

Programmes and micro-credentials – design and approval

Rules of procedure

1. Purpose and scope

1.1

The purpose of these rules of procedure is to guarantee the quality of studies and to ensure that laws and regulations are followed when new programmes or micro-credentials are designed and approved, see [Article 53 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#) and Article 8 of the [Higher Education Act no. 63/2006](#). Higher education institutions must periodically account for the ways in which they ensure that the studies they offer comply with the [National Qualification Framework](#), see Article 5 of the [Higher Education Act no. 63/2006](#), and government [regulations for monitoring the quality of teaching and research in universities](#). Consideration must also be given to Standard 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes from the [European Standards and Guidelines \(ESG\) 2015](#).

1.2

These rules of procedure apply to all programmes and micro-credentials established at the University of Iceland, including studies offered in partnership with other universities.

2. Accountability

The rules of procedure were set by the University Council in accordance with [Article 53 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#) and originally approved at a University Council meeting on 5 November 2020. The director of the Division of Academic Affairs is responsible for ensuring that the rules of procedure are correct at any given time and school deans and faculty heads are responsible for ensuring that they are followed.

3. Implementation

3.1

The University of Iceland is accredited by the government to offer programmes conferring Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degrees in the following **fields of science**. Fields of science and their **sub-categories** are defined in consideration of the revised definitions in the [Frascati Manual OECD from 2007](#):

- Social Sciences
- Health Sciences
- Humanities
- Engineering and Technology
- Natural Sciences

3.2

Each field of science is divided into sub-categories, which are those **subjects** belonging to the field of science. The organisational units of the University of Iceland (i.e. the schools and faculties) do not always directly correlate to the categorisation of fields of science and their subcategories in the Frascati Manual. For example, the Frascati Manual defines education as a social science. However, this discrepancy does not affect the way in which programmes are defined.

4. Terminology

On the basis of the National Qualification Framework and terminology usage in the [Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#), the terms in these rules of procedure are defined as follows:

- A **subject** is a sub-category of a field of science, e.g. mathematics, chemistry, electrical engineering, medicine, business administration, law, teacher education, political science, history, philosophy, languages and literature.
- A **programme** is defined as a collection of courses and assignments/theses/professional training in a subject which form an academically logical whole and confer a degree or another qualification (diploma or Master's level certificate).
- **Micro-credential:** A short organised course of study designed to provide students with specific knowledge, skills and competences. ECTS credits completed as part of a micro-credential may be transferred to a defined programme at the same higher education cycle. However, a programme can never be based entirely on micro-credentials.
- A **specialisation** is a particular line of study within a programme.
- A **department** is an administrative unit which is part of a faculty at a school; a department manages certain subjects. A department is organised within a faculty, see [Article 21 of the Regulation for UI no. 569/2009](#). There shall, as a rule, be several programmes within a department which all form an academic whole and conclude with a degree.
- A **degree** is awarded when a student has completed to an acceptable standard all stipulated courses and assignments required for the degree.
- A **diploma** is a qualification awarded to a student who has completed 60-120 ECTS at the undergraduate level.
- A **Master's level certificate** is a qualification awarded to a student who has completed 60-89 ECTS at the master's level.
- **Other postgraduate qualifications** is a qualification awarded to a student who has completed 90-120 ECTS at the Master's level, but which do not require the completion of a research or end-of-studies project worth at least 30 ECTS.
- A **diploma supplement** is included with a degree certificate, describing in a standardised format the nature, level, context, content and status of the programme which the individual in question has completed to a satisfactory standard.
- **Learning outcomes** are a description of what a student is expected to know, understand and/or be capable of after completing studies.

5. Programmes and specialisations

5.1

Faculties are the basic academic units of the University, within which studies in individual subjects are organised. **The programmes and courses offered at a given time are determined by the faculty forum, faculty council, department or board of study**, as applicable, and in accordance with rules

of procedure at the unit in question and the budgetary framework, see [Articles 12-21 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#).

5.2

University of Iceland faculties may offer joint degree programmes, for which they shall issue a joint degree certificate featuring the logos of both (or all) participating faculties. When more than one faculty is involved with an interdisciplinary programme, a special board of study shall be appointed to manage the collaboration, including members representing all participating faculties, see [Article 62 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#). In other words, independent versions of an interdisciplinary programme may not be established within each individual participating faculty.

5.3

Every programme will conclude with a degree, a diploma or a Master's level certificate. Degrees offered at the University of Iceland are listed in [Article 55 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#). A degree is awarded for a programme within a faculty or an interdisciplinary programme, for which two or more faculties are jointly responsible. Programmes that conclude with a degree shall be listed in the faculty sections of Regulation no. 569/2009. There is no need to list shorter programmes or micro-credentials in the faculty sections of Regulation no. 569/2009; it is sufficient to state that faculties are authorised to offer such programmes.

5.4

A micro-credential does not conclude with a degree or another qualification, but students will receive a certificate confirming that they have completed the course.

5.5

The procedure for developing both programmes and micro-credentials is described in the [National Qualification Framework](#). A faculty may define different **specialisations** within a programme. The specialisation can comprise a different combination of courses and/or focuses for the final project. Where more than one specialisation exists within the same programme, they shall have common core courses. Three-year undergraduate programmes may be composed of a major (120 ECTS) and a minor (60 ECTS). A degree is then awarded in the major subject, except in cases where the student has studied two majors, in which case a degree is awarded in both majors. If certain conditions are met, credits from a diploma or Master's level certificate may be transferred to a degree programme, as provided for in detail in the relevant faculty rules. A micro-credential may be up to 59 ECTS.

6. Establishing new programmes

6.1

A new programme may only be established if at least half the courses and for-credit assignments in the coursework part of the programme differ from pre-existing programmes. A thesis or final project is not considered part of the coursework. If the programme differs by less than

half the ECTS value of the coursework, it shall be designed as a specialisation within a pre-existing programme. The specialisation (including majors and minors) shall appear on the degree certificate, with a more detailed description in the diploma supplement.

6.2

A new programme must be designed within a faculty or, as appropriate, by a board of interdisciplinary studies. When a programme is designed within a faculty, the faculty's representative on the school board shall, in the early stages of the process, present the ideas and reasoning behind the new programme and its academic background, including what makes it unique, the faculty's capacity to offer the programme and, where applicable, its societal impact.

6.3

When defining a new programme, consideration should be given to the following standards as applicable, see the current UI Strategy and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015). Where standards are not met, this must be justified with a reasoned argument.

The programme

- is new in the sense that there is no parallel or equivalent programme at another faculty
- meets a clear demand for that education
- is designed with the input of students and other stakeholders. Their involvement must be formal and documented, e.g. through opinion polls, interviews and/or focus groups.
- is designed with the goal of facilitating exchange studies
- takes into account external advice and comparisons
- promotes close collaboration with other schools and faculties at the University
- uses human resources, funding, facilities and equipment across schools and faculties
- increases opportunities for the University to collaborate with Icelandic and foreign universities and research institutes
- involves organised professional training

6.4

When a programme is designed within a faculty, the faculty must send a reasoned proposal for a new programme or new specialisation to the board of the relevant school to be discussed and approved. In the case of a specialisation within a previously approved programme, the school board shall decide whether the new specialisation will be offered. If the school board approves a proposal for a new programme, after obtaining the opinion of the school teaching committee, the board shall then, on behalf of the faculty in question, submit a reasoned proposal for the programme and relevant regulation amendments to the Division of Academic Affairs **before 1 October** each year. The Division of Academic Affairs shall seek a statement from the Academic Affairs Committee on the proposal, as well as a statement from the University Council's Finance Committee regarding the financial basis for establishing the programme. If the proposed programme is a Master's or doctoral programme, the Division of Academic Affairs shall also seek a statement and confirmation from the Graduate School, in

accordance with [Article 66 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#). All things being equal, the Graduate School shall address the matter within four weeks of receiving the proposal.

6.5

When a programme is designed by a board for interdisciplinary studies, the board must submit a reasoned proposal for the programme and relevant regulation amendments to the Division of Academic Affairs **before 1 October** each year. The Division of Academic Affairs shall seek a statement from the Academic Affairs Committee on the proposal, as well as a statement from the University Council's Finance Committee regarding the financial basis for establishing the programme. If the proposed programme is a Master's or doctoral programme, the Division of Academic Affairs shall also seek a statement and confirmation from the Graduate School, in accordance with Article 66 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009. All things being equal, the Graduate School shall address the matter within four weeks of receiving the proposal.

6.6

The Division of Academic Affairs shall submit the proposal for establishment of a new programme to the University Council's Academic Affairs Committee, which will submit it to the University Council for formal approval. The proposal must include (i) a reasoned argument from the school board supporting the establishment of a new programme, (ii) a statement from the University Council Finance Committee, (iii) proposed amendments to regulations as appropriate, (iv) a statement and approval from the Graduate School where applicable. All things being equal, the University Council shall have taken a position on the matter before the end of December of the same year. Amendments to regulations shall be announced to the Legal Gazette of Iceland and the University website updated as required. After approval has been obtained from the University Council, the programme shall be established in the University's study programme system.

7. Information about a programme, basis and justification

A new programme must be defined in accordance with conditions and requirements outlined in the [National Qualification Framework](#). It is important to explain the academic and financial basis for the programme, see Articles 5 and 6 of these rules of procedure.

Proposals for new programmes submitted to the Division of Academic Affairs, see 6.4, must include the following:

- a. Name of programme, level of study and qualification, number of ECTS, defined length and mode of study, structure, language(s) of instruction/examination.
- b. Main aims and subject matter, admission requirements, programme requirements and learning outcomes.
- c. Demand for education - justification for the new programme.
- d. Target group and estimated number of students.

- e. Context and links with other programmes.
- f. Parallel programmes at foreign universities, where applicable.
- g. Access to further study, professional recognition and career opportunities for graduates.
- h. Collaborating parties within and outside UI.
- i. How the proposed programme meets the standards outlined in Article 6.3:
 - is new in the sense that there is no parallel or equivalent programme at another faculty
 - meets a clear demand for that education
 - is designed with the input of students and other stakeholders. Their involvement must be formal and documented, e.g. through opinion polls, interviews and/or focus groups.
 - is designed with the goal of facilitating exchange studies
 - takes into account external advice and comparisons
 - promotes close collaboration with other schools and faculties at the University
 - uses human resources, funding, facilities and equipment across schools and faculties
 - increases opportunities for the University to collaborate with Icelandic and foreign universities and research institutes
 - involves organised professional training
- j. Courses that will be offered, both mandatory and elective. Draft course descriptions must be included.
- k. Programme coordinators, proposed teaching staff, access to facilities and equipment etc., if applicable.
- l. Proposed regulation changes required by established of the programme, see Article 6.4.
- m. Estimated costs, including:
 - i. cost of new courses, where applicable.
 - ii. costs of teaching staff, facilities, special equipment, where applicable.
 - iii. cost of school services, where applicable.

8. Establishing new micro-credentials

8.1

A new micro-credential must be designed within a faculty, unless it is an interdisciplinary subject in which case it must be designed by the appropriate board of study. When a micro-credential is designed within a faculty, the faculty's representative on the school board shall, in the early stages of the process, present the ideas and reasoning behind the new micro-credential, including its aims, why it is needed, the target group and the faculty's capacity to offer the micro-credential.

8.2

When a new micro-credential is designed within a faculty, the faculty must send a reasoned proposal to the board of the relevant school to be discussed and approved. If the school board approves a proposal for a new programme, after obtaining the opinion of the school teaching committee, the board

shall then submit a reasoned proposal to the Division of Academic Affairs. In order to admit students in the autumn semester, the proposal must have been submitted to the Division of Academic Affairs by **1 December** the previous year. In order to admit students in the spring semester, the proposal must have been submitted to the Division of Academic Affairs by **1 August** the previous year.

8.3

When a new micro-credential is designed by a board of interdisciplinary studies, the board must submit a reasoned proposal to the Division of Academic Affairs. In order to admit students in the autumn semester, the proposal must have been submitted to the Division of Academic Affairs by **1 December** the previous year. In order to admit students in the spring semester, the proposal must have been submitted to the Division of Academic Affairs by **1 August** the previous year.

8.4

The Division of Academic Affairs shall seek a statement from the Academic Affairs Committee on creation of the micro-credential, as well as a statement from the University Council's Finance Committee regarding the financial basis for establishing the micro-credential. If the proposed micro-credential is at the graduate level, the Division of Academic Affairs shall also seek a statement and confirmation from the Graduate School, in accordance with [Article 66 of the Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009](#). All things being equal, the Graduate School shall address the matter within two weeks of receiving the proposal.

8.5

The Division of Academic Affairs shall submit the proposal for establishment of a new micro-credential to the University Council's Academic Affairs Committee, which will submit it to the University Council for formal approval. The proposal must include (i) a reasoned argument from the school board supporting the establishment of a new micro-credential, (ii) a statement from the University Council Finance Committee, (iii) a statement and approval from the Graduate School where applicable. After approval has been obtained from the University Council, the micro-credential shall be established in the UI study programme system.

Amendments to regulations shall be announced to the Legal Gazette of Iceland and the UI website updated in cases where a faculty is not already authorised by Regulation no. 569/2009 to offer micro-credentials.

8.6

Proposals for new micro-credentials submitted to the Division of Academic Affairs must include the following:

- a. Name of micro-credential, level of study, number of ECTS, defined length and mode of study, structure, language(s) of instruction/examination.
- b. Main aims and subject matter, admission requirements, programme requirements and learning outcomes.
- c. Implementation and management of micro-credential. If a micro-credential is organised jointly by a faculty and the Continuing Education Institute, a written contract must be made and submitted with the proposal.
- d. Demand for education - justification for the new micro-credential.
- e. Target group and estimated number of students.
- f. Context and links with other programmes. State whether the micro-credential is stackable and, if so, to which degree or diploma programmes credits may be transferred.
- g. Parallel programmes at foreign universities, where applicable.
- h. Access to further study and career opportunities for graduates.
- i. Courses - course descriptions.
- j. Programme coordinators, proposed teaching staff, access to facilities and equipment etc., if applicable.
- k. Proposed regulation changes required by established of the micro-credential, where applicable.
- l. Estimated costs, including:
 - i. cost of new courses, where applicable.
 - ii. costs of teaching staff, facilities, special equipment, where applicable.
 - iii. cost of school services, where applicable

References

- Regulation for the University of Iceland no. 569/2009: https://english.hi.is/regulation_no_569_2009_university_of_iceland
- Higher Education Act, no. 63/2006: <https://www.government.is/media/menntamalaraduneyti-media/media/frettir2015/Thyding-log-um-haskola-oktober-2015.pdf>
- National Qualification Framework, no. 1270/2024: https://adverts.stjornartidindi.is/B_nr_1270_2024.pdf
- Regulation on Quality Assurance for Teaching and Research, no. 1270/2024: <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=5432dd25-f98e-431b-9d92-e01ea5f0d163>
- [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG 2015\)](#).
- Revised Field of Science and Technology (FOS) Classification: <https://web-archive.oecd.org/2012-06-15/138575-38235147.pdf>