



**Institution-wide Review**  
Follow-up Report for the  
Agricultural University of Iceland  
May 2016

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## Preface

This is the Agricultural University of Iceland's (AUI) follow-up report on the Institution-wide Review (IWR) published in 2013. It is written in accordance with the requirements in section 72 of the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education from 2011. The purpose of the report is to inform about our reactions to issues raised in the IWR, and about other developments influencing our quality enhancement efforts.

Since the IWR, we have conducted Subject Reviews of all our study programmes. These reviews and the connected reflections on our operations, as well as the collaboration with the members of the Quality Board and the Quality Council have been very valuable to us. They have given many insights and made our quality management more structured and prioritised. Many staff members and students have been involved in these reviews, but the main responsibility has been in the hands of a few people, mainly senior management staff. As a result, staff and students are generally more aware of the quality enhancement processes than before, but the awareness and ownership of the processes, and quality management at AUI in general, could be better integrated. We still have work to do to make our quality management more effective and institutionalised – a task we look forward to.

The report is in two sections. The first one gives an overview of recent developments and other aspects that affect the finances, structures and processes of the AUI, especially our quality management. In the second section we describe our responses to specific issues and recommendations raised in the 2013 IWR.

## Overview of developments

This section presents a brief overview of our current situation and some recent developments that affect the university and our progress in quality enhancement and management.

### **External pressures**

As already noted in the 2013 IWR, the AUI has been severely underfinanced from the start. This has not changed. Since 2013 we have faced continuous budget cuts, which have forced us to reduce staff numbers even further and have constrained development, our quality enhancement activities, and other vital aspects of our work.

In late 2013, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture announced his intention to merge the AUI and the University of Iceland (UI). This idea met political resistance and was cancelled. In early 2015, the Minister introduced a new idea; to merge the AUI with the Hólar and Bifröst universities – all with their headquarters in West- or North-West of Iceland. He invited the rector to join a committee with the mandate to discuss the feasibility of this merger. The committee did not reach consensus and the idea is now dormant. These merger attempts have involved some extra work load but most importantly, they have created uncertainty about the university's future. This in turn has had a negative impact on many aspects of our work, especially on development and strategic planning, but also on the workplace atmosphere.

## Internal developments

One of the consequences of the uncertainty created by the merger ideas is that we have not yet created a new strategic plan to replace the old one that expired in 2013. We intend to finish it this year. Staff shortage has also meant that we have not been able to make as much progress in quality enhancement as we would have liked.

There are, however, some positive developments. As mentioned in the Preface, we have completed Subject Reviews for all our study programmes. The graduate and postgraduate programmes in Nature and Environmental Science, Forest Science and Restoration Ecology and Management, Agricultural Science, and Equine Science were covered in 2014, and the Landscape Planning and Architecture (BSc) and Planning (MSc) programmes in 2015. These reviews include activity plans that we are now carrying out. Many of the issues and related activities in the Subject Reviews echo the IWR and the 2012 Reflective Analysis, which both confirms these issues importance and shows that our progress in some improvements is slow.

In March this year, new regulations for the AUI were approved and we have now started the implementation process. These regulations address many of the issues mentioned in the IWR and will also lean the governing structure to a certain degree. Some important changes are:

- The two university faculties will be merged into one; the Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Science. This creates opportunities for more interaction, collaboration and mutual understanding between the different scientific fields.
- A new position, Head of Faculty, with a four year tenure that can be prolonged for another four years, will be installed from 1 August 2016. It has already been advertised domestically and internationally. Previously the Head of Faculty role was rotating between faculty members.
- The Head of Faculty is stand-in for the Rector, and we do not have vice-rectors anymore.
- Responsibility for teaching programmes will be at the Faculty level, even though there will still be Programme Directors. Their role will be re-defined and there will be broader faculty engagement, and even external engagement, in programme development and management. This arrangement facilitates the revision of curriculum content and delivery. The tasks of the former Education Committee will mostly be dealt with by the new Faculty Committee.
- The new Division of Academic Affairs and Quality Management formalises and emphasises quality enhancement. The Division Head, appointed for four year periods, is responsible for quality management processes within the university in close collaboration with the Faculty, and has a seat on the AUI Management Board.

In connection with the new regulations, we will also update other policies, processes, role descriptions etc. It will take some time before the new regulations are entirely operationalised, but we think these changes are necessary and will be beneficial.

The formal and informal collaboration between the Icelandic universities is increasingly important to us, for example around the UGLA system, which we have now installed, and other IT matters, the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), the UI Centre for Education and Learning, equality matters etc.

## Responses to specific issues raised in the Institution-wide Review

In this section we present and discuss our responses to 15 main issues emphasised in the IWR, and the associated recommendations. For easy reference, the page number in the IWR is given in parenthesis at the end of each issue or recommendation quotation.

### **1. As a matter of priority, formalising quality assurance processes and making them more visible within the institution. (34)**

- The AUI needs to formalise its quality assurance processes and make them more visible within the institution. Shortage of funds and the loads already being carried by the staff in what is a very small university are genuine impediments, but they underline the need for a definite action plan with target dates, perhaps in conjunction with the preparation of the next Strategic Plan, due to cover the period 2014-18. A dedicated, Quality Assurance Officer could expedite implementation. (15)
- Individual teachers seemed quite unaware of how AUI's quality assurance system operates and about their role in quality assurance. There is no Quality Assurance Handbook they can refer to. (9)

**Response:** The new AUI regulations formalise quality assurance, e.g. by introducing the partly new role of Head of Academic Affairs and Quality Management, with a seat on the Management Board. This is still only a part time role, however. All our study programmes have gone through the first review cycle in the QEF, so programme directors, teachers, some other staff members and some students are now more aware of our quality assurance work, but a general awareness and ownership of the review processes has yet to be created within the institution. Serious understaffing is still an impediment, but another reason might be that senior management staff has carried the main responsibility for the reviews, and in the last Subject-Level Review, also an editor.

The review reports include activity plans and one of the undertakings of the Quality Manager will be to monitor progress. More needs to be done, however, both to formalise quality assurance processes and to make them more visible within the university. Some guidelines and general descriptions of our quality management are presented on our home page, but a quality assurance handbook would be beneficial. Our goal is to increase staff ownership of the quality assurance processes and make them an integral part of the organisational culture.

- The Education Committee monitors teaching on an on-going basis, but the review team was not told of any standardised procedure for annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes. Annual monitoring reports are normally a key part of the evidence base for periodic reviews, and both annual monitoring and periodic reviews are important for enhancement as a source of good practice that may be transferable to other disciplines within the same institution. (10)

**Response:** The QEF Subject Reviews provide periodic reviews and they have been very valuable exercises. As mentioned by the Board, we do monitor teaching, e.g. through teaching surveys. Also, Programme Directors meet with students on a regular basis and the Education Office personnel are in daily contact with students and teachers, which gives them quite a good overview of teaching

standards. More formal annual monitoring, on the other hand, has not been introduced but might be so in the future in some form.

- One of the University's enhancement aims is the publication of an annual report, which would include the outcomes of quality evaluations. (13)

**Response:** The AUI has published annual reports since 2006, and the general outcomes of quality evaluations have been mentioned. In the future we could elaborate more on the outcomes.

- A named Quality Assurance Officer must be charged with overseeing the regular collection and analysis of institutional data, including that related to student learning and post-graduate placements, programme quality, and administrative functions. This function might be shared through the NPUI consortium, but there needs to be sufficient time and expertise devoted to AUI to be sure that meaningful activity with respect to quality assurance is taking place. (32)

**Response:** Since 2013, we collaborate with the other public universities about annual student satisfaction surveys of second year undergraduates, masters' students, and graduates. The graduate surveys include questions about post-graduate work situations. These surveys provide background information for our quality enhancement efforts, and the outcomes are used in the QEF reviews. In addition, Programme Directors usually keep track of former students' placements and further studies.

- It is recommended that AUI should cover the Department of Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning (DVTLL) in an internal Subject Review, and thereafter incorporate it in the following Institutional Review. (8)

**Response:** This is a good idea that we will consider.

## **2. Creating more transparent and consistent processes for the assessment of student work. (34)**

### **3. Taking better account of the particular need to safeguard student confidentiality in a very small institution. (35)**

- The review team raised three issues concerning the assessment of undergraduates: comparability across programmes; double marking; and anonymity. Courses with unusually low or high average marks are inspected by the Office of Academic Affairs for possible action but it would be desirable to supplement this by introducing some element of double marking. Apart from its value as another form of check it serves to exchange teaching and assessment practices between teachers. The fact that most grades are derived from more than one set of marks contributes to sound assessment, but it was also presented as an obstacle to anonymous marking, whereas the review team considers that such difficulties can easily be overcome in most cases. (14) It is critical that the process for marking assignments be anonymous and that students' grades should be treated as confidential matters. (31)

- The down sides to the University's small size, in terms of formalising information and processes and also of ensuring student confidentiality where necessary, need to be faced and solutions found.(24)
- Student confidentiality – and to staff impartiality – are both of them of especial importance in a small institution. In an establishment of this size, faculty often have to wear several hats and some of these multiple responsibilities risk conflicts of interests. In two areas in particular students felt confidentiality and staff objectivity were threatened. It was suggested that anonymous marking (along with random double marking) would avoid tutor subjectivity. Likewise the programme/course evaluation process was felt not to be entirely anonymous, and was not trusted by either undergraduates or postgraduates consulted. It is recommended that the University addresses these matters as a priority. (18)

**Response:** This is something we are constantly working on. All programme and course descriptions have to define learning outcomes and teachers are encouraged to ensure compatibility between stated learning outcomes and course assignments and assessments. Moreover, each year all bachelor theses from the same programme are read by a teacher not involved in supervising to ensure comparability between grades. To assure comparability across programmes is very difficult, however, because the subjects and individual courses, and therefore assignments and assessment methods, are very different.

With few exceptions we do not use double marking and do not see it as a feasible option. The other marker would have to get more or less the same input (reading, lectures, assignments etc.) as the students, which would be too time-consuming and costly for the time being. In many cases, the teacher is the only authority in his or her field of specialisation in Iceland.

Anonymous grading is also a bit problematic to achieve, e.g. for the reasons already mentioned in the IWR citation above (p.14). The teachers themselves calculate and enter the final grades in the UGLA system, and the classes are very small, which makes total anonymity practically impossible. We believe, however, that most, if not all, teachers strive to be fair in their marking. One common practice is, for example, that teachers build their grading on comparison between all assignment solutions or all answers to the same exam question, thus distancing themselves from the student's person. They are also encouraged to create and inform students of grading criteria, preferably beforehand. This helps create transparency and consistency. The course evaluation surveys are under revision in order to improve student participation, information relevance and feedback mechanisms, but also confidentiality. In general though, we believe that this is just as much a question about fostering a culture that does not allow partiality and personal biases to affect grading and how students are treated. In that area we are making progress but could probably do more.

Student grades are always treated as confidential matters and never shared with others without the student's consent.

- Likewise, it is important that students receive timely feedback on their assignments, consistent with existing, but not always heeded, university policies. (31)

**Response:** This has improved. Teachers are required to give feedback within 11 work days, or less if they themselves decide so and state it in assignment description. We have strived to ensure that they respect this rule, and that they inform the students in time if they are not able to do so.

#### **4. Resolving the mismatch between the aspiration to raise admission standards and the need to strengthen academic support for non-traditional entrants. (35)**

- The University aspires to raising its entry standards, as a pre-requisite to raising academic standards generally. This could be addressed in a number of ways: by more actively, widely and imaginatively targeting appropriate applicants; by devising appropriate access courses – before and/or after entry – to support non-standard entrants; by more closely monitoring individual student progress; by strengthening academic support for students struggling, especially in the early stages of a programme; and by tightening the rules for progression. (17)
- To the extent that AUI continues to admit some students who are not fully qualified for post-secondary study, regular academic monitoring and accessible academic support will be crucial. These resources are not fully in place presently.(30)

**Response:** We still admit some students who do not fulfil the formal qualifications, but now with stated precautions in the acceptance letter. Each case is evaluated individually and we provide appropriate and individually designed support to the extent we can. We have tightened the rules such that now they have to complete all first year courses satisfactorily to be allowed to continue to the second year. Furthermore, teachers are now asked to state prerequisites in course descriptions and students without appropriate background are not admitted.

#### **5. Monitoring graduate performance and progress more effectively and systematically, especially for students on individually planned Masters programmes. (35)**

- A forum to discuss research activities for MSc and PhD students should be developed. This could be in the form of regular seminars and scientific paper discussion sessions. (29)

**Response:** The basic problem with our graduate studies programme is that graduate students are few and apart from the Planning MSc students they are following individual study plans and are dispersed around the country. Some even reside abroad. Similarly, their fields of study are diverse and they often have very little in common when it comes to scientific discussions. We organise regular seminars for graduate students where they get the opportunity to present their own work (see next point). However, it is difficult to organize journal clubs for the reasons given above. Attempts have though been made to establish such clubs. For example, within the Faculty of Land and Animal Resources at the site in Keldnaholt we ran a regular journal club during the study year 2014-2015, when we had two PhD students and two MSc students working on their projects there.

- A more formal system for monitoring and evaluation of MSc and PhD student performance and progress should be developed. It should include individual study plans with milestones and targets, and clear timelines for achievements. (29) Progress regulations should be consistent. (28)

**Response:** Our system for monitoring and evaluating MSc and PhD student performance is formal as it is now. Students sign a contract where their study plan is agreed upon by their supervisors and



they also hand in a detailed description of their research project including milestones. We have a strict system of seminars where students present their research project (1) shortly after this has been agreed upon and (2) when their project is well advanced and their supervisors deem it so that they are approaching their defence. In addition, PhD students have a mid-term seminar where they give a progress of their work. On the basis of the presentation it is decided whether they are able to carry on with their studies. These seminars are given twice a year, in March and October, and their presence is written into our regulations on MSc and PhD studies. The Director of Graduate Studies monitors the progress of students regularly in advance of these seminars, i.e. twice a year, and sends out E-mails to the respective students and supervisors. If students have long passed their deadline they get an ultimatum to deliver their thesis.

AUI is a full member of the Centre for Graduate Studies at the University of Iceland. The Centre is currently preparing a formal procedure to follow the progress of PhD students which will apply to our students as well in due course.

- Some in the science fields asked for more consistency and formality in course requirements and more systematic feedback on progress. They would also welcome a greater range of opportunities to undertake undergraduate teaching. (19)

**Response:** It is difficult to respond to this point as courses taken by graduate students reflect their diverse research projects. There are two compulsory courses for the MSc students (Research Methodology and Philosophy of Science), otherwise the selection of courses is individually constructed to support the research project in question. There is a discussion within the Centre for Graduate Studies to introduce courses for PhD students on e.g. Ethics and other relevant topics which could apply across the board. Once these are in place our PhD students would of course gain access to these. For systematic feedback on progress, see above. Here, MSc/PhD committees also play a role and we still need to make them better aware of their responsibilities towards keeping their student on track. To help with this the Director of Graduate studies has recently prepared a document to explain the rights and obligations of both students and supervisors once an alliance has been made.

When it comes to the opportunities of teaching, this would only apply to PhD students as we require teachers in our university courses to have at least a MSc degree. Our PhD students have indeed had the opportunity to teach, some more than others, but this is something that we could of course bear in mind when manning courses.

- In order to enhance the research culture within the institution, it is desirable to develop closer contacts between undergraduates and MSc and PhD students and increase cooperation and coordination between MSc and PhD programmes. (27)

**Response:** This is a worthy aim but there are several obstacles here: most of our academic staff is located at Keldnaholt in Reykjavik and the undergraduate teaching takes place at Hvanneyri but very few of our graduate students have been located there. Rather, they are dispersed around the country so opportunities for closer contacts are few. It is therefore difficult to see how this could be changed.

- Timely feedback from supervisors should be ensured. (28)

**Response:** It is not clear what is being referred to here. If this is about feedback on thesis drafts then in our recent information document about the graduate studies to students and supervisors it is stated that students should hand in a fully prepared thesis draft to the supervisor who should respond within two weeks. This rule will be presented to all supervisors and will subsequently take effect. When it comes to PhD thesis then the process relies much more on close collaboration between the student and supervisors as it is made up of papers in addition to the thesis proper. Here it is more difficult to set fixed time limits.

## **6. Producing, as part of its next Strategic Plan, a research strategy that is appropriate to its developing research culture. (35)**

**Response:** We have not yet developed a general research strategy, or policy, for the whole university but intend to do so in connection with the development of our new strategic plan. The merging of the two university departments, and the opportunities it creates for collaboration, is also important in this context.

- Policies to address the responsible conduct of research, intellectual property, allocation of research funds, evaluation of research in the promotion and tenure process, and use of research space all will need to be developed. (31)

**Response:** Responsible conduct and intellectual property issues are addressed in our Code of Ethics, and in general it is in our research culture to keep a high standard in this respect. It is also emphasized in student assignments and projects. We have access to Turnitin for scanning assignment solutions and other texts for plagiarism, but we could do more to encourage teachers to use this option whenever appropriate and to inform the students about it.

Evaluation of research activity and impact factors is an integral part of our promotion and tenure process. Research funds are generally in the form of external grants applied for by the researchers themselves. Consequently, the AUI as such has little to say about the allocation. At the AUI, all research space is used in common and professors and other researchers do not have their “own” research space. Some of them are responsible for certain laboratories or equipment, but others can also use them. This arrangement allows us to be flexible and we do our best to accommodate all research activities. This flexibility is necessary because research funding and topics vary over time.

- Sabbatical leave was universally regarded as essential for the advancement of research, to the extent that, if funding remains tight, reorganising some teaching so that it is delivered only every second year might be contemplated. (12-13)

**Response:** Sabbaticals have been available for some time and they are now stated as an option in our new regulations. So far, no one has used this opportunity and we still have to develop accountability measures etc. Our short semester system means that most teachers have one or more semesters “free” from teaching that might be devoted to research – at least in theory. Furthermore, some courses are only taught every second year, and we have some flexibility to reorganize course delivery further.

## **7. Addressing current tensions between full-time studies and distance learning. (35)**

- The tensions and communication problems which exist between full-time and distance learning streams on the science programmes need to be addressed, and organisational infelicities need to be resolved, so that neither full- nor part-time students feel disadvantaged. (18; 24)
- While students confirmed that individual communication with tutors is good, they felt that current scheduling and delivery was ideal neither for full-time nor distance students. (20)
- It is especially important to assure comparable quality for distance learning and residential students; the former are somewhat isolated from the community of AUI students and would benefit from more informal and frequent opportunities to interact, both on-line and in person. (30)
- The problems are partly organisational but main issue is lack of interaction: little intellectual or social intercourse amongst students or between students and tutors; lectures passively received, recorded to camera; few problem-solving challenges; inadequate practical and fieldwork experience. (20)
- Addressing the challenges of distance learning could be combined with a reassessment of teaching methodology and delivery. (18) This might make studying on site more attractive and thus might move the balance towards more full-time students (20).
- Collaborations with University of Iceland and University of Akureyri regarding distance learning pedagogies and content delivery could also be beneficial. (30)

**Response:** Our progress in this aspect is slow, again mostly a result of low budgets and staff shortage. We are aware of the disadvantages of this arrangement and would like to create better conditions for both types of learning. We have introduced a compulsory three day on-site introduction for new students at the beginning of their first year. During these days, all students, including distance students, get necessary information, meet other students, the teachers, Student Counsellor and other staff. In addition, more is done to assure that all distance students attend the two compulsory on-site weeks each short-semester. These weeks are used intensively for group exercises, practical training, literature seminars etc.

The implementation of our new regulations and the creation of the new strategic plan will offer opportunities to revise our teaching strategies and improve conditions for both distance and on-site learning as far as our budget allows. We also intend to seek more collaboration and sharing of distance teaching experience with other universities.

## **8. Ensuring that policies for equal opportunity and disability issues permeate the entire institution. (35)**

- The students consulted were a little vague on how the institution deals with the range of equal opportunity and disability issues, complaints and appeals, and also on its Code of Ethics. These issues are covered to some extent in AUI's regulatory documentation, but there is a need to disseminate them more effectively to the student body. (22) Students would welcome more direct and formal information on institutional policies. (23)

**Response:** We constantly try to improve the induction process and other ways to increase students' awareness of these aspects. During the newly installed three day introduction for first year students,

they get thorough information about our Code of Ethics and other policies, and about what kind of assistance is available. They first get an oral presentation and then a practical guidance, sitting at computers, on where to find this information on the home page and in UGLA. Our current Student Counsellor also works for University of Iceland (UI), which gives us access to a broad spectrum of options and solutions. In addition, the Education Office personnel are easily accessible and ready to assist the students at any time. Our next step is to **introduce formal assistance agreements with those students who require special assistance. Thus it will be** clearer for both students and staff what type of assistance each student should have.

#### **9. Strengthening all aspects of staff development, and formalising the HR function. (35)**

- AUI's tight financial constraints have affected staffing in many ways, especially the ability to recruit academics both domestically and internationally. (11) There are some gaps in expertise and the full-time staff is aging. The knowledge gaps have been filled through the employment of part-time and guest teachers, with some course components taught entirely by them. Part-time staff bring with them industry reality, but also, with a high turnover rate, discontinuity in course delivery. (21)
- The reduction in staff caused by the financial crisis has meant that all who remained have had to work harder. (12-13)

**Response:** Our budget still restricts recruitments and the remaining staff members still have to take on too many roles and tasks. In the last couple of years we have hired a few full-time academics, but mostly as replacement for retired staff. A new position as Head of our new Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Science will be introduced from 1 August 2016. The position has been advertised both domestically and internationally

- Course tutors would welcome the opportunity for on-going staff development and training, in order that they can best support the institution in its future aspirations. (24)
- More could be done within AUI itself to encourage teachers to share good practice, for instance through peer observation of teaching. (12)
- The institution needs to improve and formalise staff induction and to strengthen all aspects of staff development and training. All full-time staff who were consulted agreed that on-going training should be compulsory. This could be delivered through a combination of industry placements, peer review of teaching, and better use of the teaching support courses offered by the University of Iceland. (21)

**Response:** For several years now, we have offered one-day trainings for our teachers twice a year in collaboration with the UI Centre for Education and Learning. These trainings are not mandatory, but have been well sought and appreciated. Depending on topic, attendees share experiences and practices during these workshops, but we have not introduced peer-review of teaching as such. Furthermore, teachers and other staff are encouraged to attend relevant courses, workshops, lectures and longer educations offered elsewhere. Some teachers and other staff members have acted as guest lecturers at foreign universities through Nordplus and other mobility and network programmes.

- AUI would clearly benefit from more explicit, transparent, and formal processes for human resource management, and the reinstatement of a formal HR function. The University has not had a Human Resource Manager since 2009 and the current activity is overly centralized in the Rector's office, who also acts as HR officer. (11; 32) It may be that AUI will have to forego an academic appointment in order to re-establish that post. (12)
- Both enhanced staff induction and reinvigorating the annual appraisal scheme are difficult to achieve without a Human Resource Manager (12)

**Response:** We acknowledge the need for a more formal Human Resource function. This is a priority and we are now looking for solutions.

- As soon as funding permits, there is an urgent requirement for general teaching staff support – additional secretarial and technical back-up. (21-22)

**Response:** No additions yet. The Education Office, IT personnel and other support staff are very flexible and offer assistance to the extent they can.

- Processes for the filing and hearing of staff grievances and other attention to protection of staff rights are necessary and regular, systematic processes for staff evaluation should be put in place. (32)

**Response:** Such processes will be clarified in connection to the implementation of our new regulations and the associated updating of all processes, policies and roles. Regular personal interviews between individual staff members and their next superior (TMT) offer good opportunities to discuss all kinds of matters, and for both parties to give and take feedback. We have recently put more emphasis on conducting TMTs at least once a year. In general, people should be able to discuss grievances with their next superior at any time. For issues connected to staff rights and connected grievances, staff can also get assistance from their trade union representative within the organization, or directly from the trade union.

**10. As funding permits, addressing the inadequacies of the physical library.” Improve facilities and support for learning. (35)**

- Increased availability of a librarian, enhanced holdings, updating of search and data base software, and dedicated study space in or near the library are all important steps necessary to assure the best possible learning experience for all students. (31)

**Response:** At the moment, we only have one Librarian. She is based at our Horticultural campus but attends the Reykjavik campus once a week. At Hvanneyri, there is no librarian, but our Information Officer assists students and staff, maintains the physical library and performs other library connected tasks two days a week. She works closely with the Librarian.

Our physical library holdings are updated to the degree our budget allows. However, in recent years we have prioritised electronic access material, which is more cost efficient and more accessible to our distance-learning students. We collaborate with other libraries about inter-library loans and data

bases. Especially important is the Icelandic countrywide access portal, hvar.is, offering access to many international data bases and journals.

The Reykjavik campus library offers silent study facilities. We have not installed more of them at Hvanneyri but students usually have access to other spaces they can use for silent studies our group work. At the Reykjavik campus, we have created a separate office for master students, where they can have their own study space and work in silence.

- Support staff felt that their number was inadequate to fully to support increased institutional activities in teaching and research. (22)

**Response:** This is still a large problem, as our financial situation has not allowed us to hire more support staff or replace those who retire or leave for other reasons.

#### **11. Providing a comprehensive career guidance service. (35)**

- An additional support area is that of career guidance to assist students make wise decisions with respect to choice of degree programs, internships and other field experiences, and job seeking upon graduation. The current resources for career guidance could use significant augmentation to achieve this purpose. (31)

**Response:** Since January 2016, we share a Student and Career Counsellor with University of Iceland and Holar University. She is two days a month at Hvanneyri, and students can also contact her at other times. They can even meet with her in Reykjavik, which is convenient because many students live in the capital area. This new arrangement seems to work quite well. Hitherto, the students' issues have mostly concerned their studies and not so much career advice, but the plan is to promote that part. The Counsellor brings new ideas, and her connection to the other universities is an advantage.

#### **12. Fostering synergies between the various departments. (35)**

- There is a need for closer and deeper collaborations across all departments (both academic and administrative), leading to new, presently unrealised synergies and efficiencies. Such an effort must be guided by a robust, meaningful strategic plan for the University. (30)
- It is recommended that interaction between staff and students, and between the different disciplines, so essential for a dynamic academic community, be promoted and fostered. (24)
- Inter-departmental communication and collaboration also needs managing. (21)

**Response:** One of the main intentions with our new regulations and merging the two faculties is to facilitate closer interaction and collaboration within the university, and to foster more interdisciplinary understanding. To install and advertise a specific Head of Faculty position instead of appointing someone from one of the "old" faculties could also prove beneficial in this respect.

### 13. External involvement

- For the benefit of staff and students, and also for the benchmarking of the institution's standards, there is now a real need to open this University up to external influences, and to bring in personnel with wider perspectives, both national and international. (23)
- Collaborative arrangements are progressing; but further, systematic external involvement in the institution's processes would help. (7)
- Programme Directors said that involvement of external colleagues in quality assurance was informal and at their own initiative (11)
- A regular cycle of Subject-level Reviews will increase externality and may help with the identification of appropriate benchmarks. (11)
- Increased use of external review panels for programme initiatives in their early stages and programme results after they have produced graduates is also recommended. (32)

**Response:** The smallness of the university and the educational system and research environment in Iceland in general, means that external influences are inevitable. Most of our scientists and teachers have taken at least part of their education abroad and/or at other Icelandic universities, and many of them are in close contact and collaboration with other scientists in Iceland and other countries. Furthermore, most, if not all, of the study programmes involve representatives from industry in programme revision, student supervision and part-time teaching. Since 2013, all our study programmes have undergone Subject Reviews in the QEF framework, involving external experts.

This said, we are aware that we could do more to ensure external influence in a more structured and intentional way. The creation of our new strategic plan will be vital in this. The QEF reviews will be a regular feature in coming years, and collaboration between the Icelandic universities, e.g. the QEF framework and teaching enhancement, is an increasingly important source of input. The new Head of Faculty position has been advertised internationally and in the near future we will also have to replace several positions due to retirement, which opens up for new influences. Furthermore, the new regulations offer the opportunity to include external experts in, e.g. programme committees,

- The University should seek collaborations for its MSc and PhD programmes with other institutions, in order to broaden students' course options and provide opportunities for interactions. Cooperation and agreements with industry are also important for MSc and PhD programmes. (28)
- Access to a wider array of courses for M.Sc. students, taking advantage of the NPUI and NOVA consortia, is also seen as a necessary area for instructional improvement. (30)

**Response:** All our PhD degrees involve collaboration with other universities in Iceland and abroad and AUI is a full member of the Centre for Graduate Studies at the UI. Except for the MSc programme in Planning, all our post-graduate students have to take courses at other universities, and even the Planning Programme has recently been revised to accommodate student mobility.

#### 14. Organizational structures and management

- The organisational structure is transparent but its operational procedures are mostly informal. There are no written terms of reference for the Management Team, or for the Faculty Councils, which currently function in an ad hoc manner, or for the University Forum. (9)
- The Education Committee, despite its central role in the safeguarding of standards, functions reactively, meeting as business arises, rather than having a regular schedule that would allow it to monitor quality and make necessary adjustments continuously, based on regular data analysis. (9)
- Currently there is no student on the Management Committee: there was no senior staff objection to this, however, and reserved business could be instigated in this case. (23)

**Response:** The new regulations will change the organisational structure and operational procedures significantly. The implementation process has just started and will involve a complete review and updating of all operational procedures and policies. We will keep this advice in mind during the updating process.

- Improved administrative functions will be dependent on full implementation and utilization of the UGLA system. This should be an area of priority for AUI, as there is not yet a culture of continuous assessment and improvement in place. A first step will be to assure that the information necessary for assessment and decision-making is readily available. This will allow for the development of a realistic, comprehensive strategic plan, with clear priorities, timelines, and assignments for responsibility (including the prioritisation of the goals listed in Table 7 of the Reflective Analysis). (32)

**Response:** We implemented the UGLA-system in 2013 and it is very useful. The system is under constant revision, and the collaboration between the universities has helped improve it.

#### 15. Revision of curriculum content and delivery, policies and strategies, the AUI name/image etc.

- The delivery of aspects of the curriculum is in need of a major review - to attract more high quality full-time students, and to ensure a varied and effective range of learning experiences. (24)
- There were often limited course options for any given year, and inconsistencies between years on the courses offered; some courses were so similar that they might as well be taught together. (17)
- Along with a review of teaching approaches, the Division of Academic Affairs should consider rationalising aspects of course content, so that more common elements can be shared between the departments. (20)
- Addressing the challenges of distance learning could well be combined with a reassessment of teaching methodology and delivery.(18)

**Response:** The curriculum is revised and updated every year, but no major revision has taken place. It will be carried out after the new regulations have been put into practice and the new strategic plan created. These recommendations are valid and will be considered.

- The addition to the core curriculum of industry placements and mentoring schemes, and of shared, interactive classes on both problem-solving skills and career management – enterprise



skills, business and financial management – would both cement the institution’s ties with industry and provide essential opportunities for student interaction. (21)

**Response:** One of the enhancements from our 2015 Subject Review was to make students more aware of an existing course option, Applied Methodology, which allows students to get credits for internships in Iceland or abroad. They are also informed about ERASMUS grants for internships abroad.