

Report on Educational Quality 2025

The University Centre in Svalbard



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Cover photo: UNIS students and staff conducting field work in Svea during winter 2025 as part of the course AB-330/830.
Photo: Malin Daase

1 Summary

The educational quality report is presented annually to the UNIS Board. Responsibility for quality assurance and development rests with UNIS Education Committee (ECom) and the Director. This work involves following up, developing and controlling the quality of the education provision, as well as focusing 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, through their own educational projects and collaboration with staff to develop and strengthen academic content and learning activities.

The quality work at UNIS in 2025 demonstrates a committed academic community, a good learning environment and high levels of student satisfaction. However, students, guest students and staff identify several important areas that require further development. Course responsables describe the students as well prepared, academically strong and actively involved in the learning environment. Examination results show that 71% of students achieve top grades (A or B), while the failure rate is just 1%. Cooperation with the support departments generally functions well, although some challenges related to IT infrastructure persist. Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) practices associated with field-based teaching receive very positive feedback. However, safety briefings are sometimes perceived as too long and could be more concise. Several teaching staff also express a desire to further develop their teaching methods, including by increasing the use of active learning approaches, improving coordination with guest lecturers and publishing the syllabus earlier.

The students perceive the teaching as being of a high quality and describe the teaching staff as engaging and academically strong. They report a good learning environment and a strong connection between theory and practice, particularly during field work. However, they perceive the workload as heavy, especially when taking parallel courses or when assignments and assessments are concentrated near the end of a course. It is important to note that the students' perception of a heavy workload may be attributed to unclear expectations rather than the actual amount of work. When learning objectives, the syllabus, teaching schedule and preparation/requirements for field work are not communicated clearly, the students perceive the workload as higher and less manageable. Insufficient coordination between course responsables and guest lecturers further reinforces this. Consequently, good course structure, clear information and well-defined objectives at an early stage of the course appear to be essential for creating meaningful coherence in the teaching and reducing the students' perceptions of stress and overload. The guest students report receiving good academic supervision and feeling a sense of belonging within the UNIS community. However, they express a need for better integration into the academic departments and more stable workspaces and learning facilities.

At the institutional level, UNIS undertook several major strategic initiatives in 2025, including the completion of a new strategy for 2026-2030, the development of the Master of Polar Science and the establishment of a new policy concerning the use of artificial intelligence (AI). The Master of Polar Science has been developed in collaboration with the universities on the Norwegian mainland. It is designed as an interdisciplinary, field-based educational provision that will strengthen recruitment to study programmes of importance to future polar research. The AI policy establishes the framework for the responsible use of artificial intelligence in teaching and research. More detailed administrative guidelines will follow in 2026. In 2025, UNIS started efforts to develop a new Centre for Excellence in Arctic Field Education (CAFE), which will expand on the experiences of bioCEED and iEarth and further strengthen UNIS' position as an internationally recognized institution in research-based field education.

Development of pedagogical competence has remained important for many teaching staff in 2025. In collaboration with iEarth and the Norwegian Association of Researchers, UNIS has offered a range of courses and workshops aimed at strengthening teaching competence, such as the university pedagogy course UPED and a new course in Collaborative Educational Leadership. Several staff members also completed additional courses offered by the University of Bergen (UiB). The Teaching Assistant Field Academy Course continued to develop the teaching competence of PhD candidates and master's students, while the academic writing course for PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers strengthened the participants' academic writing competence. UNIS remains part of the merit scheme for Excellent Teaching Practitioners at UiB. In 2025, one UNIS staff member was awarded the status of Excellent Teaching Practitioner.

2 UNIS report on educational quality 2025

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, work involving quality and development of quality at UNIS. The report consists of the results of 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 2026/2027. 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 2027.

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, the response rate among course responsables was low in the first part of 2025. Only 33% (seven staff) provided feedback on their student groups, learning environment, syllabus, implementation and cooperation with the support departments (see Table 1). However, there was a higher response rate in the autumn semester (66%), with 19 out of 29 staff members providing feedback. The overall response rate for 2025 was 52%. This emphasizes the importance of increasing participation in course evaluations to ensure that the knowledge base is more comprehensive and representative.

In 2025, 69% of the course responsables completed midway or operational evaluations during their course. It is important that the course responsables 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).

Only 46% of the course responsables had made the reading list available to students before the start of the course. The student evaluations regularly include feedback about a need for earlier access to the reading list. When students receive the reading list in advance, they have more time to familiarize themselves with the subject matter and gain an overview of the course content. This may contribute to the perception of a lower workload throughout the semester.

Moreover, 27% of the course responsables reported that they wish to revise the learning outcomes for the course based on their experiences of conducting the course.

Strengths and weaknesses:

All the course responsables who completed the course evaluations believe the students have good or very good English language proficiency. A large majority (88%) believe that the academic background of the students was good or very good. The course responsables also reported that there was a good or very good learning environment in the course. Moreover, 84% believe that the workload for the students in the course was satisfactory to very good. Collaboration with the support departments is consistently rated as good to very good. A substantial proportion of responses to the question concerning support and collaboration with the library services were categorised as “not relevant”. This may indicate that interaction with this support service is not equally important for all courses.

Some staff responded that there is room for improvement when it comes to IT infrastructure and interaction with/support from the IT section. These issues include unstable Wi-Fi, challenges with integrating Mac computers and display screens, and a request that new staff receive training on how to use classroom screens and teaching technology effectively.

The course responsables are generally very satisfied with HSE and safety in field work, including safety training, support from the Section for Operation and Field Safety (OFS) and their own perceptions of field safety. Several mentioned the presence of a dedicated field technician in each academic department as a strength. However, some noted that the safety briefing is perceived as too long and detailed, and suggested that it could be made shorter and more efficient.

The course responsables’ suggestions for improving their own courses include a desire to revise the form of examination by reducing the emphasis on written reports in response to students’ use of AI. Greater focus on active student learning through increased use of discussions and seminars was also proposed, along with improving coordination to avoid overlapping content among guest lecturers. Several lecturers wish to provide the students with better information about course organisation, field work and examination expectations before the course starts, including clearer clarification of expectations. Furthermore, the need to make reading lists available before courses start was highlighted, along with a desire to increase the proportion of female guest lecturers.

“As a Prof II, I have been struck that UNIS, despite our evident emphasis on pedagogic excellence, can further strengthen by embracing the importance of feedback (and feed-forward) to its course participants. Participants are provided with a grade, and potentially a brief justification of the grade. Making sure students know they will get feedback, and how to access it and use it are helpful. Subsequently, providing some (2-3) action points for improvement in the next assessment is even more helpful. Too much feedback can be counter-productive, but students could benefit further from their experience here by taking a few thoughtful tips with them on their academic journey. I would strongly advise colleagues to think about ways of ensuring that students consistently gain clear, actionable feedback as this is often far more important than an end of course grade to their personal development, long after they have become UNIS alumni”.

4 Learning environment for students

Evaluations 2025

The evaluation forms at UNIS are based on Ramsden (1991) and provide institutional, overall data about how students perceive the teaching, as well as measuring various elements related to good teaching practices. The questionnaire also provides information about students’ academic background knowledge and their perceived relevance of the courses for their future careers.

The course evaluation consists of 29 statements that students assess using the following response options: fully agree, agree, neutral, disagree, fully disagree and not relevant. The statements are grouped into seven main categories:

1. good teaching and feedback
2. learning environment and learning resources
3. workload
4. safety and field work
5. generic skills
6. clear goals and constructive alignment
7. background knowledge and future career relevance

The form also includes three open-ended text fields for the students to comment on safety training and field safety and describe what they perceived as the best aspects of the course and the greatest needs for improvement.

The course evaluation takes place near the end of the teaching period, preferably during the final lecture before the examination period begins. The evaluation remains open until the start of the examination period and the results are shared with the course responsible after the examination results have been announced.

In 2020, UNIS introduced an annual evaluation among guest students at the bachelor's, master's and PhD levels, which was repeated in 2021 (see Table 1). This evaluation provides guest students with an ongoing contract at any point during the year with an opportunity to provide feedback on a range of topics, including learning outcomes, supervision, student support services and their overall satisfaction of their affiliation with UNIS. In 2025, the guest student evaluation was reinstated and distributed to students at the end of the year. This had not been prioritised in the intervening years due to limited administrative capacity.

Results of the course evaluations in 2025

The response rate for the student evaluations (courses) in 2025 was 64% (see Table 1). This represents a slight increase from 2024 and 2023 when the response rate was 63%. Responses were received from 558 of the 866 students who received the evaluation. These responses cover 83 courses.

Table 1. Response rate for all evaluations carried out in 2019-2025.

	Course students	Course responsables	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%
2022	70%	49%	Not carried out	Not carried out
2023	63%	31%	Not carried out	Not carried out
2024	63%	67%	Not carried out	Not carried out
2025	64%	52%	29% ¹	

¹ In 2025, no distinction is made between guest students with active contracts and guest students with physical presence.

Summary of strengths and weaknesses

In 2025, one course did not carry out the evaluation. 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 included in Appendix 1. The quantitative questions, as well as the open-text responses, indicate that the course students have generally positive feedback regarding their time at UNIS (see Appendix 1). This is particularly evident in the following categories:

- **Good teaching and feedback from the course responsible:** The students highlight close interaction between students and teaching staff, high academic quality and inspiring teaching staff.
- **Learning environment and learning resources:** Overall, the students are extremely satisfied with the physical learning environment, quality of the teaching materials and their sense of being part of the UNIS community. However, the responses show more varied perceptions of IT resources, particularly regarding Wi-Fi, software and technical equipment in the classrooms.
- **Safety training and field work:** The students value the connection between theory and practice, the practical experience and field skills they acquire and the opportunity to work on scientific projects. However, some mentioned the length of the safety briefings and a desire for more firearms training.
- **Generic skills:** The students perceive that the courses contribute to developing their generic skills, particularly their ability to handle new challenges and cooperate in groups. However, the open-ended responses indicate that group work can also be challenging, especially when assessments are based on group performance.
- **Background knowledge and future career relevance:** The majority of students responded positively to both statements.

However, two categories receive significantly lower scores in the evaluation:

- **Workload** (Figure 5): The students perceive the workload as high and report an uneven distribution of workload throughout the courses. This is typical when they take parallel courses and perceive the coordination between courses as insufficient, and in individual courses where the workload piles up towards the end of the course with several assignments and examinations.
- **Clear goals and constructive alignment** (Figure 3): Many students express a need for clearer learning objectives, better course organisation and access to information about the reading list, teaching schedule and field work at an earlier stage.

It is important to emphasise that these two categories are closely interconnected. The students are more likely to experience high workload when a course is marked by poor organisation and unclear communication. Consequently, good structure and predictability can contribute significantly to reducing the students’ perception of stress and workload.

Moreover, the following points were mentioned in the open-ended text fields:

- **The use of AI:** Students request clearer guidelines concerning the use of AI.
- **Gender balance:** Some students perceive an uneven gender distribution among teaching staff in certain courses, with one gender being overrepresented.

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, 71% of the grades awarded were A or B, which was similar to 2023 (69%). 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% (the same as in 2023) 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 88% (71% in 2023) have a similar perception of the students. When it comes to the importance of the courses at UNIS for their future careers, 71% (up from 66% in 2023) agreed/fully agreed that the courses were important, while 23% of the students responded neutral.

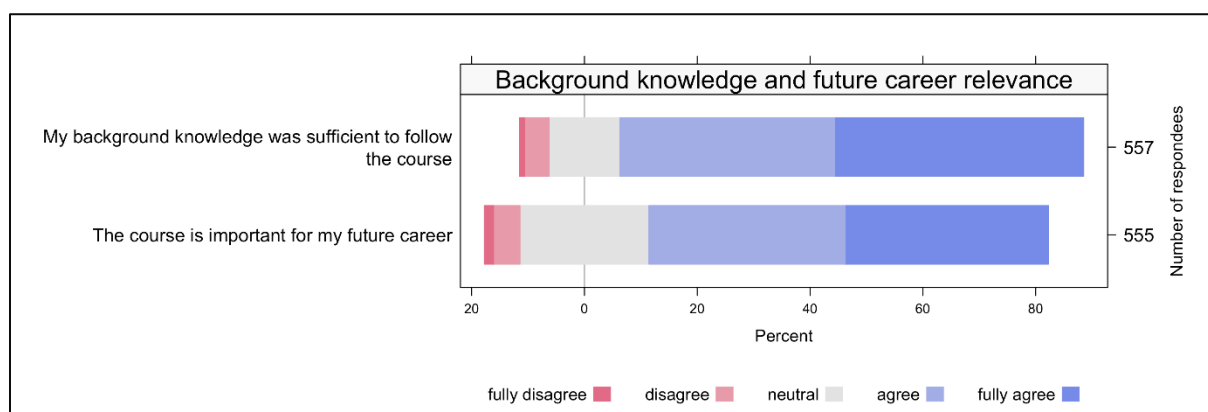


Figure 1: The students' perception of background knowledge and relevance for their future career. Variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

Safety and field work

The perception of safety related to the field teaching (95%) and safety training (93%) receives extremely positive feedback from the students (Figure 2).

The students also agree or fully agree (85%) that they learn a lot from the field teaching (see Figure 2) and that it is well organised (83%), while 7% of the students disagree or fully disagree with this.

A recurring theme in the open-text responses is that students from both short courses and semester-long courses request a refresher course in firearms training. The students also commented on the HSE briefings provided prior to field work, noting that they are often extremely long, which can lead to a loss of focus and engagement. Some students felt that some of the content was unnecessary or repetitive. They expressed a preference for shorter, more focused HSE briefings that focus on the most relevant information. This was particularly evident in the responses from the autumn semester.

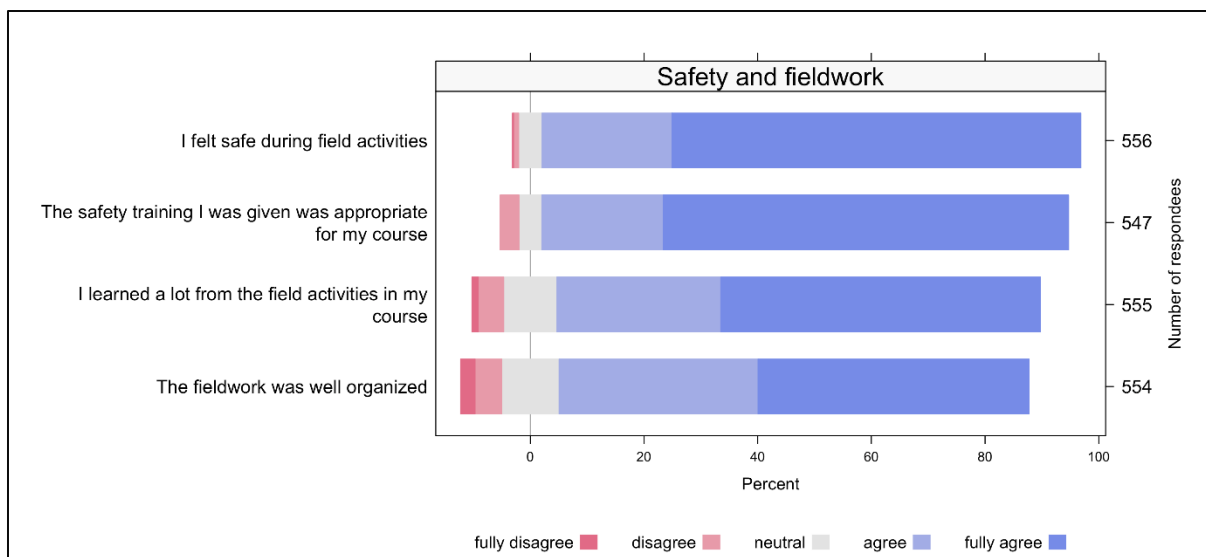


Figure 2: The students' perception of the field work and safety in the field. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

Clear goals and constructive alignment

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 (81%) that the course activities support the learning outcomes in the courses (see Figure 3). However, 17% of the students were unsure of the level of work expected of them and 18-28% were unsure of what they were working towards.

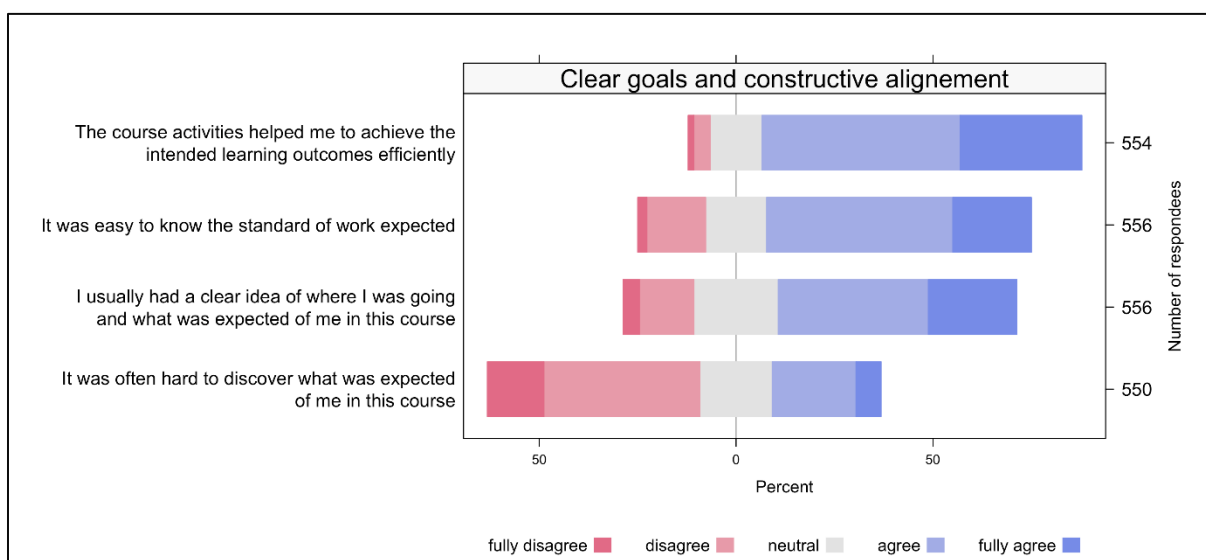


Figure 3: The students' perception of the constructive alignment in the teaching, clear goals, the standard of work expected and the appropriateness of learning activities. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

Many students used the open-ended text fields to report that the stress they experience is due less to academic challenges and more to uncertainty about what is expected of them. They express a need for clearer organisation and communication concerning both learning objectives and expectations for projects and examinations. The students also want earlier access to reading lists, teaching schedules and preparation requirements for field work. There were also numerous requests for better coordination among guest lecturers to avoid overlapping content and ensure a more coherent structure and flow of topics. The students want fewer assessment components in the courses, especially in the shorter courses. Many perceive that group assessments offer limited control over their individual grades and they want more emphasis on individual performance. Furthermore, they want assessment criteria presented as rubrics to be developed and distributed well in advance to clarify the expectations for their work.

Good teaching and feedback

A high proportion of the students (84%) believe that the teaching staff were good at making the course content understandable (see Figure 3). This represents an increase from 2023, when the percentage was 74%. Moreover, 77% 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 what the students are struggling with. Most of the students (74%) agreed that the teaching staff provide them helpful feedback on their work. There has been a general increase in positive responses from 2023 to 2025 for all statements in this category.

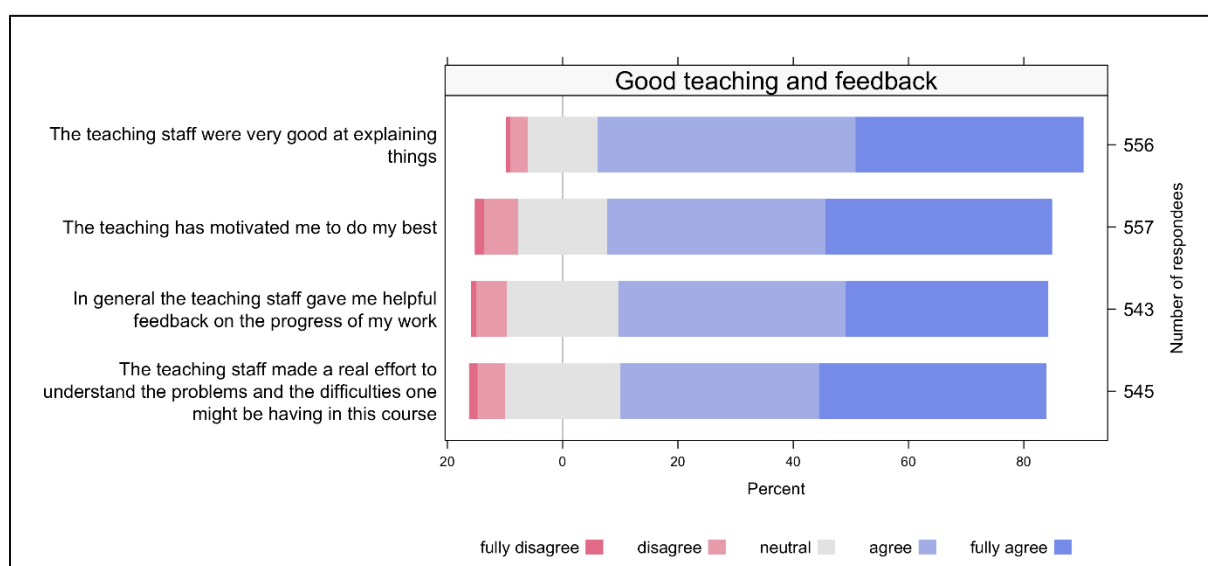


Figure 3: The students' perception of the teaching and the feedback they receive from their course responsible. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

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 (82%) that the courses helped them develop their skills to handle new challenges (see Figure 4). 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 open-text sections, it appears that group work is something the students perceive as challenging. This is particularly related to group-based assessments, where the grade depends on the efforts of the entire group.

The proportion of students who agree or fully agree is somewhat lower for analytical skills (75% in 2025 compared to 67% in 2023), oral (68%) and written (60%) communication and the students' ability to plan their work (58%).

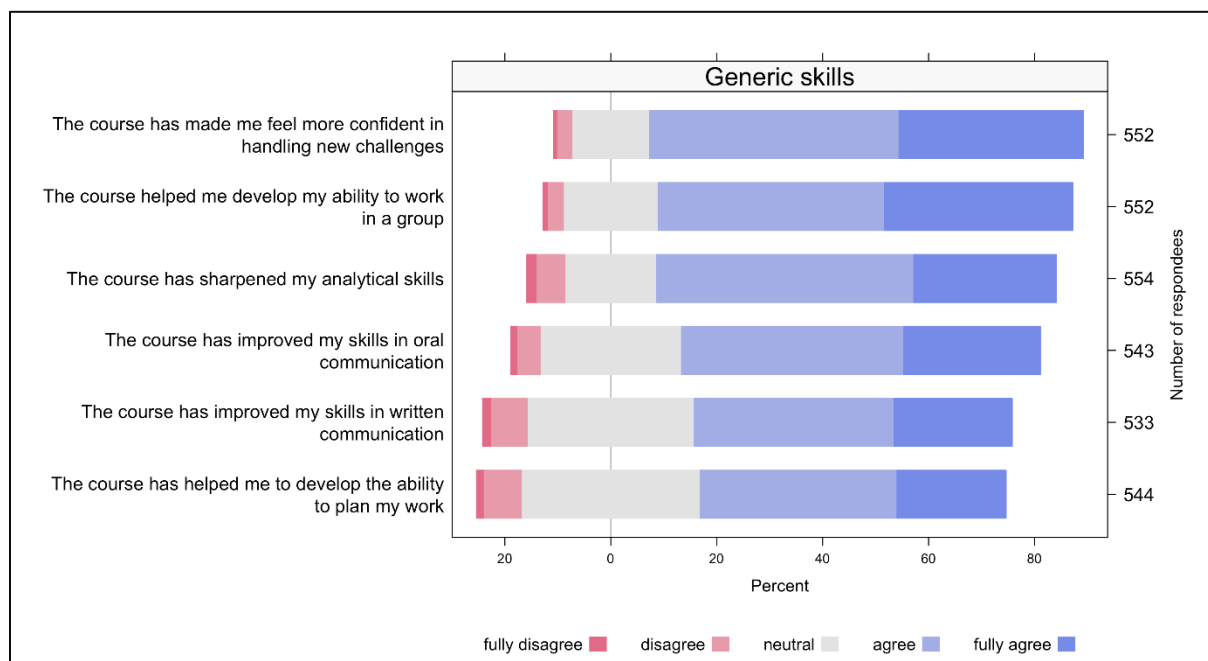


Figure 4: The students' perception of the generic skills they have acquired during the course(s) they have taken at UNIS. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

The students' workload

One third of the students agree or fully agree that the overall workload in the course makes it impossible to acquire the academic content in a satisfactory manner (Figure 5). Moreover, 17% of the students report that, in general, they did not have enough time to understand what they are expected to learn.

Just under one third of the students believe that the workload is not evenly distributed throughout the course. If one takes a closer look at the quantitative response distribution, there is a tendency for bachelor's students to be more negative about the distribution of workload (36%) than master's and PhD students (29%). It is worth noting that this is the opposite of the findings from 2023.

The students provide more detailed feedback in the open-ended text boxes. They report that field work, projects and assessments are often compressed into short and intensive periods, which leads to stress, surface learning and reduced learning outcomes. Such feedback comes primarily from students admitted to shorter courses, who often express a wish for longer course periods that provide more time to understand the syllabus. The students also highlight the need for a more even distribution of the workload during courses, as many perceive that not enough time is allowed for assessments. Moreover, the students highlight the need for better coordination between parallel bachelor-level courses to avoid a heavy workload within a short period.

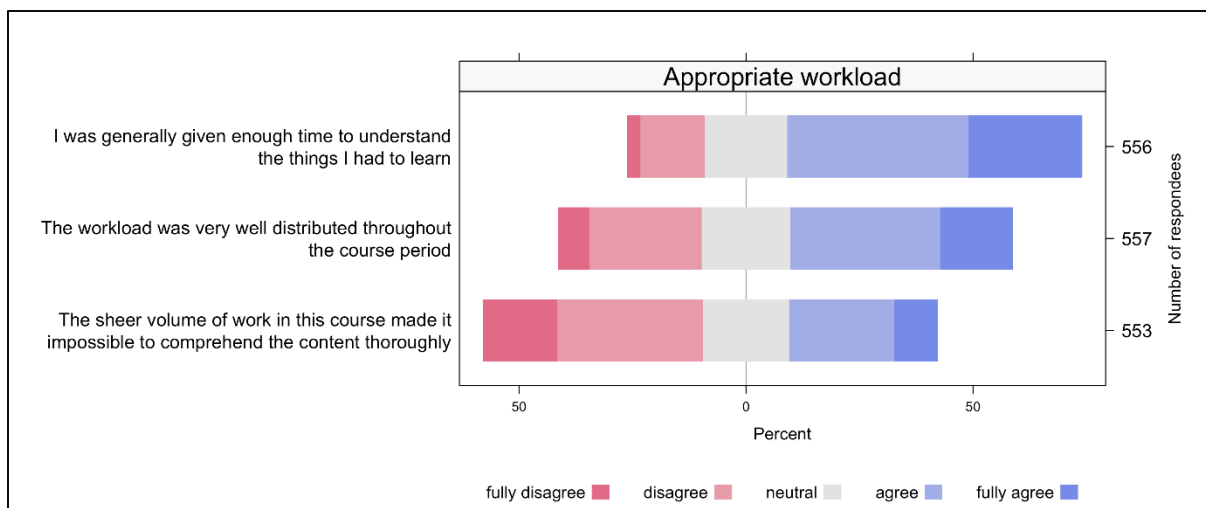


Figure 5: The students' perception of the workload in the course and how this was distributed throughout the course period. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

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 6). They agree or fully agree that the course content and materials are relevant and up to date. The students also feel a sense of belonging to the university community at UNIS. As in previous years, the library resources receive mixed feedback with a high proportion of students responding neutral (43%). However, it is worth noting that 30% responded that the category is "not relevant", which represents a slight decrease from 2023 (34%).

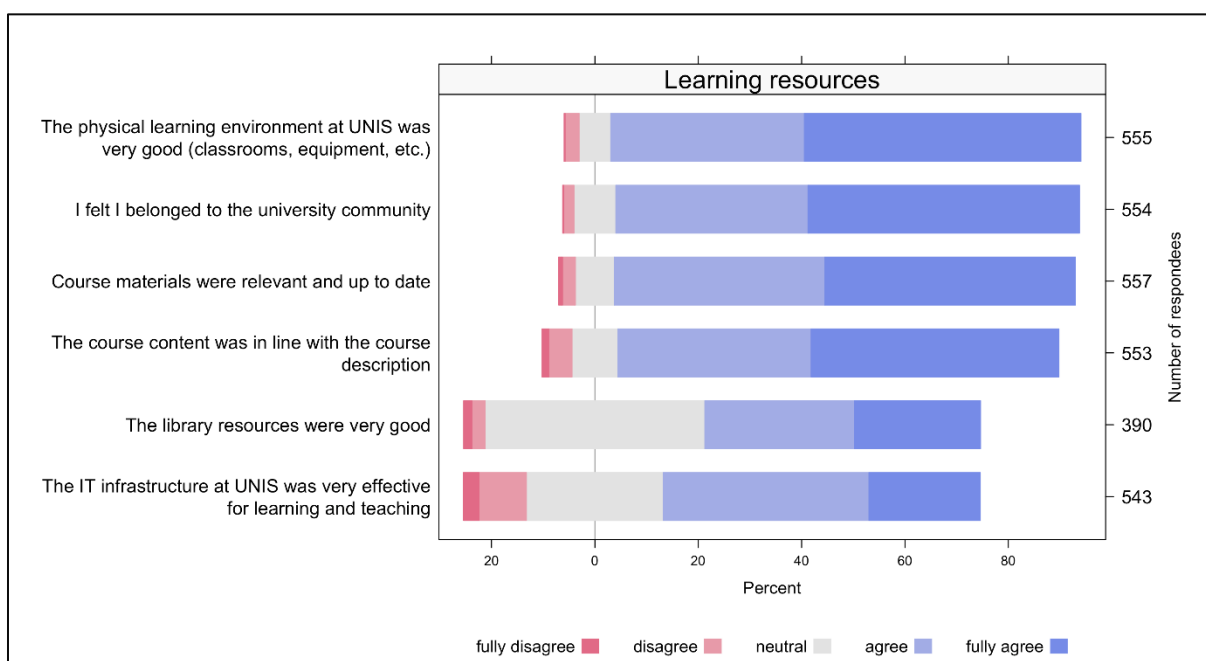


Figure 6: The students' perception of the quality of the learning resources and the learning environment at UNIS. The variation in the number of respondents may be attributed to the category "not relevant" being removed from the figure.

The high proportion of students responding that the question regarding library resources is not relevant may have several explanations. This may be attributed to limited awareness of library services,

students obtaining information about literature through other channels and differences in interpreting term “library resources”.

When it comes to IT infrastructure, 61% of students respond that they agree or fully agree that it is very effective for learning and teaching (27% are neutral while 12% disagree or fully disagree). In the quantitative part of the survey, there have been no major percentage changes from 2023 to 2025. The open-ended text fields contain fewer comments regarding IT resources than 2023, but students continue to highlight challenges related to unstable and slow Wi-Fi, missing software in the computer labs and screen-related issues in the classrooms. Several students also highlight the need for better structuring of the Canvas pages for the courses.

“So much time was lost during presentations due to issues connecting to screens. This has been an issue on every UNIS course I've taken”.

Results of the evaluations from guest students in 2025

In December 2025, an evaluation form was sent to the guest students. The aim was to gather experiences from all guest students throughout the year. The response rate was 29%, with 31 of 108 students completing the survey.

The majority of the guest student's express satisfaction with the support provided by their supervisors. This applies particularly to supervisors' availability (89%), constructive feedback on students' progress (87%) and their ability to understand the challenges faced by the students (87%). A minority of students (15%) respond that they do not have adequate access to IT facilities and services. A clear majority respond that they feel a sense of belonging within the university community at UNIS (80%), while 20% remain neutral. However, just half the guest students feel that they are well integrated into the academic departments, while 39% remain neutral.

In the open-ended comments, some students point out a lack of office spaces with screens (master's offices), as well as limited access to the learning areas at Elvesletta during the periods of practical training. UNIS does not currently have a system for allocating screens to the 80-100 guest students based here throughout the year. Introducing this would require additional resources from the IT section.

Student participation

The students at UNIS actively contribute to the development of educational quality through participation on boards and committees, involvement in educational projects and as co-creators of teaching/learning in collaboration with academic staff. Student feedback collected via course evaluations, midway evaluations, guest student evaluations and the Speak Up system provides an important basis for the further development of 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 priorities for the annual Learning Forum.

The Student Council and the Centre for Excellence in Education, iEarth, are important pillars for student participation at UNIS. Members of the Student Council are elected each semester representing the breadth of the student body, including various subject areas and levels. The Student Council comprises 10 members, in addition to two student representatives on the UNIS board. The Student Council also has one representative on the ECom, but not in the leader group at UNIS. The student representative on ECom serves as an important link between the academic side and the students and regularly reports back to the council.

In iEarth, the students participate as partners in the centres' activities, in the steering group and on the board. They are recruited to various projects on an ongoing basis, of which several of the roles are paid positions.

Students also play an important role in a wide range of academic and social initiatives at UNIS. Many of these are initiated and run by the students based on identified needs. The Student Council receives an annual budget of NOK 80,000 to run activities aimed at strengthening the student learning environment. These funds are allocated to various working groups, including groups responsible for outdoor equipment, the student cabin in Bjørndalen, Friday Gathering, the climate group, the UNIS Marathon group, the social committee and a feminist group.

Temporary Academic Staff

Temporary Academic Staff (TAS) is a group for PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and other temporary academic staff at UNIS. As of December 2025, TAS consisted of 17 PhD candidates, two postdoctoral researchers and three researchers in temporary positions. The group elects a chair and deputy chair among its members and is represented on ECom. TAS organises academic and social activities to ensure a good working environment for the temporary academic staff. This group is also an important arena for new staff to get to know others in the same situation. TAS considers it important to establish a dedicated point of contact between TAS and UNIS to strengthen coordination and ensure consistent support for temporary academic staff.

In 2025, the group held three meetings in addition to organising a summer barbecue, a writing marathon in September and a Christmas dinner in December. During the meetings, they discussed relevant topics such as salary negotiations and the mandatory course, Philosophy of Science, for PhD candidates. Given the number of PhD candidates at UNIS, TAS has emphasized the need for a local or hybrid solution to improve accessibility to this mandatory course.

Other competence-building activities with TAS participation included the academic writing course for PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers organised by the Norwegian Association of Researchers (p. 18), the Teaching Assistant (TA) Field Academy Course (p. 18), which was attended by seven PhD candidates and four master's students and the annual Learning Forum (p. 16), which is also open to temporary academic staff. In 2025, as a measure to strengthen the psychosocial working environment, a mental health café was organised by the library in collaboration with a PhD candidate. The event was open to permanent and temporary staff at UNIS.

Psychosocial learning environment

In the course evaluations, the students provide positive feedback about the learning environment at UNIS (see Figure 6), which indicates a high level of wellbeing among the students. Nevertheless, the results from the national student health and wellbeing survey (SHoT) for 2022 and 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. A new SHoT survey will be carried out in 2026.

In 2025, the Student Counselling Service (Samskipnaden) continued to offer free digital consultations for students in need of support. In late 2025, a dedicated psychologist was also employed in a part-time (50%) project position, with an office at UNIS. This strengthens UNIS' provision of mental health support for students.

When it comes to psychosocial challenges, the student population at UNIS appears to largely reflect the student population at universities on the Norwegian mainland. This means that students at UNIS require access to the same support services that are available to students at universities on the

mainland. Furthermore, there are factors related to studying in Longyearbyen that may be particularly challenging for students who are already vulnerable. This emphasises the need for a broad and coordinated support system for the students, including services provided by UNIS, the Student Council and the Student Counselling Service. It is worth emphasising that predictability concerning what the students can expect from a course, thorough planning and clear communication are particularly important for students experiencing challenges. These factors contribute to ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment.

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 and outside their studies. In 2025, the Student Council contributed to this through regular Friday Gatherings in the canteen, which served as an important social meeting place for students, as well as through other working groups run by the students.

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 measures and systematic quality work, and by follow-up and development work through the Department of Academic Affairs and iEarth. The ECom and the leader group receive half-yearly status reports including a summary of the main findings from course evaluations in the previous semester. The leader 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. Course responsables 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 leader group, while institutional trends are addressed in the annual on educational quality.

Among the major initiatives related to educational quality in 2025, extensive work has taken place involving i) development of a new education strategy, ii) establishment of a Master of Polar Science programme and iii) a new AI policy.

The work to develop a new UNIS strategy for the period 2026-2030 has been ongoing since 2024. The primary focus has been on research, education and sustainability. The strategy process was completed in 2025, and the strategy has been published on the UNIS website: <https://www.unis.no/about/strategy-and-plans/strategy-2030/>. When it comes to education, the strategy includes three key areas: i) the development of the Master of Polar Science, ii) continuation and further development of educational quality – “the legacy of the Centres for Excellence in Education” and iii) follow-up of IPY-5 / Arctic Ocean 2050.

Moreover, the sustainability section of the strategy includes several measures related to teaching, including the development of e-learning modules for the field safety course. These measures will contribute to strengthening the quality of and accessibility to the training, while also supporting UNIS' objective of integrating sustainability throughout the entire education portfolio.

As part of the strategic efforts to increase recruitment to existing master's programmes and facilitate longer student stays at UNIS (one or more semesters), a model for the Master of Polar Science was developed in 2025 in collaboration with the universities on the Norwegian mainland. The Master of Polar Science is interdisciplinary containing practical field work and safety training as mandatory and

integrated components. It will serve as a common arena that provides added value for students, strengthens their transferable skills and contributes to integrated competence development. The Master of Polar Science is planned as a unique educational provision that will support and strengthen recruitment to existing master's programmes at universities on the Norwegian mainland. It will also contribute to increasing interest in study programmes of importance to future polar research, with particular emphasis on subject areas that are currently experiencing declining student recruitment.

Moreover, it is an objective that the Master of Polar Science will appeal to upper secondary school pupils and thereby contribute to strengthening long-term recruitment to polar-related educational pathways. In 2025, preparations were made for a semester-long pilot to test the concept with a planned start in autumn 2026. Experiences from this pilot will provide the basis for further development, with the intention of starting a full scale Master of Polar Science in the 2027 academic year.

In 2025, a new policy was adopted concerning the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by students and staff. The AI policy provides overarching guidelines for the use of AI at UNIS. In 2026, supplementary administrative guidelines will be developed for students and teaching staff, including regulations pertaining to permitted use of AI in home examinations and coursework and guidelines for the use of AI in research activities.

UNIS continued with block scheduling in 2025, following the same model as in 2024, where courses are divided into seven blocks. The evaluation of the system in 2024 showed that the system functions well, but that some adjustments were needed in relation to the peak periods. A comprehensive revision of the course portfolio is planned in 2026 and 2027, with the aim of adapting the portfolio in relation to available resources and the priorities contained in the UNIS 2030 strategy.

iEarth – Centre for Excellence in Education

Since 2020, UNIS has been a partner in the Centre for Excellence in Education, iEarth, which plays a key role in strengthening the quality of education, teaching and learning at the institution. In 2024, the centre entered its final year of funding from the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills and since then has been working to develop a model to continue the centre's activities when the funding period ends.

The Teaching Assistant (TA) Field Academy Course was carried out as part of iEarth's activities in 2025. The course, which is described in more detail on page 18, represents an important initiative for further developing teaching competence and learning support for teaching assistants involved in field-based education at UNIS. A dedicated TA manual for field-based teaching was developed in 2025, and this will be published in 2026. Furthermore, staff in iEarth have been invited to hold presentations at various international conferences and meetings.

For more information about the centre's activities and achievement of objectives: <https://www.iearth.no/resource/iearth-education-for-earths-future>

CAFE- Centre for Excellence in Arctic Field Education

As part of the development of UNIS' teaching strategy 2026-2030, and as a continuation and further development of the work established through the Centres for Excellence in Education, bioCEED and iEarth, funding was allocated in 2025 for a preliminary project to be carried out in 2026. The project aims to further strengthen UNIS' position as an internationally recognized institution in research-based education. In 2025, a proposal for a new Centre for Excellence in Arctic Field Education has been developed, including an outline of its organisational structure, while ensuring that the proposed measures are aligned with the new strategy.

Learning Forum

The UNIS Learning Forum (LF) for 2025 was held on 24-26 November. The working committee comprised of four academic and administrative staff members. There were a total of 56 registered participants (see Table 2). A total of 40 employees and seven external speakers contributed.

Table 2. Overview of registered participants at the Learning Forum 2013 - 2025

Year	Number of registered participants at each Learning Forum (including external speakers)
2025	56
2024	73
2023	83
2022	74
2021	89
2020	78
2019	66
2018	44
2017	61
2016	62
2015	79
2013	12

The main focus of LF 2025 was twofold, with emphasis on (1) mental health and (2) the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into teaching. Research data management was also a key topic. These topics were explored through three keynote presentations and two workshops. The programme featured three external speakers. Dr Gareth Hughes (UK) delivered the online keynote presentation entitled “About Wellbeing, Mental Health and Learning”, while Associate Professor Tom Glover and Trym Lindell from OsloMet presented “Creativity and Artificial Intelligence – Partner or Replacement?”

The workshop “Mental Health Support in Teaching at UNIS” was facilitated by UNIS staff in collaboration with Associate Professor Iris Borch, Kristin Benjaminsen Borch and Rannveig Sæle from UiT. The latter has collected research data from UNIS staff and students to study the students’ psychosocial learning environment and explore how different dimensions of the learning environment – such as psychosocial, physical, organisational, pedagogical and digital factors – can contribute to improving learning outcomes and mental health.

Moreover several peer-sharing sessions were held covering a range of topics, including research communication, PhD supervision, role-playing and landscape ethics, as well as a session introducing the Teaching Toolbox as a Canvas course. The latter was developed as part of last year’s Collaborative Educational Leadership course, with the aim of creating a platform for teaching staff to share pedagogical ideas and experiences. This work covers descriptions of peer-sharing sessions and peer mentoring in teaching and is now available to all staff as a dedicated Canvas course.

A formal evaluation of the Learning Forum was not carried out in 2025.

Pedagogy training for teaching staff and merit scheme

UNIS regularly offers 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 educational quality at UNIS. Several courses were offered at UNIS in 2025:

UPED

UNIS offers employees with teaching responsibilities the opportunity to take the university pedagogy (UPED) course every two years. This course is run by two staff from UiB, Marie van Kloet and Robert Kordts. 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. Eight employees from UNIS are taking this course in 2025/2026.

Collaborative Educational Leadership course (UPED686)

UNIS offered a 30-hour course in Collaborative Educational Leadership for its staff for the first time in 2025. The course was taught by two staff from UiB and had nine participants. It can be incorporated into the basic pedagogical competence in higher education and expands on themes addressed in the Learning Forum and other institutional processes.

The course aims to prepare a small group of UNIS staff to be able to plan and lead an educational development project. Educational leadership can be practiced by individuals in formal leadership positions and by staff in informal roles, such as mentors or project leaders. Such educational leaders influence the teaching and learning culture through knowledge sharing, professional networks, peer mentoring and contributions to change processes.

The course emphasises cooperation and shared responsibility. The participants develop and lead the project in collaboration by involving teaching staff and students, and then producing a resource intended to benefit the wider teaching community. This was presented at the Learning Forum 2025 (see the section on Learning Forum on page 17).

Additional university pedagogy courses from UiB for UNIS staff

Two teaching staff from UNIS took part in the online course "Imposter Syndrome and Gender Equality Challenges in Higher Education" (UPED685), a 15-hour course taught by Marie Van Der Kloet and a colleague from UiB. Furthermore, one member of UNIS' teaching staff took part in the course "Becoming a Supervisor: Community, Expertise, Dialogue" (UPED691).

Teaching Assistant (TA) Field Academy Course

The Teaching Assistant (TA) Field Academy Course was also carried out in 2025, for the fifth consecutive year. The course is organised by iEarth in collaboration with staff formerly affiliated with bioCEED, UNIS staff and two staff from UiB, Marie van Kloet and Robert Kordts. In 2025, the course had 11 participants (seven PhD students and four master's students). The aim is to provide PhD and master's students who are teaching, or who will be teaching, with improved teaching competencies and to strengthen student learning. The course focuses on field teaching, feedback culture, group work, conflict management, inclusion and diversity. Case studies from various research fields serve as

examples and a basis for discussions of various teaching situations. A key component of the syllabus is practical teaching experience communicated by the course instructors.

Academic writing course for PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers

The Norwegian Association of Researchers (Forskerforbundet) organised an academic writing course entitled “Effective Academic Writing for PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers” at UNIS on 23-24 May 2025. UNIS provided the facilities and handled travel arrangements, while the Norwegian Association of Researchers covered all other costs. Three guest lecturers from the University of Gothenburg contributed academic content along with UNIS staff. A total of 14 UNIS staff attended the course (13 PhD candidates and one postdoctoral researcher). Upon successful completion of the course assignment, the participants received a certificate of completion equivalent to 1.5 credits at the universities on the Norwegian mainland.

Guidance for Course Revision

As part of the course evaluation and revision process, Marie van Kloet and Robert Kordts from UiB offered course responsables guidance on course revision in the autumn of 2025. The purpose of these sessions was to provide support for course responsables to revise and further develop their courses. This included reviewing and improving course content, developing and refining learning outcomes, ensuring constructive alignment with learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment forms, and discussing other academic or pedagogical issues related to the course.

Excellent Teaching Practitioner

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 2025, Associate Professor Simone Lang from the Department of Arctic Biology was awarded the title of Excellent Teaching Practitioner. She is the third employee at UNIS to receive this title from UiB since the scheme started in 2016.

6 Infrastructure for teaching and learning

Library

The library had 17,698 visitors in 2025, which is a slight increase from the 15,776 visitors in 2024. In 2025, the number of first-time loans by students and staff was 1,548, compared with 1,349 in 2024.

The library has undergone major changes in recent years, including staff turnover, the introduction of the Norwegian Research Information Archive (NVA) and other “behind the scenes work”. There has also been a clear shift in the library’s priorities, from traditional collection development towards increased visibility of its services for staff and students. This includes refurbishment of the library (scheduled for completion in 2026), strengthened presence during the semester block start and increased staffing at the service desk.

In 2025, a project began to improve the library's search portal, Oria. A decision was also made to expand the library's e-book collection after previously acquiring almost exclusively physical books.

In 2025, the library, in collaboration with a PhD candidate, established a mental health café for staff, including PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers, with a focus on mental wellbeing. The initiative was inspired by Gareth Hughes keynote address and the UNIS Mental Health Taskforce workshop during the Learning Forum in November. The aim of the mental health café is to strengthen unity, inclusion and openness in the workplace. One such gathering was held in 2025 and further events are planned for 2026. Topics for future events may include how to support colleagues who are struggling, social pressure, sleep hygiene, loneliness and challenges associated with the polar night and the midnight sun. This initiative also provides an effective arena for raising awareness of the library and the services it offers. A discussion is currently underway about inviting master's students to future events.

Furthermore, in 2026, the library started to send newsletters to the academic departments containing information about its services and offers. This can contribute to closer integration between the library and the academic environment and increase awareness of the library's role as a relevant and supportive resource for teaching and learning. A user needs assessment is also underway among students and staff to assess how the library is used and identify areas for future development.

IT infrastructure

In 2025, the IT section implemented several measures to strengthen the teaching and learning support at UNIS. Guest login is now available in all classrooms, and wireless screen sharing from PCs and Macs has been simplified through Miracast. They have also compiled updated user guides for the screens. The transition to Intune has made it easier to keep the computer infrastructure up to date, configure new devices and install research software, which has in turn resulted in more stable and efficient IT infrastructure. A collaboration has been established with the University of Oslo (UiO) to implement an AI service for students and researchers. From now on, the IT section will prioritise closer dialogue with course responsables regarding software requirements in the computer labs, the development of a shared overview document for software and licences, and routines for early submission of software requirements before each semester. Moreover, courses on Webex and AV/IT equipment are planned for new employees, along with the establishment of a dedicated intranet page containing user guides and information about courses.

7 Main challenges

Based on the feedback from students, course responsables, observations and discussions at ECom, the following main challenges are emphasized based on the report on educational quality 2025:

- 1) **Workload, structure and communication during courses:** The students experience high and uneven workload, particularly when parallel courses are not well coordinated, or when individual courses have many assignments and examinations near the end of the course period. Many students also express a need for clearer learning objectives, better structure and access to information about the syllabus, teaching schedule and field work at an earlier stage. Unclear organisation makes it harder for the students to understand what is expected of them. These two factors are closely connected. Poor structure and unclear communication increase the perception of academic pressure, while good planning and predictability can reduce stress and lead to a more manageable day-to-day study experience.
- 2) **IT infrastructure:** The challenges mainly relate to unstable Wi-Fi, a lack of software and insufficient training for new employees in the use of technical equipment in the classrooms.

- 3) **AI as a tool in teaching and assessment:** There is a clear demand from both students and staff for clearer administrative guidelines and specific examples of how AI can be used in teaching and assessment.

8 The Director's recommended prioritisation of measures for in 2026/2027

In 2026, UNIS will enter the implementation phase of the **UNIS Strategy 2030**. This involves continuation and further specification of the institution's quality work, as well as clear prioritisation of measures aimed at strengthening the relevance, quality and sustainability of the education. This phase will focus on the following three key areas: the establishment and piloting of the **Master of Polar Science**, further development of the **CAFE initiative** and follow-up of **IPY 5/Arctic Ocean 2050**.

It is positive that so many students respond to the student evaluations and that the course responsables provide feedback through the course reports. This forms a key part of UNIS' quality work. The students' assessments provide an important basis for improving the teaching, while the course responsables' responses offer insight into how support functions are perceived in practice and how the teaching is planned and further developed. This two-way feedback structure is essential for identifying areas for improvement and ensuring that any implemented measures actually meet the needs of the teaching and learning. Consequently, it is important that all course responsables systematically follow up the evaluations and provide feedback. This contributes to the development of individual courses and to the institution's overall quality work, including the work to strengthen the support functions and ensure a positive framework for teaching and learning.

Recommended priorities in 2026/2027:

1. Strengthen planning and communication in the teaching

Establish a teaching team for each course, so the course responsables and guest lecturers can meet prior to the start of the semester – preferably digitally via Teams – to review the course evaluation and learning objectives. This will ensure a shared understanding of what the students are expected to achieve as well as identify and avoid any overlap in teaching between lecturers and topics. It is also important to assess the workload in relation to the size of the course, particularly for intensive courses. This will contribute to a more coherent teaching structure and strengthen the students' perception of clear communication and good planning.

2. Further develop IT support and systems

Prioritise cooperation between the support functions and course responsables to ensure that the prerequisites for a high quality of teaching are well maintained, including through updated software and clear communication of requirements. This also includes training in the use of Webex and AV/IT equipment to strengthen digital competence. The aim is to ensure a more robust and well-functioning digital infrastructure that supports the educational needs.

3. AI policy and teaching

Follow up the AI policy adopted in 2025 and any subsequent updates. It is important to clarify the framework for permitted use of AI in teaching, assessment and coursework. It is recommended to promote the use of varied forms of assessment so that the learning outcomes are assessed through different approaches, hereby strengthening the robustness of assessment practices in response to AI

9 Priorities in 2026/2027, from 01.06.2026

Action points 2026/2027 EDUCATIONL UALITY UNIS <i>ECOM has the overall responsibility for ensuring progress with the list of measures.</i>			
	Milestone date	Responsible	Status
Focus area 1: Infrastructure and learning environment			
Continue the collaboration between course responsible and IT to ensure up-to-date software in the PC labs Establish a shared master document providing an overview of: • which courses require which software • the academic contact person for each license and course • software licence expiration dates Introduce routines for early reporting of software needs before each semester (in collaboration with the academic departments/study administration). Assess the use of open-source software where academically appropriate to reduce dependence on licences, lower costs and simplify administration.	01.08.2026	UNIS IT/ Academic departments/Dept. of Academic Affairs	
Implement AI services, including training at UiO in May 2026.	15.06.2026	UNIS IT	
Offer courses in the use of Webex and AV/IT equipment in classrooms/auditoriums for new employees, and for others as needed Establish an intranet page for IT, where employees can find information about IT, simple user guides, and register for, for example, Webex	2026	UNIS IT UNIS IT/INFO	
Mapping the library service and the needs of its users (students and staff). Sending newsletters to academic departments to increase the visibility of the library service. Initiating an action plan based on the findings of the mapping.	15.06.2026	Library	
Start a mental health café for staff and temporary staff – the Library	2025	Library	
Focus area 2: Quality of teaching and courses offered			
Address challenges involving the workload, cf. the student evaluations: (1) create a short “time management” course for students in Canvas, (2) Incorporate this into the intro at the start of each semester, (3) Workshop at the Learning Forum, and (4) Implement and calculate the student workload in courses for the educational quality reporting (twice per year).	31.12.2026	Dept. of Academic Affairs (1,2, 4), the Learning Forum committee (3)	
Address challenges related to structuring, organisation and communication in courses, cf. student evaluations: (1) Intro for students at the start of each semester – “Everyday student life at UNIS”, (2) Workshop for course responsables in collaboration with adjunct professor from UiB, and (3) Plenary discussion at the Learning Forum.	31.12.2026	Dept. of Academic Affairs (1, 2), the Learning Forum committee (3)	
Present the report on educational quality annually at a general meeting.	15.06	Dept. of Academic Affairs	
Incorporate the UN Sustainable Development Goals in course and learning outcome descriptions.	31.06.2027	Academic departments/ ECom	
Discussion and sharing of experiences on the use of AI in teaching in light of UNIS’ new guidelines.	31.12.2026	ECom/ Learning Forum	

Revision of the quality system.	31.06.2027	Dept. of Academic Affairs /ECom	
Revision of the course portfolio to reflect UNIS' strategy concerning the number of courses and academic profile.	30.06.2027	ECom	
Focus area 3: Strategic processes and institutional guidelines			
Establish a policy for the use of artificial intelligence at UNIS.	31.12.2025	ECom	
Develop detailed AI guidelines for students and teachers, including clarification of which uses of AI are permitted in take-home exams, in student work, and in scientific or scholarly contexts. Update the website	15.06.2026	ECOM/Dept. of Academic Affairs/INFO	
Development of a pilot for the Master of Polar Science	31.07.2026	ECOM/Dept. of Academic Affairs/academic departments	
Launch and test the pilot in autumn 2026. Conduct ongoing evaluation throughout the process.	31.12.2026	ECOM/Dept. of Academic Affairs	
Possible launch of Master of Polar Science in spring 2027.	31.12.2027	ECOM/Dept. of Academic Affairs	
Focus area 4: CAFE – Centre for Excellence in Field Education			
Coordinate and promote joint initiatives in teaching and learning at UNIS (One UNIS – Educational Excellence).	1.12.2025	ECom, bioCEED and iEarth	
Establish the leadership structure for the Centre for Excellence in Field Education (CAFE), including appointing a responsible. Establish a student group to be affiliated with CAFE's working group/management.	01.08.2026	CAFE and ECom	
Initiate national and international collaboration between CAFE and educational communities that UNIS already has contact with.	31.12.2026	CAFE and ECom	
Initiate CAFE's activities by launching a funding call for teaching projects for students and staff and participating in ongoing UNIS activities focused on competence development of teaching staff.	01.08.2026	CAFE and ECom	
Launch student activities at CAFE, such as UNIS Breakfast, SCOPE and midway evaluations.	01.08.2026	CAFE and ECom	
Participate in internally and externally led research funding applications. In 2026, UNIS is already a partner in an Erasmus+ proposal (DigiTrans).	31.07.2027	CAFE and ECom	

Appendix 1: Overview of all 29 statements and responses from the 2025 student evaluation on a scale from fully agree to fully disagree. As the “not relevant” category has been removed, the number of respondents varies. A total of 558 of the 886 students took part in the survey.

