Report on educational quality 2023 University Centre in Svalbard

CONTENTS

Cover photo: From theory to practice – Students from AB-329/829 analyse snow profiles at the Tellbreen glacier, 2023. Photo: Tina Dahl, UNIS

1 Summary

An annual report on educational quality shall be presented to the UNIS Board. The quality work is headed by the UNIS Education Committee (ECom) and the Director. This work involves following up, developing and controlling the quality of the education provision, as well focusing attention on the culture for quality and continual improvement. The students play an important role in this work through course evaluations, representation on various committees and boards, and through their own educational projects and collaboration with staff to develop academic content and activities.

The results of the course evaluations in 2023 show a response rate of 63% and mostly positive feedback from the students. Field work, safety training, learning environment and teaching staff all receive good feedback. No challenges related to the psychosocial learning environment were uncovered. The workload and its distribution during the courses receive mixed responses. The students want more even distribution, better course structure and better communication and information from the people with course responsibilities. The learning resources and learning environment at UNIS receive mostly positive feedback, although some respondents mention IT challenges, particularly related to screen problems. The library and the new learning areas at Elvesletta support the students' learning, even though the use of the library has changed after the pandemic. The examination results show an increase in the proportion of top grades (A or B) and a failure rate of 1%, which is the norm for UNIS. Most of the students feel they have adequate background knowledge for the courses they take at UNIS and perceive the courses as relevant for their future careers.

UNIS puts considerable resources into improving the educational quality through various strategic initiatives and systematic quality work. The Department of Academic Affairs, along with bioCEED and iEarth, plays an important role in the follow-up and development of this work. During 2023, UNIS underwent a comprehensive revision of its course portfolio for 2024, with particular focus on the number of courses and block scheduling for master's and PhD courses. The aim of this was to create greater predictability with the start and end dates of the courses, while also facilitating better coordination of services and teaching. Challenges and opportunities related to artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching have been discussed, including workshops and a proposal to establish guidelines for AI use. UNIS works continuously to develop the pedagogical competence of teaching staff. As well as offering pedagogy courses and workshops for employees, UNIS is part of the merit scheme for Excellent Teaching Practitioners at the University of Bergen (UiB). Furthermore, Learning Forum 2023 was a success with increased participation and positive feedback. It is considered an important event for developing the teaching culture at the institution and raising the pedagogical competence among the teaching staff.

bioCEED and iEarth continued their work to promote the quality of education and teaching through various projects and are also important contributors to the Learning Forum. In 2023, bioCEED was in its final year and has been working on an exit strategy to ensure the continuation of its initiatives. Both centres collaborated on several projects, including UNISbreakfast, UNISprout and SCOPE, and developed the "Field Teaching Assistant Academy" course into an extended five-day course. Several courses and workshops were offered through the centres, including iEarth's Geo-MOD digital field course and a sustainability workshop. BioCEED also offered a Large Language Model workshop and the annual collegial teaching and learning course (MNPED660). The FieldPass project, which developed tools such as virtual field guides and certification of practical skills, concluded in 2023 and has been implemented in several courses at UNIS. These tools have improved learning outcomes and are shared through various forums such as the Learning Forum and external conferences.

Overall, the active participation by the students combined with the ongoing quality work and supporting measures contribute to a continuous improvement of the quality of education and the students' learning experience at UNIS.

2 UNIS report on educational quality 2023

The UNIS Board is responsible for the quality of education at UNIS. The annual report on educational quality reports on and assesses the educational quality, the work involving quality and the development of quality at UNIS. The report consists of results from course evaluations, evaluations from guest students, the Speak-up system and brief reports from various sections on the educational quality at UNIS. The report also covers continued and new measures for 2024/2025. These measures are based on professional advice about educational quality from the Department of Academic Affairs and ECom, as well as the Director's assessments and prioritising of input from the organisation and in the student evaluations. The list of measures is considered in budget processes and the development of UNIS' course portfolio. Changes to the law and regulations relating to higher education have necessitated a simple revision of the UNIS quality system. Owing to reduced staffing in the academic administration, this work has not started as previously planned but will begin in 2024/2025.

3 The academic departments' perception of strengths and weaknesses

The academic departments contribute to the report on educational quality and the list of measures through their course evaluations, participation in ECom and written contributions. Unfortunately there was a low response rate among staff with course responsibilities in 2023. Only 31% (17 staff) gave feedback on their student groups, learning environment, reading list, implementation and cooperation with the support departments (see Table 1). This low response rate makes it difficult to draw general conclusions for the entire institution, but it does offer some indications (see strengths and weaknesses). Moreover, 65% of the staff with course responsibilities completed midway or operational evaluations during the course. As the response rate from staff with course responsibilities is so low in the first place, it is difficult to say whether UNIS finds it satisfactory that 65% have completed this type of evaluation. It is still important that the staff with course responsibilities use simple feedback methods that allow for adjustments while a course is in progress, or simple collection of information that may be used in future planning (e.g. the quality of guest lecturers/digital teaching sessions).

Strengths and weaknesses:
All staff with course responsibilities who completed the course evaluations believe the students have good or very good English language proficiency. Many staff with course responsibilities (71%) believe that the academic background of the students was good or very good. They also reported that there was a good or very good learning environment in the course. Furthermore, 89% believe that the workload for the students in the course was good or very good. Nevertheless, the distribution of the workload was raised in the free text sections as an area that could be improved in the courses. The cooperation with the support departments generally scores good or very good. However, several staff responded that they were less satisfied with the IT infrastructure or the interaction with/support from the IT department. The following points relating to IT infrastructure were raised:
- difficulties getting the screens in the classrooms to work
- the lack of instructions about how to carry out simple operations related to the screens in the classrooms
- difficulties getting get help from the IT department to resolve challenges related to screens and software
- missing software on the computers in the computer lab

- unstable Wi-Fi

The staff with course responsibilities were mostly very satisfied with HSE and safety related to the field. This concerns safety training, support from the Section for Operation and Field Safety (OFS) and how they experienced field safety. Some staff reported that there is a need for an earlier clarification of time for research cruises and a desire for more assistance from OFS at the quay area during departure/arrival.

When it comes to proposals for improving their courses, the staff with course responsibilities expressed a desire to add more student-active learning in the form of the use of reflection tools, data management, more research-based project work, more field work, restructuring of Canvas and more student-active use of Canvas. They also raised the need for better organisation and a more overall approach to block courses, especially in relation to learning outcome descriptions, teaching activities and assessment methods.

4 Learning environment for students

Evaluations 2023

Evaluation forms at UNIS are based on Ramsden[1] (1991) and provide institutional, overall data concerning the learning environment, workload, follow-up of the students by the person with course responsibility and safety training, etc. The form also directly asks about the student's experience of how skills, competence and knowledge have been acquired. In 2020, UNIS also introduced an annual evaluation among the guest students (at bachelor, master's and PhD level). This evaluation provides guest students who had an active contract for all or part of the year with the opportunity to provide feedback on everything from learning outcomes, supervision and support functions to their overall level of satisfaction with their UNIS affiliation. In 2023, the course evaluation for the guest students was not carried out owing to reduced capacity among administrative staff.

Results from the course evaluations in 2023

The response rate for the student evaluations (courses) in 2023 was 63% (see Table 1). This represents a slight decline from 2021 and 2022 when the response rate was 70%. The students submitted a total of 565 course evaluations spread among 98 courses[2]. In 2023, two courses did not carry out evaluations. Note that the answer category "not relevant" has been removed in the figures below. Consequently, the number of respondents per category varies depending on how many have selected "not relevant" in response to the individual questions. An overview of all quantitative answers is available in Appendix 1. The results for 2023 are compared with the statistics for 2021 because only a brief summary of the educational quality was prepared for 2022.

	Course students	Staff with course responsibilities	Guest students with active contracts	Guest students with physical presence
2019	75%	53%	N/A	N/A
2020	64%	73%	48%	30%
2021	70%	86%	56%	37%

---

[1] Ramsden, P. (1991) A performance indicator of teaching quality in higher education: The Course Experience Questionnaire. Studies in Higher Education, 16(2), 129-149.
[2] Courses at master's and PhD level are summed up separately. If these are combined, a total of 49 courses have carried out course evaluations. The course evaluations for Arctic Safety (AS-101) and Svalbard's history (SH-201) are not included in the statistics.

2022	70%	49%	Not carried out	Not carried out
2023	63%	31%	Not carried out	Not carried out

Table 1: The response rate of evaluations carried out in 2019-2023.

Strengths and weaknesses

The course students generally have positive feedback about their time at UNIS. This especially applies to aspects related to:

- field work (the link between theory and practice, learning practical skills/methods in the field)
- safety training and safety in the field
- learning environment (being part of the academic community, meeting experts in specific fields, working closely with researchers and other students and learning generic skills they may use in their academic career)
- teaching (research-based teaching, freedom to develop their own research project and varied teaching methods)
- staff with course responsibilities/lecturers (experts in specific fields, motivated teaching staff and close contact with teaching staff)

The IT infrastructure receives better feedback in 2023 than in 2021 when it comes to how it supports learning and teaching. However, there is also repetitive feedback that screens in the classrooms turn off. The students express some dissatisfaction and criticism about the clarity of the learning objectives, standard of work expected and perception of the workload in the courses. As in previous years, some students in the 2023 evaluation noted that the use of external guest lecturers contributes to a high carbon footprint. Despite this, the students also note the use of external guest lecturers as a significant strength at UNIS. They bring valuable expertise and insight from their respective fields, giving students a unique opportunity to learn from experts in their fields. These guest lecturers act as an important source of motivation and offer a depth to the teaching that many students value highly.

Examinations, grades and failure rate

Examinations were implemented in Wiseflow, while plagiarism control was implemented via the system Ouriginal. For courses that utilised the grading scale from A-F, including Svalbard's history (SH-201), 69% of the grades awarded were A or B. This is somewhat higher than previous years (59%). The failure rate was 1%, which has been the norm at UNIS for many years.

Background knowledge and relevance of UNIS courses for the students' future

A total of 82% (up from 80% in 2021) agreed or fully agreed that they had adequate background knowledge to take the courses. This corresponds well with the attitudes among the academic staff
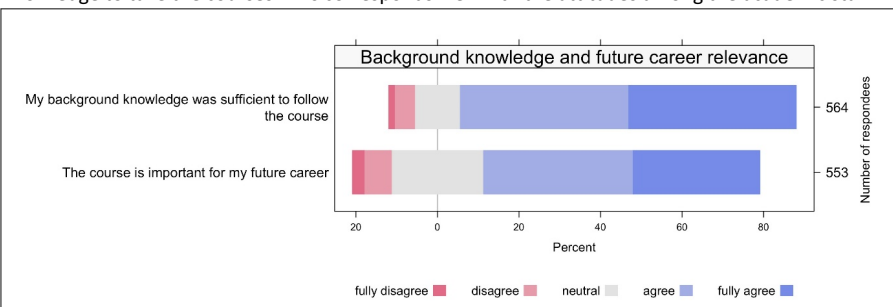
where 71% have a similar perception of the students. When it comes to the importance of the courses at UNIS for their future careers, 66% (up from 64% in 2021) agreed/fully agreed that the courses were important.

Figure 1: The students' perception of background knowledge and relevance for their future career. Variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

Constructive alignment and clear goals

These questions assess the extent to which the students feel there is constructive alignment in the teaching between course activities and the learning outcomes, as well as whether they understand what they are working towards and the standard of work expected.

The students agree or fully agree (78%) that the course activities support the learning outcomes in the courses (see Figure 2). Moreover, some of the students (17%) were unsure of the workload expected of them and 22-27% were unsure of what they were working towards.
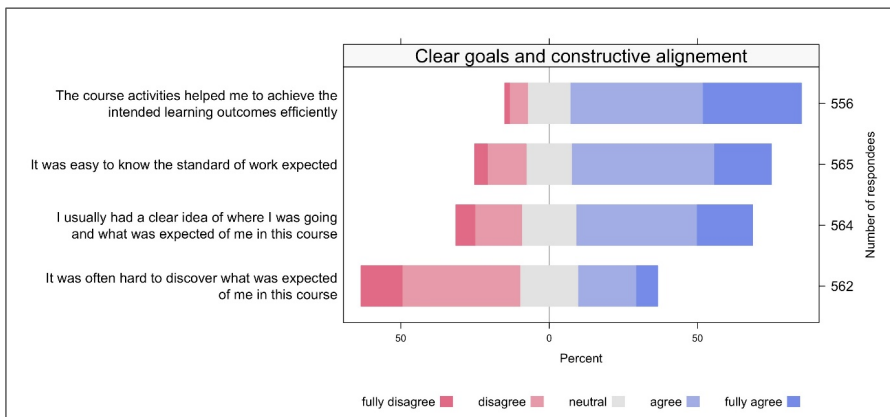

Figure 2: The students' perception of the constructive alignment in the teaching, clear goals, background, relevance, the standard of work expected and appropriateness of learning activities. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

From the feedback in the free text sections, this particularly relates to a lack of learning objectives and expectations from the person with course responsibility, poor organisation and structure of the course (lack of a recurrent theme/coherence in the course structure, unpredictable timetable, lack of information about implementation of the course and what to expect in the examination, or too much and unclear information) and a lack of communication between the staff and students.

Good teaching and safety in the field

A high proportion of the students (79%) believe that the teaching staff were good at making the course understandable (see Figure 3). Moreover, 72% of the students responded that the teaching staff motivated them to do their best, while 74% responded that the teaching staff made a real effort to understand the problems and difficulties the students were experiencing. Most of the students (72%) agree that the teaching staff give them helpful feedback on their work, while 12% disagree or fully disagree with this.

Good teaching and feedback
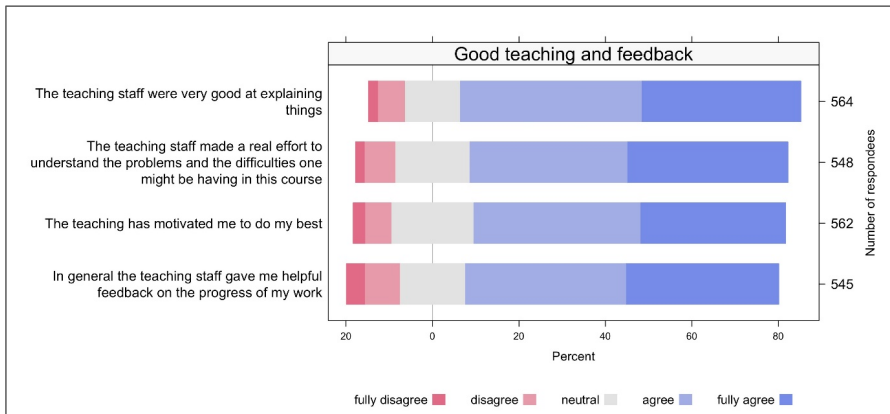
Figure 3: The students' perception of the teaching and the feedback they receive from the person with course responsibility. The results follow the trend from 2020. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

The students also agree or fully agree (82%) that they learn a lot from the field teaching (see Figure 4) and that it is well organised (80%), while 10% of the students disagree or fully disagree with the latter.

The perception of safety related to the field teaching (97%) and the safety training (90%) receives extremely positive feedback from the students.

Safety and fieldwork
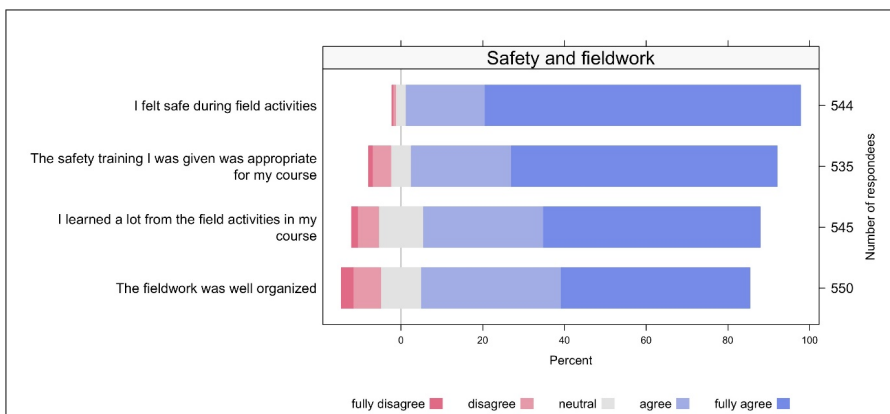
Figure 4: The students' perception of the field work and they safety in the field. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

Generic skills

The students were asked whether the courses have contributed to developing their generic skills. The results show that the students agree or fully agree (79%) that the courses helped them develop their skills to handle new challenges (see Figure 5). The evaluation also shows that 78% of the students

believe that the courses have played a part in developing their ability to work in a group. However, based on the responses in the free text sections, it appears that group work is something the students perceive as challenging. The main reasons are group dynamics and the students not knowing how to deal with challenges that often arise in a group. The answers are more varied when it comes to analytical skills, oral and written communication and the students' ability to plan their work. The proportion of students who agree or fully agree that the courses have helped to improve these skills varies from 56% to 67%.

Figure 5: *The students' perception of the generic skills they have acquired during the course(s) they have taken at UNIS. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.*

The students' workload

Half the students (50%) agree or fully agree that the workload was distributed appropriately throughout the course period (see Figure 6). This represents a small but positive increase from 2021 when 43% agreed or fully agreed. There is a tendency for students taking semester-long courses to give more positive feedback on the distribution of the workload (54%) than those taking short courses (47%).

The students provided more detailed feedback (a total of 49 comments) about the workload and its distribution in the free text section of the course evaluations. Most of the feedback stated that the workload is unevenly distributed throughout the course period. The students feel that the workload is too heavy at the start (owing to field planning, a lot of information and being new at UNIS) and towards the end of the course when there are many deadlines and submissions and too little time between the last lecture/submission and examinations. Several students commented that they had to work during the weekends and could not have a day off. The students also commented on the vast syllabus and low learning outcomes when the workload is too heavy.

"Maybe the amount of work was not the main problem, but the timing itself. By the last week, we had an oral exam, present the results of the last report and submit it. All this while still having lectures."

In addition to spreading the workload better and extending the course period, the students suggested improving the course structure, having a clearer course plan and better communication from the person with course responsibility to reduce the perception that the workload is too heavy.
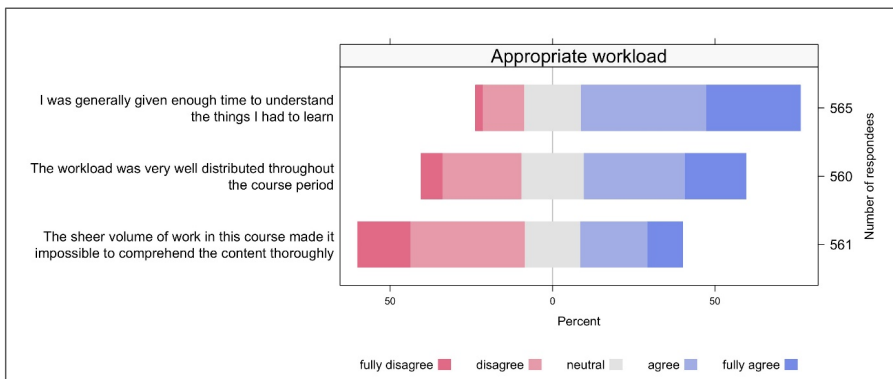
Figure 6: The students' perception of the workload in the course and how this was distributed throughout the course period. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

Learning resources and learning environment

Most of the students agree or fully agree that the physical learning environment at UNIS is very good (see Figure 7). They agree or fully agree that the course content and materials are up-to-date and in line with the course description. The students also feel a sense of belonging to the university community at UNIS. As in previous years, the library resources receive mixed feedback. However, it is worth noting that 34% responded that the category is "not relevant", which is equivalent to 2021.
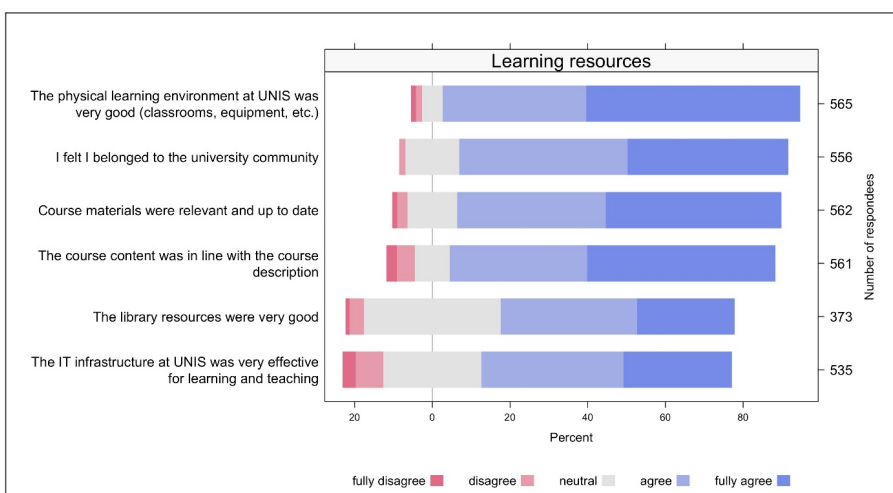
Figure 7: The students' perception of the quality of the learning resources and the learning environment at UNIS. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

The large proportion of students who responded that the library resources were not relevant may be attributed to several factors such as changes in where the students live and study (see a more detailed description in Chapter 6 Library). When it comes to IT infrastructure, 64% of students (50% in 2021) responded that they agree or fully agree that it is very effective for learning and teaching (25% are neutral while 10% disagree or fully disagree). Based on the comments in the free text sections, the students are mainly dissatisfied with the screens in the classrooms, the fact that they switch off and that HDMI cables are not available as part of the standardised equipment to connect a laptop to a screen. The students also mentioned the lack of software for the computer lab and structural issues for Canvas, such as an unclear information flow when using course messages, announcements and e-mail and a desire for better organisation of the Canvas pages.

Student participation

The students at UNIS participate in many ways to the development of various aspects within the educational quality and the educational activities at UNIS. They act as representatives on boards and committees, run educational projects and are co-creators of teaching/learning, who cooperate with employees to develop academic and teaching content and extramural activities in their own education.

The students' voice is decisive through course evaluations, midway evaluations and guest student evaluations and the Speak-up system. The feedback from these forms an important basis for discussions about the further development of the learning outcomes at UNIS and results with the measures in the report on educational quality. The feedback from the student evaluations also plays a key role when determining the focus of the annual Learning Forum.

Structurally, the student democracy (the Student Council) and the two Centres for Excellence in Education, bioCEED and iEarth, are important pillars for student participation and the learning environment at UNIS. These bodies provide the students with an opportunity to influence teaching and education at the institution. The Student Council is elected at the start of each semester and represents the breadth of the student body, including various subject areas (AG, AB, AGF, AT and the ANG programme) and levels (bachelor and master). The students also elect their own Student Council representatives on the UNIS board and ECom. However, there is no student representative in the management team at UNIS. Both bioCEED and iEarth collaborate closely with the students, and the students are included as partners in the centres' activities, in the steering group and on the board. They are recruited among the students on an ongoing basis and part of their remuneration comes through the various projects they have developed.

The students have an important role in several academic and social initiatives at UNIS. They started and run these initiatives after seeing a need for them. One example is UNISbreakfast, which is run by student representatives from bioCEED and iEarth. This initiative was started in 2018 to create a social and interdisciplinary learning arena for all students at UNIS. The students meet for an informal breakfast where students can present their research work and gain an insight into the opportunities and challenges that lie in an academic career. In 2023, the event was held five times and had a total of 200 participants.

Similarly, the annual student-run conference SCOPE is an important academic and social meeting point for students at UNIS. It is financed through UNIS, bioCEED and iEarth. In 2023, more 100 students took part in the two-day conference featuring 18 student presentations (see Photo 1).

The third student-driven initiative from bioCEED and iEarth is UNISprout, which provides opportunities for bachelor students to do field work or lab work in conjunction with a master's or PhD project. This practical training is unpaid and limited to 40 hours. In 2023, 18 bachelor students did a combined 353 hours' work through the programme.

The students also get involved in the Learning Forum where, in collaboration with staff, they design their own student programme based on topics they consider important. This year the focus was on the use of artificial intelligence in learning and cooperative learning. They also contribute to the main programme with poster presentations and panel discussions.

Through these various forms of student participation, the students at UNIS contribute to improving the quality of their education, increasing the learning outcomes and promoting broader inclusion. It also increases their motivation, commitment and ownership of their own education, which in turn strengthens their professional and personal development. By being active co-creators of their education, the students gain a meaningful role in the development of UNIS as an educational institution.

Photo 1: Some of the participates at the student-run SCOPE conference in 2023. Photo: SCOPE

Temporary Academic Staff

Temporary Academic Staff (TAS) is a group for PhD students, post docs and other temporary academic staff at UNIS. The group elects a chair and deputy chair among its members and is represented on ECom. A student adviser at the Department of Academic Affairs functioned as a secretariat for TAS up to mid-2022, but since then the group has organised its own secretariat services. However, the experiences of organising this itself in 2023 have been varied and TAS wants to have the secretariat services linked to a role at UNIS again. TAS organises academic and social activities to ensure a good working environment for the temporary academic staff at UNIS. This group is also an important arena for newly appointed TAS to get to know other TAS. In 2023, TAS held three meetings and a Christmas function in December. During the meetings, the members discussed relevant issues for this group such as matters pertaining to housing and contracts. There was also a desire to arrange a writing retreat in 2023, but this did not occur.

Psychosocial learning environment

In the course evaluations, the students provide positive feedback about the learning environment at UNIS (see Figure 7). This indicates significant wellbeing among the students.

Nevertheless, the results from the national student health and wellbeing survey for 2022 (SHoT 2022) and the subsequent supplementary survey in 2023 show an increase in mental health problems among the students. One-third of students at Norwegian universities responded that they currently have a mental illness. Consequently, it is important to maintain a comprehensive offer for students from UNIS, the Student Council, the Student Welfare Organisation and the Student Counselling Service.

An important aspect of strengthening inclusion and togetherness is giving the students an opportunity to get to know each other in and across academic environments both during and outside their studies. Access to the new informal learning areas at Elvesletta has contributed to this (see the section about the learning areas at Elvesletta, p. 17), while several UNISbreakfast seminars and the student conference SCOPE have also been organised (see the section about student participation, p. 11-12). Students also had an opportunity to take part in the Learning Forum. Moreover, the Student Council has organised regular Friday Gatherings in the canteen, which have functioned as a social meeting place for the students. UNIS also provides grants for an annual upgrade of the equipment store, which all students may use free of charge, as well as funds for maintenance and basic equipment for the student cabin in Bjørndalen.

The Student Welfare Organisation also employed a student pilot in 2023 who arranged a variety of social events for the students outside of their studies. This has included excursions in the local area with a person who is knowledgeable about using weapons, which is particularly valuable for students who do not have access to weapons and/or are only at UNIS for a short period. A popular activity during the dark season has been bonfire evenings for students from different subject areas to gather.

Furthermore, in 2023, the Student Counselling Service has offered free conversations for students who require counselling. There has also been a weekly knitting group for students during the periods when the Student Counselling Service at UNIS has been open.

5 Work on quality development and educational quality

Systems and overall processes

UNIS puts a significant effort into the institution's educational quality through various strategic initiatives and systematic quality work, and by follow-up and development work through the Department of Academic Affairs, along with bioCEED and iEarth. The Education Committee (ECom) and the management group receive half-yearly status reports including a summary of the main findings from course evaluations in the previous semester. The management group and ECom both consider matters related to the quality of education on an ongoing basis.

The UNIS board discusses the report on educational quality annually. Owing to challenges with resources at the Department of Academic Affairs, no half-yearly reports were submitted in 2023. Staff with course responsibilities are responsible for following up and developing the quality of the courses in line with the quality system, and evaluations provide the basis for necessary measures and changes. Issues of concern are forwarded to the head of department or the management team.

Of the major issues related to educational quality in 2023, extensive work has been underway to revise UNIS' course portfolio for 2024 with particular focus on the number of courses and clearer block scheduling for master's and PhD courses. The background for introducing block scheduling is a desire for greater predictability with the start and end dates of the courses. This should enable the

Section for Operations and Field Safety (OFS) to better coordinate services and teaching as well as the planning and booking of vessels for cruises. The aim is also to retain the same students throughout an entire semester, which is important in terms of optimising resource use and reducing our carbon footprint, and to better facilitate students being able to take courses at various academic departments. Challenges and opportunities related to artificial intelligence in teaching have been discussed at ECom, and there is a proposal to establish a resource page and policy for AI use for UNIS. The academic departments have also worked to integrate the UN's Sustainable Development Goals into the course descriptions as part of UNIS' green strategy.

bioCEED and iEarth – centres for excellence in education

UNIS has two centres for excellence in education: bioCEED and iEarth. Both play an important role in promoting the quality of education and teaching. The year 2023 marks the final year of funding for bioCEED, which has worked to establish an exit strategy to ensure that the initiatives and results achieved during the centre's 10-year project are continued in a sustainable way. This is being done by strengthening cooperation with other institutions and trying to ensure that the resources and activities that have been developed become part of the institution's permanent offer.

In 2023, both centres collaborated on several projects, including UNISbreakfast, UNISprout and SCOPE, as well as the "Field Teaching Assistant Academy" course. The course was restructured and further developed in 2023 based on the experiences from previous years and in 2024 will be offered as an extended five-day course. In addition to the above-mentioned activities, several courses and workshops for employees were offered through the centres. One such example is iEarth's Geo-MOD digital field course, which provided participants with skills in digital field methods and drone navigation. A sustainability workshop focusing on the integration of Sustainable Development Goals into course descriptions was also arranged. Moreover, bioCEED offered a Large Language Model workshop for teaching staff, as well as the annual collegial teaching and learning course (MNPED660), which provides opportunities for professional development and exchange of experience among the teaching staff.

The interdisciplinary project FieldPass at UNIS concluded in 2023. The purpose of the project was to develop and test virtual field guides, certification of field and lab teaching, and reflection diaries as an assessment tool. These tools have improved the learning outcomes at the institution and have been implemented in several courses. FieldPass, which involved a partnership with bioCEED and iEarth, as well as collaboration with UiO and UiB, was funded by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills' programme for student active learning. The tools are available on UNIS' website and have been presented and shared through the Learning Forum, internal seminars, open days, external workshops and conferences.

For more information about FieldPass:
- The ColdCast – FieldPass: Spotify
- Eidesen, P. B., Bjune, A. E., & Lang, S. I. (2023). "Show me how to use a microscope" – The development and evaluation of certification as direct assessment of practical lab skills. Ecology and Evolution, 13, e10592. DOI

For more information about the activities and achievement of objectives at the centres:
bioCEED Final Report
iEarth Annual Report 2023

Learning Forum

The UNIS Learning Forum (LF) for 2023 was held in Longyearbyen on 21-13 November. Based on the recommendations from 2022, these dates were set early in the year. A larger committee with broad representation from all academic departments was appointed to better root LF in the organisation and increase the level of participation. The forum was well attended, with a total of 83 registered participants (see Table 1). A small group of students also participated. They had their own programme featuring two workshops. A total of 40 employees and six external contributors contributed to the forum. The two centres for excellence in education at UNIS, bioCEED and iEarth, made a significant contribution to the Learning forum with several workshops, speakers and poster presentations.

The main topic of LF 2023 was "building an inclusive and safe learning environment", a topic that has been requested several times by employees. See Appendix 2 for an overview of topics for all Learning Forums held at UNIS. The main topic was presented through two keynote speakers, two workshops and a plenary discussion. In addition, other topics such as digital tools (instruction videos and virtual field guides), field leadership and collaborative learning were also focus areas for the workshops. The topic related to sustainability and education from LF 2022 was also raised again and presented in a poster with proposals of how the UN Sustainable Development Goals can be included in the courses and learning outcome descriptions at UNIS.

Table 1: Overview of registered participants at the Learning Forum 2013 - 2023

Year	Number of registered participants at each Learning Forum (including external speakers)
2023	83
2022	74
2021	89
2020	78
2019	66
2018	44
2017	61
2016	62
2015	79
2013	12

The evaluation of and feedback from LF 2023 was extremely good, and many commented that it was "the best" Learning Forum ever held. The feedback has been positive, with participants commenting that they have gained new perspectives, inspiration and specific tools to take back to their own practices. The summary of LF 2023 also included a proposal to develop an FAQ resource for the students on the UNIS website in 2024. A Gender Equality Plan Committee was established at UNIS in 2023. Inspired by Sehoya Cotner's research on inclusion in STEM courses, presented at LF 2023, the committee is considering looking closer at how to focus on this at UNIS.

The Learning Forum is regarded as a central and important tool for UNIS to promote educational quality in the organisation. It functions as a valuable resource for raising the pedagogical competence

among teaching staff and has had a significant impact on the teaching culture at the institution. This is raised in the article by Eidesen et al. (2023)[3].

A decisive factor for continuing this positive development and further exploiting the potential of the Learning Forum is offering support and resources to staff wishing to implement ideas and plans that have been discussed and developed during the event.

Pedagogy training for teaching staff and merit scheme

UNIS and the centres for excellence in education regularly offer pedagogy courses and workshops for teaching staff. The aim of these courses is to provide pedagogical training for teaching staff and support their professional development, which in turn improves the students' learning and the overall quality of education at UNIS. Two such courses were offered at UNIS in 2023:

UNIS offers employees with teaching responsibilities the opportunity to take the university pedagogy (UPED) course every two years. This course is run by two assistant professors from UiB. The content of the course deals with various aspects of teaching work, such as course planning, teaching strategies, assessment, supervision and feedback. This course provides UNIS employees with the opportunity to fulfil the requirements of the compulsory basic pedagogical competence in higher education required for employment at UNIS. The course covers 120 hours of the total 200-hour requirement for the required basic competence in university teaching and learning. The remaining 80 hours are covered through several other shorter courses offered by UNIS or other institutions as well as participation in other teaching projects. Seven UNIS employees are taking the course in 2023/2024. Employees taking the UPED course were also given the option of taking a separate supervision course (15 hours). Four employees completed this course.

bioCEED has offered the collegial teaching and learning course (MNPED660) since 2015. This course runs over two semesters and counts towards UiB's required basic pedagogical competence. The course introduces participants to core concepts of teaching and learning in higher education. It is built on the principles of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and focuses on general pedagogical aspects, as well as aspects specifically related to teaching and learning in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). There were no participants from UNIS in 2023.

UNIS is also part of the merit scheme at the Faculty of Science and Technology at UiB, which awards the pedagogical competence title Excellent Teaching Practitioner (Fund/ETP). This title leads to admission to the faculty's Pedagogical Academy and to a salary increase for the employee. Teaching staff may can apply to have their teaching competence assessed through the merit scheme. The title of Excellent Teaching Practitioner is awarded to people who systematically and over time further develop their teaching competence to a level that is significantly higher than the expected basic competence. In 2023, Maria Jensen was awarded the title of Excellent Teaching Practitioner. She is the second employee at UNIS to receive this title since the scheme started in 2016.

6 Infrastructure for teaching and learning

Library

The library had 17,509 visitors during 2023, which is less than half the pre-Covid figure (43,139 in 2019). Although there are no detailed visitor statistics, the employees can see that the use of the library has changed somewhat. Use of the library has decreased among certain user groups following

---

[3] Eidesen, Pernille Bronken; Førland, Oddfrid T. Kårstad; Håkansson, Lena; Christiansen, Hanne H.; Dahl, Tina & Strømseng, Elise (2023). How formal initiatives to improve teaching can lead to more significant informal conversations and increased sharing practice. *Nordic Journal of STEM Education.* ISSN 2535-4574. 7(1), p. 84–97. doi: 10.5324/njsteme.v7i1.4951.

the opening of the new student housing and associated learning areas at Elvesletta, while it has remained stable for other groups. Fewer students use the library as a social meeting place, while use has remained constant among those who prefer a quieter study atmosphere. Library use also varies in relation to the progress of study of the students. Increased activity is observed during periods when literature is needed for field work, reports and submissions, while use drops when the need for literature decreases. Furthermore, the duration of the library visits have become shorter. In the past it was common for the library to have visitors right up to closing time, but this is less common now. In 2023, the website for the UNIS library was updated with useful links, resources and information about Open Access.

The learning areas at Elvesletta

The learning areas at Elvesletta opened in autumn 2022 and, since then, have been available to all students affiliated with UNIS. The purpose of these learning areas is to offer informal workspaces where the students can work alone or with others when they do not have lectures. Two surveys about the students' use of the area were carried out in 2023 in collaboration with the Student Council. The results show that the students use the area several times a week (70%) for group work and individual study. Furthermore, 76% of the responses indicated that the students regard the learning area as either essential or very important for the learning environment at UNIS.

"This is the first study room in a student housing that I actually used and I have lived in lots of student housings before. I would say that it also definitely helps when you're in a course because all students live in the same housing it helps a lot with group work and being social."

The results of the survey were presented at Learning Forum 2023, as shown in the poster (see Figure 8). Following the survey, several measures have been implemented based on feedback from the students. This includes rearranging the furniture to optimise the use of the room and repairing damage to the sound breakers and ceiling caused by wear and tear. Furthermore, the Student Counselling Service has installed five full spectrum lamps in the learning areas so that the students could use these during the Polar Night.

Kommentert [GT1]: Er det ønskelig at jeg språkvaske sitatet som er skrevet på engelsk siden engelsknivået har forbedringspotensial?
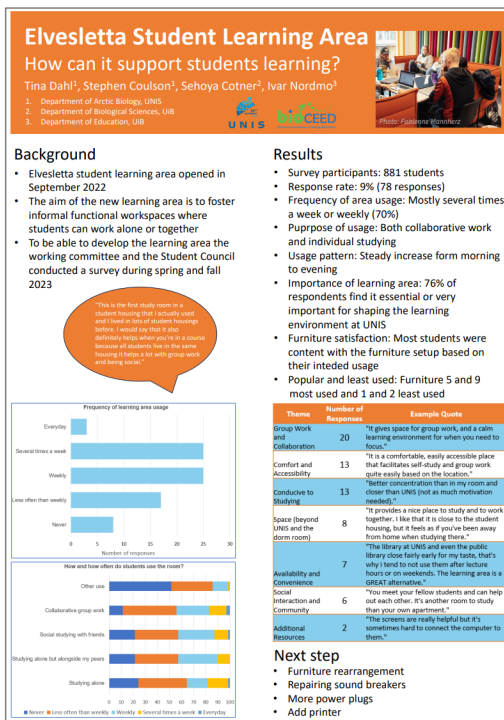
***Figure 8**. Summary of the survey about the learning areas at Elvesletta. Poster by Dahl et al. 2023. presented at the Learning Forum 2023.*

7 Main challenges

Based on the feedback from students, staff with course responsibilities, observations and discussions at ECom, the following main challenges are emphasized based on the report on educational quality 2023:

Workload, structure and communication during courses

Feedback from the students about the heavy workload has been a recurring theme in the evaluations and UNIS has been focusing on this for several years. In particular, the students point out that the workload is disproportionately heavy during certain parts of the course period. The students also express that they are unsure what is expected of them in terms of workload and what they are working towards (unclear learning objectives, lack of communication, expectations and feedback from the person with course responsibility). It is important to mention in this context that the students' perception of the heavy workload is not necessarily always about the number of hours but may also concern a lack of structure and communication during the courses.

IT infrastructure

The IT infrastructure has undergone major upgrades in recent years in terms of audiovisual equipment in the classrooms (also applies to Møysalen, Templet and Festningen), Webex, the learning platform (CANVAS), digital examinations (Wiseflow) and plagiarism control (Ouriginal). Consequently, the students are now more satisfied with the IT infrastructure than previously. Employees have also received training in the various tools through demonstrations and workshops. However, the IT infrastructure receives some feedback in the course evaluations from both employees and students that the systems are sometimes unstable and that there is a need for more user support.

Guidelines and resource page for the use of artificial intelligence at UNIS

Artificial intelligence (AI) is developing rapidly. All the universities on mainland Norway have guidelines for the use of AI, but UNIS currently lacks such guidelines to ensure responsible and ethical use of AI in the organisation. This applies to the use of AI as a tool in both research and teaching. By establishing clear guidelines and a resource page, UNIS can better manage the risks related to privacy, data security and data bias, as well as provide guidance to the students about how to use AI in assignments, etc. This will also reduce the risk of plagiarism and ensure compliance with current legislation and regulations.

8 The Director's recommended prioritisation of measures for 2024/2025

UNIS' ambition is to educate the next generation of Arctic experts through teaching that is both field-based and research-based. We work closely with the universities on the Norwegian mainland to strengthen research and educational collaboration. Furthermore, we have a continuous focus on creating a relevant course portfolio for the programmes that can contribute to recruiting motivated students.

In 2023, UNIS produced a total of 197 student-labour years, of which 177 student-labour years were linked to courses taken at UNIS and 20 student-labour years to presence by guest students. This result is slightly lower than the Ministry of Education and Research's target of approximately 220 student-labour years. The reason for this was that we had to cancel some courses in the autumn semester owing to the demanding financial situation that UNIS was facing in 2023. We still see room for improvement when it comes to filling the courses. Going forward, UNIS will work with the mainland universities and encourage them to make greater use of the quota places to increase the proportion of Norwegian students from the mainland universities.

In autumn 2024, UNIS will start the strategy process for the period 2026-2030. We will continue our focus on green energy and high-quality education, among other things. This strategy process will be decisive for our work to strengthen and promote education and the quality of education. We aim through this process to strengthen our role as a leader in Arctic research and education, with special emphasis on sustainability and environmentally friendly technology. This involves focusing on teaching that is both research-based and field-based, close collaboration with the universities on the Norwegian mainland and developing courses that are relevant to the future challenges and opportunities within green energy.

bioCEED and iEarth have both played key roles in the work to raise the quality of education at UNIS. In 2023, bioCEED had its last year as a centre for excellence in education. This marks the end of a 10-year period of significant contribution to our education. Changes in the funding model from the Ministry of Education and Research mean that iEarth also needs to adapt from the summer of 2025.

This means that UNIS must find new ways to ensure that the quality of the education remains high and that the positive effects of these centres are continued.

Recommended priorities in 2024/2025:

- Continue incorporating the UN Sustainable Development Goals into our courses and working with the universities to ensure the relevance of the courses and increase the number of semester students
- Measures to improve the workload, structure and communication in the courses
- Focus on improving the IT infrastructure, common AV systems, and develop guidelines for the use of AI in education and research

9 Priorities in 2024/2025, from 01.06.2024

MEASURES 2024/2025 EDUCATIONL QUALITY UNIS *ECOM has the overall responsibility for ensuring progress with the list of measures.*	Milestone date	Responsible
Focus area 1: Infrastructure and learning environment		
Clarify possibility of authenticating students (FEIDE or similar)	1.9.2024	*UNIS IT*
Improve access to AV services in the classrooms (Webex for external users, compile updated user manuals for the classroom screens) and strengthen communication between the academic departments and UNIS IT (user surveys)	31.12.2024	*UNIS IT/ Academic departments*
Install missing software in the computer labs. Review what is missing and make necessary investments/update licences and install in the computer labs.	1.9.2024	*UNIS IT/ Academic departments*
Canvas – joint workshop with tips and tricks for people with course responsibilities. Resource page containing instructional videos, manuals and good advice about building a good Canvas page ("classroom").	31.12.2024	*ECom/ Dept. of Academic Affairs*
Further increase accessibility and improve use of the library (self-service solution, restructuring areas) and relevant training in the use of resources and information literacy (e.g. web-based on a resource page)	31.5.2025	*Library*
Focus area 2: Quality of teaching and courses offered		
Address the challenges involving the workload in courses at ECom: Discuss problems raised in student evaluations (1), create a draft document outlining how to solve this type of challenge (2), create a short "time management" course for students in Canvas (3) and workshop at the Learning Forum (4)	31.05.2025	*ECom (1,2), Dept. of Academic Affairs (3), Learning Forum committee (4)*
Address challenges related to structuring, organisation and communication in courses, cf. student evaluations (including unpredictable timetable, lack of information about implementation of the course, lack of support in field and lab situations – need for more structure, organisation and leadership)	31.12.2025	*ECom*
Implement and calculate the workload in courses for students in the half-yearly reports on educational quality (twice a year)	1.09 and 1.09.	*Dept. of Academic Affairs*
Evaluate and (if necessary) revise UNIS' system for block scheduling, look at resource needs and the teaching capacity at OFS, academic departments and the Department of Academic Affairs	(Jan. 2025) 31.05.2025	*Academic departments/ ECom*
Incorporate the UN Sustainable Development Goals in course and learning outcome descriptions	31.12.2024	*Academic departments/ ECom*
Discuss how AI can be used in a positive and educational manner in teaching and various forms of assessment	31.11.2024	*ECom/ Learning Forum*
Focus area 3: Strategic processes and institutional guidelines		
Establish guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence at UNIS	31.12.2024	*ECom*
Evaluate the system and policy for required duties for PhDs at UNIS First phase: Survey of academic departments (experiences, suggested changes) Summary at ECom	31.10.2024 1.12.2024	*ECom*
Coordinate and promote joint initiatives in teaching and learning at UNIS (One UNIS - Educational excellence)	1.12.2024	*ECom*

Overview of all quantitative responses in the student course evaluations 2023

Summary of student course evaluation 2023

Statement	Number of respondees
I felt safe during field activities	544
The physical learning environment at UNIS was very good (classrooms, equipment, etc.)	565
The safety training I was given was appropriate for my course	535
I felt I belonged to the university community	556
Course materials were relevant and up to date	562
The course content was in line with the course description	561
My background knowledge was sufficient to follow the course	564
I learned a lot from the field activities in my course	545
The course helped me develop my ability to work in a group	549
The course has made me feel more confident in handling new challenges	561
The fieldwork was well organized	550
The teaching staff were very good at explaining things	564
The course activities helped me to achieve the intended learning outcomes efficiently	556
The teaching staff made a real effort to understand the problems and the difficulties one might be having in this course	548
The teaching has motivated me to do my best	562
In general the teaching staff gave me helpful feedback on the progress of my work	545
The course is important for my future career	553
The course has sharpened my analytical skills	555
The course has improved my skills in oral communication	549
The library resources were very good	373
The IT infrastructure at UNIS was very effective for learning and teaching	535
I was generally given enough time to understand the things I had to learn	565
It was easy to know the standard of work expected	565
The course has improved my skills in written communication	542
The course has helped me to develop the ability to plan my work	550
I usually had a clear idea of where I was going and what was expected of me in this course	564
The workload was very well distributed throughout the course period	560
The sheer volume of work in this course made it impossible to comprehend the content thoroughly	561
It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this course	562

Percent

fully disagree   disagree   neutral   agree   fully agree

Appendix 2: Overview of topics and activities at Learning Forums 2013-2023

The table provides an overview of the various focus topics during the Learning Forum from 2013-2023. In addition, it shows the different elements of the programme for each year, such as plenary presentations, workshops, sharing sessions, student programmes and poster sessions, etc. Elements marked in bold indicate when a new element has been added to the programme.

Year	Topic	Elements in the programme
2023	Building an inclusive and safe learning environment • Sense of belonging and identity • Inclusivity • Cooperative learning • Instructional videos	Plenum presentations, workshops, sharing sessions, panel discussion, poster session (led) Own programme students, student in panel, students presenting posters
2022	Education for sustainability • Sustainability • Online and onsite teaching and learning • Canvas • Assessing practical skills	Plenum presentations, workshops, sharing sessions, plenum discussions, group work, **poster session (led)** **Keynote with student,** students presenting posters.
2021	• Assessment • Academic cultures and the development of teaching • Canvas • Outreach • Reflective writing • Peer review of written exams	Plenum presentations, workshops, sharing sessions, plenum discussions, poster session Own programme students, s**tudent in panel, students presenting posters**
2020	• Blended learning • Student life in digital learning environment • Online teaching at UNIS • Digital tools	Plenum presentations, workshops, sharing sessions, panel discussions, **poster session** Own programme students
2019	• Educational challenges at UNIS • Fixed curriculum • Active learning • Field learning and assessment • Interdisciplinary education	Plenum presentations, workshops, sharing sessions, plenum discussions **Own programme students**
2018	• Collegial teaching practice • Collegial feedback • Students' writing • Field learning	Plenum presentations, workshops, **sharing sessions** **Students invited, students presenting**
2017	• Trends in higher education • Field learning • Active learning • ETP • Digital tools	Plenum presentations, workshops, **plenum discussions, panel reflections**
2016	• Course alignment • Digital tools • Multiple choice questions – active teaching	Plenum presentations, **workshops**
2015	• Field learning • Teaching challenges at UNIS	Plenum presentations, group work
2013	• Constructive alignment	Plenum presentation, group work