staff and students which achieves consistency of purpose across programmes in approaches to feedback in the pass/fail context'.

The structural change implemented in August 2024 impacts roles and responsibilities regarding teaching and learning development. The Vice-Rector for Teaching and Learning and the Head of Teaching Development are now continuing the task of coordinating assessment and feedback plans across the departments of the IUA together with the Teaching committee, which now has members from each department. General guidelines have been published in the Teachers Handbook, and further instructions and rubrics are in development with each department's needs and subject specificity in mind and in consultation with students. The aim is to set a baseline for all teachers to ensure a more consistent approach to feedback and clarity for students about how they will be assessed. A decision has been made to implement the pedagogical suite Feedback Fruits in the fall 2025 as a support mechanism for teacher's feedback and assessment.

Common Academic Timetable

'The Iceland University of the Arts should formulate a common academic timetable to support its interdisciplinary ambition and prevent further frustration of student opportunity and ensure that unavoidable changes are communicated in a timely manner.'

A specialized digital solution for timetables, TermTime has been implemented across the university. This system provides intelligent scheduling support for planning, building, delivering, and operationalizing timetables and schedules. The implementation of this new digital systems has presented challenges, particularly as it coincided with the implementation of multiple solutions such as Ugly and Canvas, which have impacted the timeline of educational procedures within the institution.

Currently, procedures and timelines for curriculum design and development are being revised. This includes the design of new courses and electives, as well as any changes to the curriculum. The aim is to create greater stability and consistency in scheduling and planning of timetables, and to ensure timely communication of any changes.



New programmes now feature a coordinated study structure with 5, 10 and 15 ECTS courses, with most elective courses set at 5 ECTS. This allows for more opportunities for interdisciplinary electives across programmes and departments. This structure is applied to both new MA programmes in Design and Performing Arts. The Music Department is undertaking a restructuring of its study programmes and a curriculum reform aimed at simplifying its structure. The goal of this reform is to offer more clarity of structure, flexibility, and more room for electives, thereby providing students the choice to broaden or deepen their skills and specialization.

A representative of all sessional staff

‘The Iceland University of the Arts should enable a sessional member of staff to become a representative of all sessional staff, to act as ‘point person’ for ensuring more effective communication to sessional staff, and their access to orientation and professional development opportunities.’

Several measures have been implemented to enhance support and communication to sessional staff. The Vice-Rector Teaching and Learning leads a team that includes the Head of Teaching Development and Academic Coordinators. These Academic Coordinators work closely with the departments and serve as the primary contacts for sessional staff regarding teaching support. They are responsible for the reception of sessional staff, ensuring they receive all relevant information, including the copy of the Teachers Handbook, which contains details about IUA staff, facilities, and resources.

The Academic Coordinators for each department invite sessional staff to attend a departmental orientation meeting at the beginning of the term. Additionally, they are invited to participate in an institution-wide orientation and teacher training session at the start of each academic year. However, as not all sessional staff start simultaneously, many need to be onboarded individually. This process is now overseen by the Academic Coordinators.

While the function and the role of the Academic Coordinators are still in development, there are currently two full-time positions, with a third position set to be in place from January 1, 2025. Each coordinator will oversee two to three departments, depending on their location.

Sessional staff are invited to attend regular educational talks within the university, referred to as the “Teachers Coffee”. These sessions are facilitated by the Head of Teaching Development and covers various educational topics. Often, this platform is used for teachers to share innovative teaching approaches and tips, or to bring forward subjects they wish to discuss. Sessional staff are eligible to apply for a grant from the Academic Staff Professional Development Fund, provided their work hours during the same term amount to the minimum of 200 hours.



There is a representative of sessional staff in the Academic School Council. However, there is currently no specific 'point person' representing all sessional staff, as the challenge lies in the fact that sessional staff numbers went up to 624 teachers and contractors for the calendar year of 2023 across seven different departments. Although some progress has been made, it remains a challenge for the institution to find a way to connect and support sessional staff.