



**UNIVERSITY
OF ICELAND**

School of Education

Doctoral Programmes

FEBRUARY 2022

Summary

This self-evaluation report of the doctoral studies at the School of Education (SOE), University of Iceland (UI) was carried out by a self-evaluation committee including the doctoral board and doctoral students' representative, during the autumn semester of 2021.

Information was gathered from: SOE previous self-assessment from 2013; Results from a focus group interview with SOE doctoral students; Group work with SOE supervisors; Student surveys; A previous focus group study by UI Centre for Teaching and Learning among SOE doctoral students from March 2021; The QEF2 [Institutional-wide Review report](#) of University of Iceland from September 2021; and discussions with SOE doctoral students and staff.

The doctoral board supervises doctoral studies in all four of the SOE faculties. The studies are organized at the school level and not within each faculty. The doctoral students have their home faculty at their supervisor's faculty.

The number of doctoral students at the SOE has increased during recent years and is 67 at the time of writing this report.

Two doctoral level programmes are offered: EdD (4 registered students and no new enrolments for the past two years) and PhD (63 registered students and increasing). The EdD programme is not well defined, and it is not clear how it differs from the PhD programme. The quality of the EdD programme is ensured as well as the quality of the PhD programme as the student work is evaluated at two instances (interim evaluation and oral defence) and continuously by the student's doctoral committee and by the doctoral board through progress reports.

The great diversity of the doctoral projects at the SOE reflects the diversity of the academic staff and doctoral supervisors. This is among the reasons for discussing the possibility of defining more than one line of study for the PhD programme. A number of students have expressed that they want the text on their diplomas to better describe their fields of study.

According to a 2020 survey report from the Social Science Research Institute, only about half of the SOE doctoral students were satisfied with the overall quality of their studies. In response to this, a focus group study was carried out by the UI Centre for Teaching and Learning in the beginning of 2021. The main results and suggestions had to do with increased support to doctoral students in the beginning of their studies, funding, improving flow of information, involving students in decision making and clarifying their role, educating supervisors, and looking over the course offerings and function of the research seminars. The doctoral students' focus group formed for this report had many of the same conclusions, which were also found in the External experts' report. Actions to meet some of those suggestions have already been taken and others are listed in the action plan at the end of this report.

A vision for the doctoral studies at the SOE is developing through consultation and discussion among the doctoral board, doctoral students, and supervisors. The supervisors and their competencies are the most important aspect to keep in mind for developing a strategy for the doctoral studies to flourish.

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1 Introduction

In accordance with the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework at the University level and the University of Iceland's (UI) Guidelines for the organization, schedule, and process of institution-led review of faculties and interdisciplinary programs, the Doctoral board of the UI School of Education (SOE), carried out a self-evaluation during the autumn semester of 2021. The results are presented in this report. A self-evaluation committee was established on October 6, 2021.

The committee members were:

- Atli Harðarson, chair of the self-assessment group and chair of the doctoral board, atlivh@hi.is
- Steingerður Ólafsdóttir, project manager of doctoral studies, steingeo@hi.is
- Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir, member of doctoral board, brm@hi.is
- Erlingur Sigurður Jóhannsson, member of doctoral board, erljo@hi.is
- Hafdís Guðjónsdóttir, member of doctoral board, hafdgud@hi.is
- Helga Rut Guðmundsdóttir, member of doctoral board, helgarut@hi.is
- Amelia Larimer, representative of PhD students, ail9@hi.is

Information was gathered from: SOE previous self-assessment from 2013; Results from a focus group interview with SOE doctoral students; Group work with SOE supervisors; Student surveys; A previous focus group study by UI Centre for Teaching and Learning among SOE doctoral students from March 2021. The QEF2 [Institutional-wide Review report](#) of University of Iceland from September 2021 has also provided valuable information as well as discussions with SOE doctoral students and staff.

2 Program Characteristics and Management

Doctoral studies at the SOE are organized on the school level and not the faculty level. The SOE Doctoral board (also called "The doctoral studies committee") supervises doctoral studies in all the four SOE faculties in accordance with article 2 of the [Regulation on doctoral study at the University of Iceland School of Education, no. 440/2018](#). SOE of course follows The Standards and Requirements for the Quality of Doctoral Programmes at the University of Iceland and consults with the Graduate School on a regular basis.

The doctoral board has seven members: A chair, appointed by the SOE board and representing the dean of the SOE; Representatives of all four faculties; One representative of the SOE administration, who is also the project manager for doctoral studies; One doctoral student representative. It is appointed for a two-year term. The chair of the committee also acts as coordinator for doctoral studies and as the SOE contact with the Graduate School (Icel. Miðstöð framhaldsnáms).

The board meets at least once a month during the academic year. It is responsible for the organisation of doctoral studies; Recommendations to the school board concerning the admission of doctoral students; Appointment of supervisors, doctoral committees, external examiners, and opponents.

The doctoral studies rely on faculty members from the four faculties of the SOE. More information on human resources, recruitment policy, faculty members etc. can be found in the self-evaluation reports from the four faculties of the SOE.

2.1 Finance

This report does not cover the financing of doctoral studies at the SOE. The doctoral studies at the SOE are funded by UI, directly and through each of the four faculties. There is also external funding for doctoral research that is hosted by each faculty. Doctoral students apply for grants from the University of Iceland, Rannís, or other funds, either individually or together with their supervisors. They can also be hired to carry out their doctoral research within larger research projects.

2.2 Students and Study Programmes

The number of doctoral students at the SOE has increased during recent years and is 67 at the time of the writing of this report (December 2021). At the Faculty of Education and Diversity 24 doctoral students are registered; 17 to the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy; 16 to the Faculty of Subject Teacher Education; and 9 to the Faculty of Health Promotion, Sport and Leisure Studies. Two doctoral level programmes are offered: EdD (UMD561) and PhD (UMD532). A large majority of students are registered for the PhD programme, and a few are registered for the EdD programme. See chapter 4 for specifications of each programme.

2.3 Student Satisfaction, Supervision and Support for Students

According to a 2020 survey report from the Social Science Research Institute (Icel. Félagsvísindastofnun), entitled Views of PhD students on their studies at the UI 2011-2020 (Icel. Viðhorf doktorsnema til náms við HÍ 2011-2020), only 52% of doctoral students at the SOE were satisfied with the overall quality of their studies, down from 75% in 2013-14, 80% in 2015-16, and 61% in 2017-18, and lower than the university wide average of 67%.

In response to this negative outcome the SOE asked The Centre for Teaching and Learning (Icel. “Kennslumiðstöð”) to do further research on the experience of doctoral students. That work resulted in a report on students’ experience of doctoral studies (written in Icelandic by Guðrún Geirsdóttir, Eyþór Bjarki Sigurbjörnsson and Halla Valgeirsdóttir and entitled Students’ Experience of Doctoral Studies, in Icelandic “Reynsla nemenda af doktorsnámi”). The main conclusions of this report emphasised the importance of:

1. Receiving students and supporting them.
2. Clarifying the role and status of doctoral students and involving students in decision making.
3. Flow of information to students needs to be improved and students need to be better informed from the beginning about several issues including their roles, rights, and membership of the academic community, the staff, and administration.
4. Increased support for students regarding funding and grant possibilities and clarification of the supportive role of the Educational Research Institute.
5. Better definition of the roles of supervisors and more education about supervision.
6. Academic community including the form and function of the research seminar and offering of courses.

The participants were of the opinion that the SOE has received more students than is possible to support. This can be combined with the question often raised and discussed, on whether students should be required to have secured funding when they are accepted to the studies. That question will not be answered in this report.

Actions to meet those suggestions have already been taken and the action plan in the end of this report lists further actions. The actions already taken include a central advisory person, more consultations with the doctoral student association, more selective flow of information in the form of a regular newsletter, and regular meetings with supervisors.

In the [Standards and Requirements for the Quality of Doctoral Programmes](#) approved by the University Council 5 Nov. 2020, Art. 4.1, states that “At the beginning of the doctoral programme at the University of Iceland, the student and supervisor shall sign an agreement regarding the organisation of the studies. This agreement shall stipulate the mutual rights and responsibilities of the student and the supervisor, ownership of data, publication rights and intellectual property rights, etc.” This has not been done consistently at the SOE and needs to be addressed in a revised version of the Handbook for doctoral studies at the School of Education.

3 Academic Vision

3.1 Strategy for Teaching and Research

At present there is not a clear vision or strategy for doctoral studies at the SOE. Such a vision is developing through consultation and discussion among the doctoral board, doctoral students, and supervisors. Discussions where all the parties are present have been scheduled and need to be further promoted. Regular consultations occur between the doctoral student association and a member of the doctoral board, and between the doctoral board and supervisors within the SOE.

The most important aspect to keep in mind for developing a strategy for the doctoral studies to flourish, is the supervisors and their competencies. The Graduate School offers [courses for supervisors](#) on a regular basis. The research fields within the doctoral studies at the SOE are diverse as is the academic staff. However, there is a lack of potential supervisors in some areas of study such as teaching of languages, art, and science education.

Not all doctoral students graduate within 5 years. This may be linked to a lack of supervision, a lack of funding or other reasons. Ways to tackle this have been discussed and have included a targeted workshop and increased support. For those who do not complete their doctorate for some reason, the possibility to graduate with M.Phil. is now offered in several faculties within the UI but is still under discussion at the SOE.

3.2 Collaboration and International Context

According to Art. 9 of the regulations of the doctoral studies at the SOE, doctoral students shall spend at least one semester at a university outside Iceland. This can be within a previously founded international collaboration between SOE and other universities or within the student’s or supervisor’s network.

SOE has been a part of the Nordic Research School in Teacher Education Relevant Research (NorTED) network since 2019. Nine universities from the five Nordic countries are involved in the network which includes courses, conferences, and seminars. The chair of the doctoral board and the project manager of the doctoral studies are contact persons for the SOE. This network needs more representation among the doctoral students at SOE. After COVID-19 it is easier to travel within the Nordic countries than during COVID-19 and this might increase the mobility of the SOE doctoral students.

The SOE has so far organized and held one seminar/course that was attended both by UI students and students from one other NorTED university.

4 Doctoral programmes at SOE

4.1 UMD561 Education (EdD 180 ECTS)

4.1.1 Students

Currently (spring 2022), four students are registered for the EdD programme, and no new students have been enrolled in the last two years. Those registered undergo interim evaluations, as all doctoral students at the SOE, and there is not much difference between the research work and supervision of EdD and PhD students.

Table 1. No. of new entrants, number of students graduating, completion rate¹, total number of registered students 20 October (all study years), of which no. of active students², sex ratio of registered students and age group for the years 2018-2020.

	Intake rate (%)	No. students in first term	Retention rate (%)	No. students graduating	Completion rate (%)	Total no. of students	% Male	Full time	Part time	Mean age	Min age	Max age
2020	0%					7	29%	1		56.9	39	65
2019	0%	1				6	33%		1	54.5	38	61
2018	0%	3				6	33%		3	49.2	37	60
Mean	0%	2				6	32%	1	2	54	38	62

¹ 5-year completion rate.

² Students with registered ECTS units.

4.1.2 Teaching and learning

The EdD programme is not well defined, and it is not clear how it differs from the PhD programme. Descriptions in the UI Course Catalogue are in two languages, English, and Icelandic. The English version lists the same learning outcomes for EdD and PhD but in the Icelandic version they are different. If the English version is the correct one there does not seem to be much reason to offer two lines of study and EdD can merge with PhD.

If the Icelandic version is correct, then an EdD demands less in terms of competences than the PhD. The “Formal criteria for higher education and degrees” (Icel. “Viðmið um æðri menntun og prófgráður”) issued by the Minister of Education, do, however, only define one degree at this level.

The programme should either be properly defined or removed from the course catalogue until the differences between EdD and PhD have been clarified and pertinent clauses in the *Regulation on doctoral study at the University of Iceland School of Education, no. 440/2018* have been reviewed.

The quality of the programme is ensured by the interim evaluation (that students undergo when they are about halfway through their study, typically after about two years from enrolment) with two external

examiners and the public defence with two external opponents. The student work is evaluated at these two instances and continuously by the student's doctoral committee.

The structure of the study programme is defined in the UI Course catalogue. The list of options to complete 60 ECTS in courses does not reflect reality. The very diverse needs of the students are partially met through courses offered outside the SOE, both at the University of Iceland and universities abroad.

Two paths are possible, a doctoral thesis in the form of a single work (monograph) or a collection of scientific papers with a synopsis combining the articles into a comprehensive scientific entity.

4.2 UMD532 Education (PhD 180-240 ECTS)

4.2.1 Students

At the time of writing this report (spring 2022), 63 students were registered to the PhD programme, and the number is increasing. Including the EdD students, a total of 67 doctoral students are currently registered at the SOE.

Table 2. No. of new entrants, number of students graduating, completion rate¹, total number of registered students 20 October (all study years), of which no. of active students², sex ratio of registered students and age group for the years 2018-2020.

	Intake rate (%)	No. students in first term	Retention rate (%)	No. students graduating	Completion rate (%)	Total no. of students	% Male	Full time	Part time	Mean age	Min age	Max age
2020	63%	40	?	4	25%	43	26%	20	20	44.4	26	64
2019	64%	25	100%	6	50%	48	27%	9	16	44.5	28	63
2018	50%	27	100%	4	0%	43	30%	11	16	44.1	29	61
Mean	59%	31	100%	5	25%	45	28%	13	17	44	28	63

¹ 5-year completion rate.

² Students with registered ECTS units.

4.2.2 Teaching and learning

The main strength of the PhD programme at SOE is its inclusiveness. The great diversity of the doctoral projects at SOE reflects the diversity of the academic staff and doctoral supervisors.

The learning outcomes for a doctoral degree are outlined in the [Icelandic Qualification Framework for Higher Education](#) published by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. Because of the diversity of doctoral studies at the SOE it is doubtful that the learning outcomes, common to all, can be much more specific.

In the [Standards and Requirements for the Quality of Doctoral Programmes](#) approved by the University Council 5 Nov. 2020 it says regarding learning outcomes (in article 3): "The objective of a doctoral programme at the University of Iceland is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and competences they need to meet the current learning outcomes for doctoral studies issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture."

In Art. 4.2 of the same document, it says: “Doctoral programmes shall be clearly defined, including descriptions of the knowledge, skills and competences that students should possess on completing the programme. It shall be stated by what means (coursework and other programme components) the student is expected to achieve these outcomes.”

Art. 4.2 seems to demand that for each line of study there should be a list of learning outcomes that are more specific than those listed in the Icelandic Qualification Framework for Higher Education. It is, however, hard to implement this at the SOE with only one line of study for all PhD students working on very diverse research topics.

The remarks above present one of the reasons why the SOE doctoral board and the SOE board need to consider the possibility of defining more than one line of study for the PhD. Another pertinent reason is that several PhD students (some of whom are working within the areas of Health Promotion, Sport and Leisure Studies) have said that they wanted the text on their diplomas to describe their fields of study. Given that the text names the line of study, the only text available is the name of the one and only PhD line of study (i.e., “Educational sciences, Ph.D.”). It should however be possible to change the text on the diplomas by changing the software used to make them and allowing for instance one additional line of text.

The structure of the study programme is defined in the UI Course catalogue. The list of options to complete 30 ECTS in courses does, however, not tell the whole story. The very diverse needs of the students are partially met through courses offered outside the SOE.

Two paths are possible, a doctoral thesis in the form of a single work (monograph) or a collection of scientific papers with a synopsis combining the articles into a comprehensive scientific entity.

5 Summary and Main Conclusions for doctoral studies at SOE

5.1 Lessons learned from the External experts’ report

Most of the issues brought to light by the External experts’ report (QEF2 Institution Wide review) published in September 2021 have also been pointed out by focus groups and the report from the Centre for Teaching and Learning. The UI Strategy 2021-2026 also involves a work programme on the framework, funding, and quality of the graduate studies. The most important ones relate to:

1. Support for students
 - a) Improved flow of information to doctoral students
 - b) Need for an “ombudsman” for doctoral students
 - c) Need for more funding
2. Improved supervision
 - a) Education and peer support for supervisors
 - b) Guidelines for qualifications of supervisors
 - c) Contracts between doctoral students and supervisors

5.2 Other issues that need to be addressed

3. Revision of diplomas and lines of study defined in the course catalogue
 - a) Decision on how to make the text on diplomas sufficiently descriptive
 - b) Decision about new study lines for PhD
 - c) Decision on the future of the EdD
 - d) Decision about a new study line for M.Phil.
4. Academic vision
 - a) Intake of students and difficulties with accommodating students in areas where there is a lack of manpower, e.g., in language teaching and science education
 - b) International cooperation
 - c) A clearer pathway to relevant courses and courses taught in English

5.3 Actions

Table 1. Action plan.

	Action	Deliverable(s)	Deadline	Responsible party
1a	Improved flow of information to doctoral students	Introduction day for new doctoral students at the beginning of each academic year.	Ongoing from autumn 2021	Doctoral board
		A weekly newsletter sent to students	Ongoing from spring 2021	Doctoral board
		A course for all new students	Planned start September 2022	Doctoral board
		Handbook for doctoral studies at SOE regularly updated	Next spring 2022	Doctoral board
2a	Education and peer support for supervisors (in addition to courses offered by The Graduate School))	Regular meetings where supervisors discuss doctoral student supervision.	Ongoing from 2020	Doctoral board
2b	Guidelines for qualifications of supervisors	A chapter in a revised Handbook for doctoral studies at SOE	February 2022	Doctoral board
2c	Contracts between doctoral students and supervisors	A chapter in a revised Handbook for doctoral studies at SOE	Planned spring 2022	Doctoral board
		Meetings with new students and their supervisors	Planned spring 2022	Doctoral board
3a	Decision on how to make the text on diplomas sufficiently descriptive	To be decided later	Planned autumn 2022	Doctoral board and SOE board
3b	Decision about new study lines for PhD	Study lines in UI Course catalogue for the academic year 2024-5	Planned spring 2023	Doctoral board and SOE board
3c	Decision on the future of the EdD	Study lines in UI Course catalogue for the academic year 2024-5	Planned spring 2023	Doctoral board and SOE board
3d	Decision about study line for M.Phil.	Study lines in UI Course catalogue for the academic year 2023-4	Planned spring 2023	Doctoral board and SOE board
4	Academic vision. (A clearer vision for the future of doctoral studies at SOE.)	To be decided later	Planned spring 2023	Doctoral board and SOE board
4a	Clearer pathway to relevant courses and courses taught in English	The defined study lines in UI Course catalogue (see 3b-d). Annual courses on set topics	Planned autumn 2023	Doctoral board and SOE board

The table above lists actions that will be taken to improve the quality of the doctoral studies at the SOE. Other actions are needed that are not in the hands of the doctoral board or the SOE board. This includes improved funding and the much called for “ombudsman” for doctoral students that was established just before this report was completed.

5.4 Follow-up Processes

The implementation of the Action Plan will be a standing item at meetings of the SOE Doctoral Board and the 2022 and 2024 biannual reports of the board will list what has been accomplished and what is still in progress.

Appendices

1. Terms of reference for the external experts
2. Report of the external experts
3. CVs for the external experts