

**Quality Enhancement Framework
For Icelandic Higher Education**

INSTITUTION-WIDE REVIEW

Hólar University College

September 2013



Preface

This is the report of an independent institution-wide review undertaken by the Icelandic Quality Board for Higher Education under the authority of the Icelandic Government. The review was carried out by a team of independent senior international higher education experts together with an independent student from the higher education sector in Iceland.

Institution-wide Review is one component of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) established by the Icelandic Government in 2011. The main elements of the QEF are:

- Quality Board-led reviews at the institutional level.
- A transparent, comprehensive program of subject level reviews led by the institutes themselves.
- A programme of annual meetings between members of the Quality Board and individual institutions to discuss institutional developments in quality assurance and enhancement.
- A series of quality enhancement workshops and conferences to share national and international developments in enhancing the quality of the student experience.

Further information on the Icelandic Enhancement Framework is available at the RANNIS web site.¹

Professor Norman Sharp OBE
Chair

Dr Einar Hreinsson
Secretary General

¹ See: <http://rannis.is/english/qef/>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *The Review Process*

Institutional Review is one of the main elements of the *Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education* (QEF). All seven Higher Education Institutions in Iceland are being reviewed between 2012 and 2015. This is a report of the third review, of Hólar University College (HUC).

The review was conducted by the Quality Board with support from RANNIS, in accordance with the procedures described in the 2011 *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education*. The review team comprised Professor Rita McAllister (chair) and Dr Frank Quinault (vice-chair) from the Quality Board, together with Professors Bruce Mallory and Thomas Palo, and Anna Maria Gudmundsdottir as the student member. Dr Einar Hreinsson and Eva D.D. Þorkelsdóttir, both from RANNIS, provided administrative support.

In preparation for the main visit the Quality Board members of the review team had three meetings on the Reflective Analysis with senior staff: two of these were by audio or video link and the third was at Hólar. The review visit took place on 14 and 15 March 2013 in the University's main building at Hólar. On the afternoon before the review the team were shown around HUC's aquaculture and fish biology teaching and research facilities at Sauðárkrókur. On 14 March an initial presentation was given by the University, followed by a tour of the horse training and riding amenities. Thereafter twelve meetings were held with staff, students and alumni, University Board members, and representatives from the relevant industries. The schedule for the visit was designed by the review chair in consultation with HUC, after reading the University's Reflective Analysis and associated reference material. The preparation of the Reflective Analysis and the arrangements for the visit were overseen by the Rector, Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, Professor Bjarni K. Kristjánsson and Professor Helgi Thorarensen.

The Quality Board is grateful to the University for its cooperation in organising the proceedings, and to RANNIS for ensuring the smooth running of the visit.

1.2 Hólar University College

Located in the northern municipality of Skagafjörður, Hólar University College is the smallest of the country's seven universities. It is a centre for education and research in horsemanship and horse breeding, aquaculture, aquatic biology and tourism studies. Hólar in Hjaltadalur is an historical landmark in Iceland. The University dates its origins back to a cathedral school founded in 1106; its more recent roots lie in an agricultural school established in 1882. University-level courses were first offered in 1997; degrees were developed in 2003; HUC was formally accredited as a higher educational establishment in 2007. Since 2010 the University has been an active member of the Network of Public Universities in Iceland (NPUI).

HUC has three departments: Aquaculture and Fish Biology (DAFB); Equine Sciences (DES); and Rural Tourism (DRT). Equine Sciences and Tourism are delivered at the main campus at Hólar; teaching and research in Aquaculture and Fish Biology take place at Sauðárkrúkur, 30km away. DAFB offers its own Diploma and Masters programmes and a Bachelor programme in collaboration with the University of Iceland (UoI); DES offers its own Diploma and Bachelor programmes in riding and riding instruction, and a joint Bachelor programme in equine science with the Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI); and DRT offers programmes in tourism at Diploma, Bachelor and Masters level. Although Hólar does not yet offer its own doctoral programme, discussions are in progress on a collaborative programme with the UoI. There are notable educational and cultural differences and few synergies amongst the three departments, however: in its future planning the Management Team should seek to promote a more cohesive, overall institutional identity.

The student body is small: of 263 registered students, only 94 study on campus while 169 are distance-learning students. The proportion of on-campus to distance-learning students varies between departments – 2 : 21 in DAFB, 19 : 169 in DRT, while all 73 students in DES are resident. In 2012 the University employed 56 individuals in 44.7 positions.

1.3 Mission and Strategic Objectives

Hólar University College aims to contribute significantly to the academic and professional communities by maintaining high standards in teaching, vigorous research programmes, strong industry links and active international collaboration.

Over the last few years, HUC's strategic planning has been in a state of flux, because of the financial crisis in Iceland and, more recently, with both the institution's transfer to the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC) and the appointment of a new Rector. The 2006-11 Strategic Plan was revised after institutional accreditation; the subsequent Plan for 2009-14 is to be completely reviewed; the new Plan will have more specific, more measurable outcomes. The main strategic objectives now are: to enhance the research profile, especially in Equine Studies and Rural Tourism; to increase student numbers and expand the Masters programmes; to strengthen institutional collaborations both in Iceland and abroad; and more actively to market the institution, promoting HUC's rural setting. The main thrust will be, as it should, towards depth rather than breadth of focus.

1.4 Organisation and Governance

HUC is governed by a University Board, chaired by the Rector and including members representing the Ministries of Education, Industries and Innovation, and the Interior, the Horse Trainers' Association and the University of Iceland, as well as staff and student representatives. This Board sets policy for instruction, research and the University's organisational structure. Its meeting with the review team was, unfortunately, poorly attended and discussion was not well focussed. In the last few years the Board's main concern has been the extremely fragile state of the institution's funding; it sees its purpose as supporting HUC in appropriate external arenas. It was unclear to the review team, however, where staff in the institution considered that final decision-making authority lay – with the Board or with the Rector. (It lies with the Board.) The review team suggests that, in any forthcoming changes to Board structure, such issues should be clarified and clear terms of reference drawn up.

The main executive committee of the University, answerable to the Board, is the Management Team, consisting of the Rector, Heads of Departments, the Director of Finance and the HR Manager: this committee is in charge of daily operations and oversees the educational programme. Three key committees report to the Management Team: the Academic Affairs Committee, the Graduate Studies Committee and the Research Committee. **The general remit of committees is outlined in the University's Procedural Regulations. The scope of the responsibilities and terms of reference of all of these committees needs, however, to be clarified and the authority of the Academic Affairs Committee, which monitors all aspects of the main teaching programme, strengthened.**

1.5 Recent Developments

Iceland's financial crisis has badly affected Hólar University College. Faced with having to cut expenditure, the institution chose to prioritise the delivery of its teaching programme and to raise external funding through research grants and service fees. The educational programme has expanded and student enrolments have increased since 2008; but there have been cuts in part-time and support staff, a curtailment of staff research time, and decreases in the maintenance budget. On its own admission, the University is now close to its limits with respect to fiscal viability.

The new Rector was appointed in June 2012 but as yet, in an unstable financial climate, has had little chance to make an impact. Likewise, the University's recent Service Agreement with MESAC, while it sets out parameters for funded student numbers, is thought to have brought little benefit in real terms.

There seems, however, to be a new vision developing for HUC. The previous Rector's view was of a 'University of Rural Iceland', incorporating a number of small, geographically-scattered rural associations and institutions. Now Hólar's future is seen by its management as a small but distinctive, specialist, flexible, independent establishment, with growing industry links, collaborating with – and supported by – the network of larger public universities.

1.6 Response to previous Reviews/Accreditation exercises

The University obtained Accreditation from the MESC in October 2007; in December 2010 the Department of Rural Tourism underwent an external Evaluation by the Ministry. The two reports were submitted as Annexes² to the Reflective Analysis. Neither report was dealt with systematically by the institution at the time; a summary of the institution's responses was, however, drawn up for the present review and presented in chart form³.

The visiting panels made a large number of recommendations. Some of them implied additional funding, and – understandably – the institution has not been able to meet these. **Some significant suggestions from the institutional accreditation, however – the establishment of an international panel of experts to advise on research developments, for example, and the need for focussed and strategic curricular planning – were either 'not done' or 'not agreed with'. Amongst the recommendations for DRT was that HUC should not be offering postgraduate programmes; HUC did not, however, agree with this. Altogether, it seemed that the institution had not given much weight to the outcomes of the process – though it was stated that the preparations for it, which led to the adoption of elements of the Bologna system, had led to fundamental improvements in programme delivery.**

The review team were assured that the findings of this current review would be the starting-point for the next Strategic Plan.

1.7 Production of the Reflective Analysis

The production of the Reflective Analysis was a substantial task for HUC: at the time of writing there was no designated QA officer amongst a very small staff, most of whom have more than one role. The writing of the document was largely the work of the Head of the Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, who is also the chair of the Academic Affairs Committee. To help in preparing the documentation, the Quality Council for Icelandic Higher Education had delivered a workshop on the

² Annexes 8 and 9 to the Reflective Analysis.

³ Annex 10 to the Reflective Analysis.

subject in November 2011, and additional guidance on the general content and structure (but no evaluation) of this Reflective Analysis was given by Professor McAllister.

The form of the resultant submission broadly follows that suggested in the *Quality Enhancement Handbook*. It was accompanied by helpful reference material and supplemented by the extensive documentation requested by the review team in advance of the visit. The Case Study focussed on recent developments in the Department of Rural Tourism.

The information presented was comprehensive; the institution clearly undertook the processes of self-evaluation and reflection with some seriousness, identifying many issues for further action. Two review teams, one of academic staff and the other consisting of members of the Hólar Student Association, were consulted during the writing process and all staff were invited to comment prior to the submission of the report. **Nonetheless, the document seemed to this review team somewhat lacking in collegiate ownership, and only obliquely to reflect the student voice: in fact, this voice was fairly muted throughout the review.**

1.8 Evaluation

Hólar University College is situated in an impressive and historical location, which effectively supports the institution's expertise in teaching and research. Its physical and intellectual resources are of key importance to this region of Iceland – though the isolation of its setting, together with the geographical separation of its aquaculture and fish biology facilities from its main centre, present some operational problems. Its specialist departments are rooted in Hólar's landscape and long history: its staff are at the heart of the local community.

Despite its long historical roots as an educational establishment, HUC is a young and very small University, by any comparisons. It sees its future as being independent, but collaborative, supported by NPUI and by its strong industry links (though these need to interface more closely with the curriculum). It relies, for example, upon the resources of the University of Iceland for teaching support, and takes advantage of

the services provided by NPUI to complement its small size and limited support services.

The size and small critical mass of HUC, however, together with its very large proportion of distance learners and a high percentage of drop-outs, threatens the viability of some of its programmes. The lack of synergy between the three, very different departments undermines institutional identity. Additionally, the extreme financial vulnerability of the University has severely hampered its development over the last few years, and places a definite question mark over its future as an independent organisation.

2. SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS

2.1 Organisational Structure for the Management of Standards

Responsibility for quality is shared by three of the 'Divisions' that are shown, diagrammatically in the Reflective Analysis, as orthogonal to HUC's three academic departments. The Division of Academic Affairs is responsible for monitoring the quality of undergraduate education, while the Divisions of Graduate Studies and of Research monitor the quality of graduate education and of research respectively. There is also a fourth Division, for Operations and Services.

The Head of the Division of Academic Affairs, appointed by the Rector for a three year term, 'oversees the coordination of programmes of study' (Article 7 of the University's Procedural Regulations) and chairs the Committee for Academic Affairs, which also comprises one member from each of the three departments and two student representatives. Article 7 states that the Committee 'is responsible for quality control of study programmes and decides on improvements as needed, in co-operation with the college management board'. It also states that each of the three

departments shall operate a study committee, consisting of two faculty members appointed by the head of department and two student representatives, all with a term of one year, and that the study committee is 'a forum for discussions regarding the development of the prospectus, syllabi and progress of courses'.

The staff members of the Academic Affairs Committee made two important points when discussing their role with the review team. First, that their oversight is really at the programme level rather than being concerned with individual courses. Second, that when a proposal comes to them from one of the study committees, they can request further information, for instance about likely costs, as part of their scrutiny, but they do not have the authority to grant, or withhold, approval.

It has been necessary to describe these arrangements in detail because they were not immediately clear to the visiting team, which would urge the University to review them. The authority vested in the Academic Affairs Committee should be strengthened, at the very least by clarifying what is delegated to the study committees and what requires sanction by the Management Team, or indeed by the University Board. Just how the responsibility for maintaining academic standards - as distinct from other aspects of quality- is allocated and exercised should also be made explicit. It would have helped the review team (as it would anyone else not already familiar with the institution, such as a new member of staff) to have had prior access to a document explaining the distinction between the Committee of Academic Affairs and the Division of the same name, and how the latter provides administrative support for the former.

2.2 Design, Approval, Monitoring and Review of Programmes

Published guidelines and procedures for the design and approval of new programmes (including the courses or modules of which they are composed), and for their subsequent monitoring and periodic review, are among the most important elements of any quality assurance system. **The Reflective Analysis provides a brief description of how new programmes have been introduced and approved. Apart from the apparent absence of any requirement for external input** (as discussed in the next section of this report), the process is broadly in line with current practice elsewhere.

However, as acknowledged by the Reflective Analysis, it has not been included in any of HUC's written rules or regulations. It should be.

The regulations should also deal with changes to existing programmes and specify which body is responsible for their final approval. The need for such regulations was powerfully illustrated by HUC's own Case Study, which included a very frank account of how a major change, from full-term courses to 3 week modules, had been implemented by the then head of DRT without proper consultation, resulting in widespread and persistent complaints from students.

The main, routine means of evaluating teaching quality at HUC is by the administration of a standard questionnaire to students at the end of each course. Low, and falling, participation limits its utility. Whilst that is also true of other universities, it may be that HUC could do more to persuade students that these evaluations do matter, for instance by introducing a simpler form of evaluation earlier in each course, so that any consequent changes benefit the respondents and not just their successors. In any case, HUC already aims to supplement student evaluation with some form of self-reflection by teachers and by having the Academic Affairs Committee select one course every semester from each department for a thorough examination.

These proposed innovations are welcome but the University may also wish to consider whether it should institute some form of annual monitoring of all programmes. One of the requirements of the new Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education is for each university to institute a cycle of Subject-level Reviews, which will themselves become one of the principal sources of evidence for the next round of Institutional Reviews. HUC needs to decide how it will conduct these periodic reviews and whether, in line with established practice in many other universities, an annual report on each programme should be part of the evidence base.

2.3 External Reference Points and Benchmarks

HUC understands the importance of corroborating the standards of its awards by benchmarking them against those of other universities. It has done this in various ways: through its long-standing relationship with the University of Guelph, in Canada; its participation in the NOVA network; and by collaborating with the University of Iceland and with the Agricultural University of Iceland in the provision of joint degrees. It also welcomes the new collaborative opportunities within Iceland that have opened up through the creation of NPUI.

All the subjects taught at HUC have close links with business and industry: with fishing and aquaculture; with horse breeding, training and riding; and with rural tourism. The review team met representatives from each of these areas of work, all of whom valued the teaching being delivered by the University and were keen to give it their support. Some had been consulted about course content and assessment, especially, as is to be expected, in the case of Equine Studies. There may be scope for further involvement of this kind, particularly in DRT.

There should always be some external involvement before new programmes are approved and again when they are due for periodic review. The former requirement should be included in the written regulations called for in 2.2 above; the latter is already a mandatory component of Subject-level Reviews.

What is just as important as the external perspective itself is the way in which the institution responds to it. The most extensive independent reviews of teaching at HUC, prior to the present one, were the *Accreditation Report* of 2007 and the December 2010 *Evaluation of Tourism Studies*. As already demonstrated (under 1.6 above), HUC failed to produce a formal response to either at the time, and there were various anomalies in those which were drawn up as an annex to the Reflective Analysis.

2.4 Staff Induction, Appraisal and Development

The Reflective Analysis recognises that in order to secure high academic standards the University needs to recruit good staff and provide them with opportunities to keep up to date and advance their careers. It concluded that its quality system for academic staff appeared to be working well. The views expressed by the members of staff who met the review team suggested that they were in broad agreement with this judgement. There are some provisos however.

Chief among these are the challenges posed by HUC's quite heavy dependence on part-time staff. Efforts are made to include them in discussions about teaching, by telephone and Skype, and a part-time member of staff who met the review team confirmed that this was working in her experience. But it is inherently difficult to support intensive or sustained training for part-time staff: so much so that, according to the Reflective Analysis, comprehensive implementation of the Bologna process would entail a reduction in the number of part-time staff.

It would also entail, again according to the Reflective Analysis, greatly increased pedagogic training for all academic staff, with mandatory participation. Some staff have taken advantage of workshops run by the University of Iceland and it may be that the solution will lie with NPUI if it is able to create new training opportunities.

One change already taking effect, due to NPUI, is a revision of HUC's rules for academic recruitment and progression, which will result in a merit system that is common to all the public universities. Staff interviewed by the review team expressed some concern regarding the extent to which teaching – which takes up so much of their time and makes ever more complex demands upon them - would be recognised within the new system, relative to research.

HUC has been encouraging its staff to study for more advanced degrees than the first or Masters degrees that were the final qualifications of many when it achieved university status a few years ago. This is commendable. The review team was surprised, however, by the decision to accredit the qualification 'Riding Instructor A' as equivalent to a Masters degree. The rationale, which was to be able to appoint two highly skilled riding instructors to academic positions, seems entirely justified,

but there might have been a better way of achieving the same end result. Unilateral accreditation by a single institution could well give rise to anomalies across the HE sector.

2.5 Use of Management Information

The web-based data management system, UGLA, has been in operation at HUC since the summer of 2012. Prior to that, HUC had been using the Stefania student register system for two years, which was a major advance on the spreadsheets previously used for student registration purposes. Because it has been adopted by all of the public universities in Iceland, through the NPUI initiative, it should make it easier for HUC to compare itself with those other institutions. When the review team asked the University Board what key performance indicators it would wish to use for such comparative purposes it was told that HUC had been waiting for MESC to clarify what information it would want from the new system. It is to be hoped that the potential that UGLA has to generate valuable statistical information, about such matters as student progress and attrition, will soon be realised.

2.6 Published Information

The Management Team considers that HUC's homepage is in urgent need of updating but has been waiting to see whether agreement is reached through NPUI on some common format for webpages. Meanwhile, the present version includes a substantial amount of information in English, which doubtless helps prospective students from many overseas countries, as it did the review team. It is important, when presenting material in more than one language, to check that changes are applied consistently.

2.7 Assessment of Students

The requirement, as part of the European Bologna process, that all award-bearing programmes should have intended learning outcomes, has been mediated in Iceland through a National Qualifications Framework that was created in 2007 and revised four years later. At HUC, the Department of Rural Tourism has taken a lead in implementing the progression from programme outcomes to learning outcomes for individual courses and to marrying those with appropriate means of assessment. Although some staff may initially have regarded this process as unduly burdensome for such an intimate institution as HUC, DRT took the view that it is probably especially important for a small university to be able to demonstrate the validity of its awards by this means. The exercise now needs to be completed, so that all courses have their own learning outcomes, linked to assessment, but the review team commends HUC on the progress it has made thus far.

One of the goals of a quality assurance system is to ensure consistency of assessment: within a given discipline, across disciplines in the same institution, and across institutions. The review team was told that compliance with the Bologna process is making it easier for HUC to monitor the consistency of assessment across its three departments. However, it has also exposed a problem which is as yet unresolved. This concerns the relationship between learning outcomes and grading scales. Specifically, should the learning outcomes be cast in terms of minimum acceptable standards, so that a student who fulfils them is given a passing grade (of 5 on HUC's 10-point scale), or of the maximum expected performance? A secondary issue is the question of whether students need to achieve all the learning outcomes to pass a course.

These matters have been the subject of lively debate at HUC, which is to be welcomed, and the review team commends the University for its concern that its students should not be disadvantaged relative to those at other Icelandic universities where different conventions may apply. An agreed, national policy would undoubtedly be best, but in the meantime HUC should ensure that its own assessment practices are transparent and consistent across the University. The review team therefore welcomes the commitment in the Reflective Analysis to the introduction of a common grading scale.

The Reflective Analysis also commits the university to clarifying its rules on plagiarism, with particular reference to the penalties that would result. It categorised this as a high priority, as indeed it is, having been one of the main recommendations in the 2007 Accreditation Report.

2.8 Evaluation

Despite its several concerns over the quality of the student learning experience, the review team found no evidence that awards had been made inappropriately. Confidence in HUC's standards does presuppose, however, that the institution will respond in a more strategic manner to this review than it did to either the 2007 Accreditation or the 2010 Evaluation by producing a quality assurance action plan with clear target dates and allocated responsibilities.

This is not to underestimate what HUC's very small and undoubtedly dedicated staff have already achieved in these matters. Building on that will be a considerable challenge. It should help that a member of the administrative staff is now acting, in effect if not formally in name, as the University's Quality Assurance Officer, and that she, like the University as a whole, will be able to draw upon the resources and experience that are being gathered and shared by the public universities through NPUJ.

3. THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

3.1 Overview

This section of the report is concerned with aspects of the educational journey of an undergraduate or graduate student at Hólár University College, beginning with the

process of application and induction, covering the experience of programme delivery and the support offered to students on course, and outlining the help made available at later stages, including the preparation for employment or for further study. It also surveys the importance of the student voice both in gaining maximum benefit from, and in assuming some responsibility for, their studies.

Two representative groups - of undergraduates including Student Association members, and of graduates and alumni - were asked about their experiences at these various stages; academic and support staff were also asked about programme delivery and learning support.

Hólar University College aims to provide its students with a positive environment and a confident learning experience; it has focused upon providing opportunities for study for people of all ages. The University is to be commended for this commitment to open access and to the development of blended learning in Aquaculture and Tourism studies – both of these closely related to the needs of the people and geography of north-west Iceland. 78% of the student body, however, are resident outwith north-west Iceland, the majority of them in the Reykjavik area, so that HUC meets the needs of a broad range of individuals in its specialist fields. It has a relatively mature student population: the average student age is 33. This student body, whilst small, has increased by almost 50% since 2009; in a time of severe financial limitations this growth has placed enormous pressure on teaching and support systems, especially since the biggest expansion has been in distance learning.

The three constituent departments of the University have very different profiles, and they operate almost as separate educational silos. DRT has the widest student age range, averaging almost 37, and the largest student body, the vast majority of whom are distance learners. DAFB has tiny undergraduate cohorts, but an impressive, and growing, research profile. All students in DES - a much younger group - are undergraduates working on campus, with tutor role-models whose professional equine skills are of the highest. Whatever the departmental strengths, however, the lack of interaction between them, further dividing what is an already perilously small critical mass, undermines the perception of HUC as a university entity. The institution does not favour future merger with a larger university; but it is

sympathetic to membership of a federation of HE bodies in Iceland, one in which it could evolve and continue to be confident in its specialisms.

Staff who met the review team supported this view. They felt that departments currently 'do their own thing'; students felt that whilst they had good individual contact with faculty, there was regrettably little communication with staff or students in other disciplines, and this was particularly true for distance learners.

3.2 The undergraduate student journey

Applicants to HUC are expected to have passed the Matriculation Examination or equivalent. In addition to this, because of demand for its places, the DES has a skills selection examination. For other programmes, since many applicants have not completed secondary level education, it is the University's policy to accept suitable candidates without entrance qualifications: suitability is assessed on an individual basis by means of interviews, counselling and a written examination. This seems good practice, and these selected, non-standard entrants (11% of all students since 2008, 37% in DAFB) seem to perform as well as their colleagues. HUC additionally has a large proportion of entrants part of whose prior learning is accredited: 84 students since 2007, the majority in DRT. While this situation does not necessarily undermine the processes of maintaining or enhancing institutional standards, **the review team would wish to see requirements for access and for credit transfer formalised, and both monitoring and support for non-standard entrants on course strengthened.**

HUC offers a BSc in Aquatic Biology jointly with UoI, and a BSc in Equine Science with AUI, in both cases teaching the final, 3rd year of the programme. Sixteen students have completed the BSc in riding and riding instruction, but no student has as yet completed the degree in Aquatic Biology. The DRT offers no degree jointly; there is 'general collaboration', in the form of recognition of each other's courses, with both UoI and the University of Akureyri. No formal monitoring processes, however, were in evidence here – the more necessary in view of the very high proportion of both distance learners and non-standard entrants in DRT. Most of the small numbers of students consulted by the review team (who, unfortunately, did

not include undergraduates from DAFB) were happy with their programmes, though they were aware of the effects of financial cuts. Graduates and alumni felt well-prepared for employment. In the absence of relevant statistical information on, for example, student satisfaction or graduate employment, it was impossible for the team to find hard evidence on these or other key aspects of student performance. The institution is aware that, for purposes of Quality Enhancement, it needs to generate more and better statistical data; the UGLA system is apparently not yet geared to HUC's needs.

The review team had a most constructive meeting with an impressive group of external and industry representatives (including the Trainers Association, the Farmers' Tourist Association and the Federation of Employers, as well as faculty from UoI and AUJ), all of whom expressed their strong support for the University. There is clear loyalty here – and this was also evident amongst HUC's staff and students. Links with industry are important for teaching in DES and especially for research in DAFB: for example, the fish protein company FISK has created a special Development and Innovation unit with which HUC works closely. Collaboration in DRT has been less active in recent years, but ties with the tourism industry are still close. The University should certainly ensure that these willing industrial contacts are maintained and fostered, including curriculum and research involvement at all levels.

3.3 Graduate studies

Graduate students have been trained and supervised at Hólar for almost twenty years, but until 2008 they were all registered at other Universities. The University now offers its own Masters programmes in Aquaculture and Fish Biology, and Rural Tourism (for the latter, see 3.5); currently there are 8 MSc students (3 in DAFB and 5 in DRT) registered at HUC, with 2 MSc and 4 PhD students additionally supervised by Hólar staff. Masters programmes are largely research-based. All graduate programmes are supervised by full-time staff, appointed by the Graduate Studies Committee, with input from external specialists where necessary or desirable. The Equine Science department does not offer Masters level study.

The DAFB graduate students who met the review team expressed high satisfaction with their studies. They felt very much part of an open and ambitious research community – many overseas students come to the department on short-term placements. Supervision and scientific experience are of a high order; research projects are commonly in collaboration with industry; discussion and feedback are challenging; and there is strong encouragement to publish. Progress rules and feedback are generally informal – there are few set milestones; but students felt that the situation is working well and is 'under constant improvement'.

3.4 The management of student learning

The Bologna process was formally adopted in Iceland in 2006. HUC introduced learning outcomes in 2007; the next step is to align these to assessment. Both Bologna and the development of the National Qualifications Framework in Iceland have improved the content and delivery of teaching in this University, according to those staff members met by the review team. They were mostly enthusiastic about these changes, seeing them as tools for improvement; some, however, were a little more sceptical. Students acknowledged the presence of learning outcomes in documentation, but doubted their ubiquitous implementation.

Teaching delivery is organised according to departmental and subject needs: DES focuses on study and practice in small groups. Both DAFB and DRT have been structuring courses into 2-4 week modules, effectively in DAFB, with less success in DRT (see 3.5). The institution's policy for teaching apparently promotes varied course delivery, and staff are supportive but, as with some other QA processes, there seems to be nothing documented on this. Staff reported that they take external advice on course development. More courses which can be shared across the departments are now being created: initially this was for financial reasons, but both tutors and students see the advantages of these interactions – a view shared by the review team.

One of the areas of greatest concern in teaching delivery, voiced by teaching staff and students alike, is the difficulties – academic, social and organisational – created by trying to accommodate the needs of small numbers of resident, and many more

distance-learning, students. The problems are most acute in DRT. Staff are very sympathetic to the principle of blended learning, but feel swamped by distance-learning numbers and unable to monitor their progress. Both resident and distance students feel disadvantaged. There is little doubt that distance-learning is central to the University's mission; but there is now an urgent need for the Academic Affairs Committee to undertake a comprehensive review of course provision and delivery, with particular regard to the needs of distance-learning students, in terms of content, contact, support and equipment.

In the process of such a review, both progress regulations and the reasons for high numbers of drop-outs should be examined. Members of staff voiced their awareness that progress regulations are not always complied with: too many students extend their studies beyond the specified limits, leading to administrative, monitoring and assessment problems. And while the Reflective Analysis states that there are 'no indications here for concern' in the high number of drop-outs (128 since 2008; 94 of these in DRT), the review team disagreed with this view: despite being assured that such numbers were partly a result of students changing programme, the team felt that the reasons for students leaving should be investigated and addressed.

Currently, the evaluation of teaching is monitored by means of a questionnaire administered at the end of each course. Since this was put online, however, responses have fallen and results are less reliable. Students voiced several concerns about areas of their learning experience: that staff expertise was variable, particularly with respect to part-time instructors; that there was little support for students (especially distance-learning) with academic problems; that study skills were formally covered only in induction week; and that they would value both more contact with industry on course and more formal advice on career preparation. The RA sets out plans to address teaching evaluation, including internal peer-reviews conducted each semester by the Academic Affairs Committee. The review team endorses these plans.

3.5 Case Study: the Department of Rural Tourism

The Evaluation by the Ministry of the Department of Rural Tourism in 2010 contained some serious recommendations, including the need to consolidate best practice in programme delivery before further expansion, to strengthen its research output and to desist from offering postgraduate programmes except in close collaboration with other, supportive universities. The department has since been trying to build up its research profile but, without additional funding, with limited effectiveness. Despite the Ministry's recommendation, it currently has 5 Hólar-registered Masters students.

Its own review of programme delivery reassessed student work load, promoting less text reading and more analytical reflection; it also resulted in a change from full-term courses to a succession of 3-week modules, intended to concentrate learning and resolve problems of extended student progress. This latter intervention was introduced without warning to students; it was 'based on judgement rather than evidence'; and it was unsuccessful. It had a detrimental effect on collaboration. The main student complaint was that there was no time to assimilate and reflect. The short duration of the modules also made it difficult for students to access books and journals from the library: the module ended before the required reading material was available. The delivery schedule has since been revised.

As has been outlined above, the DRT is ostensibly the least 'grounded' of HUC's departments, with a fluctuating student population, a large proportion distance learners, relatively high numbers of drop-outs, and student progression issues. All of these elements make maintaining and enhancing the quality of provision, as well as ensuring student satisfaction, particularly difficult to achieve.

DRT's experiences have already been widely discussed throughout the University and changes to quality systems have been made and are being planned. The review team recommends that the institution continues to monitor activities in this department both by gathering statistical data and through student consultation, and that the Academic Affairs Committee's proposed system of peer reviews of teaching quality (see 3.4) might focus on this provision in the near future.

3.6 *Teaching and support for learning*

The University is striving to enhance the status and effectiveness of its faculty through encouraging individual research and research qualifications. Six members of the full-time staff have either gained, or are in the process of gaining, a PhD since institutional accreditation, when the visiting panel expressed concern about limited staff expertise. There is no doubting, however, either the skill levels of faculty in DES or the research capability of DAFB staff: both are impressive. Full-time staff at HUC are small in number, so that a substantial proportion of courses – almost half of those in DRT- is taught by non-permanent staff. While part-time staff are mainly recruited from industry and from amongst the Icelandic academic community, and many are re-recruited annually, they inevitably have less regular communication with course planners. Students were aware of the advantages of their industry links, but felt that part-time staff were less consistent in teaching effectiveness.

Additionally there is little formal induction for part-time staff and no means of funding staff development or pedagogical training. There is little systematic development even for full-time staff, though HUC has supported faculty in taking the Teaching Studies postgraduate diploma at UoI and has organised workshops on course revision. Considering the speed of institutional development and the range of proposals for change set out in the Reflective Analysis, the University is urged to undertake a survey of its current staff teaching/research/administrative responsibilities, to formalise its system of annual staff appraisals across all departments, and to attempt to support the pedagogical needs of staff as far as possible within available funding. Staff development activities, and the funding to underpin these, could probably best be overseen at departmental level. Commendably, heads of department already have authority for financial management within their own areas.

Since the financial crash, support staff numbers have fallen radically in relation to rising student numbers; support staff now number only 40% of faculty. If the research profile of HUC is to be raised, an increase in support staff – to free faculty time – is essential; that apart, more support staff and support facilities are badly needed in order to underpin necessary elements of student learning. A single IT technician currently attempts to cover the whole range of the institution's

technological needs: so limited staff or student IT training is possible. Software needs up-dating. No training for the technician himself has recently been available. There is no internet access in the stables area. The Librarian is resident only one day a fortnight; library facilities are inadequate for Masters level provision and are developed only through departmental requests. Student counselling provision is insufficient. The Counsellor has a .25 post; contact is often hampered by weather; pro-active advice on, for example, financial management or entrepreneur skills, is non-existent. Policies for equal opportunities and disability awareness do not permeate the institution. Better general support, including technical facilities, is required for distance learners. It is clear, also, that a long-term maintenance plan is needed for both facilities and equipment.

Support staff are loyal, committed and would be willing to play a more active part in institutional planning. The Management Team might consider more regular meetings with them, so that support staff can express their ideas for improving the quality of student learning. Currently, some support staff have no job descriptions. They are line-managed by a Human Resource officer, but are unclear about how HR works. The review team recommends the need to develop and activate a clear and comprehensive HR policy for all staff at HUC.

3.7 The student voice

Students are formally represented on the University Board, Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies Committees, as well as on departmental committees, and there is a strong Student Association presence at Hólar. Nonetheless, the student voice did not feature largely in the review team's encounter with HUC. Most students took no part in developing the Reflective Analysis: only the two Student Association members met by the review team had any knowledge of the process – some students had only seen the document the previous day. The team encountered the student representatives of neither the Board nor Academic Affairs – of the latter, one was heard briefly by telephone. Students were unclear on how committee representatives were chosen or why. They felt that while their views were usually well-received, they were not always listened to.

Of considerable concern to the review team was the fact that the two student members on the Academic Affairs Committee are party to discussions on both student progress issues and student appeals. It is recommended that the institution reviews this situation as quickly as possible, and also seeks to develop a new institutional culture as far as the student voice is concerned – one in which students are systematically consulted in decision-making and appropriate action is taken.

3.8 Evaluation

As an institution, Hólar University College has definite strengths to offer its students. While its isolation from many support networks can present resource difficulties, it benefits from a most impressive and uplifting geographical setting. Its buildings have good physical attributes: the Equine Science department has outstanding riding, training and horse-breeding facilities to support both practical instruction and research. The Rural Tourism department benefits greatly from Hólar's natural surroundings. Aquaculture and Fish Biology's centre has fine teaching and laboratory spaces, and excellent research facilities.

The University is confident in its own mission, but also exhibits a ready willingness to collaborate with its NPUI partners. It has a commendable attitude to open access and the need to offer blended learning options; it creates opportunities for rural study allied to the needs of non-standard entrants. In curricular development, the institution is adopting much from the Bologna process and its teaching is benefiting from this framework. Academic and support staff are strongly committed to the institution and its future aspirations. It has the loyal support of local enterprises.

There are, however, areas in which HUC needs to take positive action in order to enhance the quality and the value of the student learning experience. Firstly, if Hólar is to be regarded as a single, dynamic, academic institution at HE level, synergies between the three departments and interaction between their faculty and students should be actively promoted. Each department has its distinctive strengths; but institutional critical mass should not thereby be divided. Also, in order to avoid further risk to critical mass and to stabilise student cohorts, issues of drop-outs and slow progression should be addressed.

Problems arising from mixed delivery of the curriculum to full-time and distance learning students need to find solutions that satisfy the needs of both; and in seeking solutions to these and all issues of programme delivery the views of students should be sought and should inform the decisions taken. Because of recent financial circumstances, both academic and service staff have been under considerable additional pressures. As funding permits, systematic support for all staff, including staff development and pedagogical training, should be put in place. Learning support for students also needs strengthening, in particular in the areas of library and IT, counselling and formal advice for future careers and further study.

In terms of institutional processes for quality enhancement, the Reflective Analysis identifies a great many practices which need formalising and systematising; some of these need early attention. They include stated requirements for non-standard acceptance and for credit-transfer; enforceable regulations for progression; procedures for monitoring the progress of all students, including distance learning and those on courses shared with other institutions; the generation of statistical and management information that will present reliable information on student achievement; and lastly a published account of the ways in which the institution ensures the quality of the student learning experience, such as can be appreciated by all involved.

4. RESEARCH AND TEACHING

4.1 Overview

Hólar University College has three specialist research areas: aquatic biology, equine science and rural tourism. It is a challenge for the institution to maintain research capacity in a remote rural area within such specialised fields of research. The programme in Aquaculture, located at Sauðárkrókur, has developed its facilities and infrastructure in collaboration with local business and industry in the fish/fish protein sectors. The research is directed towards sustainable aquaculture. It includes genetic

studies of local fish populations and the individual growth of fish species. The department offers MSc programmes in Aquatic Biology. It also enrolls post-doctoral students from overseas in research projects.

Equine Sciences is located at Hólar and has excellent facilities for the maintenance, training and riding of Icelandic horses. Its teaching focuses on riding skills and riding instruction, but it also carries out research on nutrition, equitation and the exercise physiology of horses. Much of the research activity has developed since 2007, though it has been somewhat hampered by the Icelandic economic crisis.

The Department of Rural Tourism does not have a strongly developed research profile; it uses a pedagogical model to explain and learn about factors surrounding tourism in the Icelandic countryside. The department has project collaborations with the University of Iceland (UoI). Most of the staff have good teaching skills but also heavy teaching loads, and therefore less time for devoting to research. They offer an MA programme in Tourism Studies that seems to relate well to industry needs.

4.2 Research policy and strategy

In Hólar University College's strategic vision the importance of research to the institution's developing profile is highlighted. Collaboration with other universities within Iceland and abroad is also emphasized, in order to make research at HUC more visible. In the difficult financial situation over the past few years at HUC, however, while research activities have grown steadily since 2008 – particularly in DAFB - academic teaching has had to take precedence over research: this was a strategic decision in the face of cuts in funding. Staff expressed the view that both teaching and research are important to the institution, with teaching perhaps undervalued. The Management Team felt that the sheer promotion of research would create a domino effect – though, without additional funding, this seems improbable.

The next Strategic Plan, the review team was told, will view research as a prioritised area; but this would be dependent upon external funding. At present there is no research policy to support such a development, nor does the institution have a plan for expanding and incorporating research systematically into its teaching programme.

Both of these are desirable and should be initiated now, instead of waiting until new resources are identified. In this way the University will be better positioned to direct such resources strategically, based on sound prior planning. It would also benefit HUC to engage research workers from/in liaison with industry, to access research advice from overseas academic institutions, and generally to make its research activities more visible to the outside world.

4.3 Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology

The research in DAFB has a very strong profile at Hólar University College. The department has an international outreach with its publications and exchanges with partners in industry and academia internationally. Research is done in collaboration with the Nordic universities, within the Nova network, and with some universities in Canada and the US. The fish industry does its own research at the Sauðárkrókur centre as well as collaborative research with HUC. Support is given both 'in kind' and as direct financial support for specified projects. While the University has a close relationship with industry in this respect – and this benefits research students - it has its own integrity. In the review team's meeting with industry representatives it was stated that further funds from industry and from external grants could be accessed to help further HUC's research ambitions – another reason to engage in systematic planning now, rather than waiting for increased funding from the Ministry.

MSc projects in the Department are externally funded; supervisors are drawn from the international research community but with the main supervision based at Hólar. Students felt appropriate pressure to publish results as a part of the MSc programme; they also felt that the programme built, to a large extent, on self-motivation and interest. Progress regulations for MSc seem largely informal, but most students felt that supervision was regular and helpful. Contact between graduates in DAFB and those in other departments at Hólar is sporadic – partly for reasons of geography; the departmental research community is, however, close-knit. Library resources for research at HUC are poor on the whole, and access to scientific publications is not always easy: students from all departments stated that they needed more research journals, better physical library resources, and the more regular physical presence of a librarian.

4.4 Department of Equine Sciences

This department has strength in its facilities, and in the professionalism of its teachers and instructors within its programmes. While graduate studies are not yet offered by this department, undergraduate students in Equine Sciences feel that they get a solid research experience from teachers and from course projects. In a small institution like this, and in this particular specialism, students have closer attention and more relayed personal experience from teachers than would be the case in a larger institution. Contacts with the industry and the Trainers' Association are excellent; this gives access to the employment market and answers societal needs. With small numbers of academic staff and few research projects going on, diversity of research material for students is limited. Given the department's facilities and expertise, however, it is entirely possible that a stronger atmosphere of scientific and critical thinking could be developed.

4.5 Department of Rural Tourism

DRT has a collaborative agreement with the UoI and, as with the other departments, there is a mutual recognition of credits for students within NPUI. In the 2010 external Ministry evaluation of the department it was recommended that, given the nature of staff expertise and support resources, Rural Tourism should not be offering a programme at Masters level. HUC did not agree with this recommendation, however, and continues to offer a Masters programme in this department. Those students met by the review team had reservations about the degree of scientific thinking and level of scientific methodology on the programme. The research resources and profile of the department are indeed limited, and need substantial development in order adequately to support student research work at Masters level.

4.6 Evaluation

The research profile of HUC, whilst strong in one area of specialisation, needs serious development and adequate financial support, if it is to enhance the academic standing of the institution.

Arising from the Reflective Analysis and from discussions during the visit, the following recommendations are offered:

- The University should, as soon as funding permits, increase the opportunities for, and scope of, academic staff research, and encourage all staff to incorporate their research interests and research projects into taught courses.
- The Department of Rural Tourism is strongly encouraged to enhance its research profile, in order to foster an academic environment within its subject area.
- The institution should develop both a policy and strategic plan for research, which will make research more visible, inside and outwith the University, as well as an integral part of the student learning milieu.
- Given the small number of post-graduate students it is important to foster a research-based environment. This could be achieved with invited lecturers, discussion forums, managed exchanges between departments, and regular meetings on research topics for graduate students.
- The Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology should utilise its contacts with industry in order to access additional funding for research.
- The Department of Equine Sciences should strengthen its association with AUI and/or other appropriate research establishments in order to offer relevant and science-based thesis projects in its Bachelors programme.

5. ENHANCEMENT

5.1 Overview

Hólar University College demonstrates a number of strengths, as described in other sections of this report. Adequate research facilities for aquaculture and equine sciences have been noted; strong graduate education in marine biology (fish studies) and undergraduate programmes in equine sciences are apparent. As with any institution of its size, however, HUC faces a number of challenges that must be addressed as part of an effort to improve the overall functioning and quality of the institution.

The primary characteristic of HUC that must be effectively managed is its small critical mass in terms of residential students, faculty, and staff. It is doubtful that HUC will grow significantly in the coming years, and so appropriate systems must be established to assure that its small size and very limited financial resources do not lead to poor quality programmes and operations. The corollary high proportion of distance learning students, with unique instructional and support needs, also must be considered as the institution moves ahead. The current lack of resources to grow programmes, the limited opportunities for recruiting additional students within Iceland, and its remote location are all factors which work against HUC attaining a critical mass that can begin to create overall growth – despite the ability of DES to attract overseas students.

5.2 Quality Assurance Enhancements

These realities demand that an institutional culture based on strong leadership, realistic strategic planning, and effective quality assurance systems be evolved in the near term. **There does not appear to be a long-term view currently guiding decision-making in the areas of programme development, budget allocations, and partnerships with external stakeholders.** Quality assurance processes could be invested more clearly in the authority of the Academic Affairs Committee, which has the potential to serve as a University-wide governance body where data-driven

decision-making and planning could occur. In addition to creating a quality assurance action plan, with meaningful target dates for implementation and clear assignments for responsibility within various offices, specific concerns that the Academic Affairs Committee should address include:

- the design of processes and systems for course review, monitoring of student progress to degree completion, and assessment of student learning
- more systematic use of UGLA data, especially focused on monitoring student progress and attrition rates and the reasons for attrition
- the design of consistent and regularly applied processes of annual staff evaluation, including feedback regarding performance based on current, accurate position descriptions
- improved and consistent response times for feedback on assignments to undergraduate students
- clear authority, criteria, and processes for reviewing and approving new courses and programs
- assurance that student complaints and appeals are handled appropriately, without peer student involvement in such actions (and clarification of student roles and authority on the committee in general, to assure their meaningful input into institutional decisions).

5.3 Academic Enhancements

Whether it is responsibility of the Academic Affairs Committee, department committees, or other decision-making bodies, there are several other areas related to the academic mission of the University that require attention. There is a critical need to create more transparent and consistent processes for the assessment of student work. For distance learning students in particular, more effective ways for students to communicate and interact with fellow students and faculty must be prioritised. Access by distance learning students to support services, library resources, and instructional materials must be improved.

There is an overall need to strengthen all student support services, including counselling, library, IT, advising, and career guidance. Staff representing each of these functions must be involved in annual budget development processes and financial management so they can provide input into financial decision making and have clear accountability for their respective areas of operation. Inadequate staffing for counselling, career guidance, and library are especially problematic and require allocation of resources in the near term.

Likewise, staff support for IT use and professional development related to instructional improvements must be strengthened. The Human Resource functions of HUC must be formalized and clarified to assure that staff understand their expected responsibilities, are evaluated based on that understanding, and are offered appropriate resources to improve their performance when needed. The lack of clear and effective line management for support services must be addressed as part of these improvements. In addition, HUC must ensure that policies related to the protection of equal opportunities, including appropriate accommodations for students and staff with disabilities, permeate the entire institution.

5.4 Strategic Planning

Whether it is through the Academic Affairs Committee or other governance mechanisms, HUC must create effective processes for strategic planning.

The most pressing areas of planning to be addressed include:

- the lack of facility planning, including uncertainty about who is responsible for it
- financial planning, especially to create contingencies that can respond to reductions in funding as a function of enrolment changes and changes in government appropriations
- the systematic use of data for planning, appraisal, decision-making, and resource allocation

- the need for an explicit and realistic research policy, with special attention to the time needed by faculty to balance their teaching responsibilities while they develop their research skills and conduct research projects.

Finally, we note that the membership and functions of the University Board require attention. It should be considered as to whether the Board should have an independent chair (though it is appreciated that this is currently determined by the Ministry), in order to separate governance from executive authority. Members of the Board should be committed to full and active participation; they should have clear terms of reference for their authority and duties; they should regularly engage with each other and the institution; and they must represent an appropriate mix of industries and resources relative to the institution's changing needs. This group can be instrumental to HUC's success; thus their functioning is critical.

5.5 Evaluation

It is now of crucial importance for Hólar University College's future development that it build upon its strengths and addresses, according to clear institutional strategic priorities, those areas in need of enhancement. Along with its academic strengths, it already benefits from strong and productive collaborations with institutions within NPUI, and with industry and research enterprises in northern Iceland. It has the support and loyalty of its academic and support staff, as well as its student body, to both promote its positive assets and, by playing a more active part in institutional planning, to help evolve formal systems and processes to improve the quality of its educational experience.

Strong leadership from the Rector, the Management Team and the Board is needed to implement the University's own proposals for improvement as outlined in the Reflective Analysis and to create a more coherent, self-analytical institutional culture which will lead to long-term enhancement.

6. CONCLUSION

Following its consideration of the Reflective Analysis and associated evidence submitted by Hólar University College, and its visit to this institution on 14 and 15 March 2013, the Institutional Review team commissioned by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education wishes to commend the following strengths and elements of good practice:

- The institution's key importance to the region, and its effective utilisation of its physical location in programme delivery and research
- The commitment to maintain university-level teaching and research at HUC despite major financial pressures
- Strong, positive, productive collaborations with industry and research enterprises
- The Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology's intensive and supportive research environment, its links with industry, and its increasing ability to attract grant funding
- The facilities, expertise and professionalism in the Department of Equine Studies
- The institution's willingness to take advantage of the range of collaborative support mechanisms being developed through NPUI (Network of Public Universities of Iceland)
- Since the institution's accreditation in 2007, the development of programmes and courses based on the principles of Bologna, with explicit Learning Outcomes
- Heads of Department are involved in annual budgetary decisions and have authority for financial management within their area
- The willingness of support staff to play a more active part in institutional planning
- The loyalty towards the institution shown by students, academic and support staff, alumni and local business interests.

Areas which the review team considered to be in need of further development, some of them in the near future, include:

- The need for an approach to leadership that ensures a more coherent institutional culture and effective strategic planning
- Creating an institutional culture that enhances the capacity to analyse and reflect, as is necessary for a long-term view
- Strengthening the authority of the Academic Affairs Committee
- Producing a quality assurance action plan with clear target dates and allocated responsibilities
- Creating more transparent and consistent processes for the assessment of student work
- The need for a comprehensive review of distance learning provision in terms of contact, support, equipment and programme content
- The need for an explicit and realistic research policy
- Ensuring that students are systematically consulted in decision making, and that appropriate action follows
- Strengthening all student support services, such as counselling, library, IT, learning support and career guidance, including their budgetary responsibility and management
- The need to evolve a more effective HR policy for staff support, including IT and pedagogical training
- The need to create clear and effective line management for the support services
- Ensuring that policies for equal opportunity and disability issues permeate the entire institution
- Ensuring, in any forthcoming change to the structure of the University Board, that it has clear terms of reference and a planned pattern of meetings, with committed personnel who are fully engaged with the institution's changing needs.

Two important contextual facts were noted by the review team:

- The institution's extreme financial vulnerability and the resulting severe limits to development possibilities
- The small size and critical mass of the institution together with the high proportion of distance learners threatens the viability of some programmes.

The review team concluded that:

- **confidence** can be placed in the soundness of Hólar University College's present and likely future arrangements to secure the **academic standards of its awards**; but that only
- **limited confidence** can be placed in the soundness of Hólar University College's present and likely future arrangements to secure the **quality of the student learning experience**.

These judgements were based both on the team's review of present practice and on the institution's own examination of that practice.

ANNEX 1

Submitted documents

Contract between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and HUC

HUC list of Committees

HUC Procedural regulations

HUC Regulations for study

HUC joint programme with UoI

HUC joint programme with AUJ

HUC Regulations on recruitment and progress

HUC accreditation report 2007

HUC Final report by evaluation group for DRT

HUC response to former external evaluation reports

Other documents were submitted on demand during the site visit.

Annex 2
Schedule for Meetings with Students and Staff

Thursday 14th March

Time	Topic	Participants from HUC
09:00-11:00	HUC presentations	Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, rector of HUC, Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, Director of DAFB, Guðrún Helgadóttir, Director of DRT, Víkingur Gunnarsson, Director of DES, Sigurbjörg B. Ólafsdóttir, Human Resource Manager, Guðmundur B. Eypórsson, Director of Finances, Helgi Thorarensen, DAFB
11:00-12:00	Rector, authors of RA, Head of Finance	Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, rector of HUC, Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, Director of DAFB, Guðmundur B. Eypórsson, Director of Finances, Helgi Thorarensen, DAFB
12:00-12:45	Lunch	
12:45-13:00	Short Panel Meeting	
13:00-13:45	University Board	Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, rector, Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, Director of DAFB, Gísli Árnason, appointed by Sjávarútvegs og landbúnaðarráðuneyti, Sigríður Sigurðardóttir appointed by Samgöngu og sveitastjórnarráðherra
14:00-15:00	Heads of Departments /Divisions	Guðrún Helgadóttir, Head of DRT, Víkingur Gunnarsson, Head of DES, Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, Head of DAFB, Sigurbjörg B. Ólafsdóttir, Human Resource Manager, Helgi Thorarensen, DAFB
15:15-16:00	"Ordinary staff, including pt staff	Ólafur Sigurgeirsson, Assistant professor DAFB, Camille Anna-Lisa Leblance, post doc DAFB, Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir, assistant professor DRT, Guðrún Þ. Gunnarsdóttir, assistant professor DRT, Guðrún J. Stefánsdóttir, assistant professor DES, Anna V. Einarsdóttir, part time teacher DRT, Mette C. M. Mannseth, adjunct DES, Arnþór Gústavsson, assistant professor DAFB, Sveinn Ragnarsson, associated professor DES.
16:15-17:00	Academic affairs committee	Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, head of academic affairs, Laufey Haraldsdóttir, DRT, Helgi Thorarensen, DAFB, Guðrún J. Stefánsdóttir, DES, G. Heiðar Guðnason, HSA, Freyja Toroddson, HSA, Hjördís Gísladóttir, Quality officer
17:00-17:30	Panel meeting	
17:30	Stock taking meeting with Senior Management	Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, rector of HUC, Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, Director of DAFB, Guðmundur B. Eypórsson, Director of Finances, Helgi Thorarensen, DAFB, Hjördís Gísladóttir, Quality officer

Friday 15th March		
08:45-09:30	Support staff	Hjördís Gísladóttir, Quality officer, Astrid Magnúsdóttir, librarian, Gunnar Óskarsson, genator, Halldóra Lóa Þorvaldsdóttir, student councillor, Eysteinn Steingrímsson, stable manager, Aldis G. Axelsdóttir, information desk, Broddi R. Hansen, technical support,
09:30-10:15	External and Industry	Jón Eðvald Friðriksson, Managing director Fisk Seafood, Jón Árnason Matís, Ólafur H. Einarsson, Horse trainers association, Ingimar Ingimarsson, horse farmer, Anna Karlsdóttir, UOI, Emma Eyþórsdóttir, AUI, Snaebjörn Pálsson, UOI, Katrín María Andrésdóttir, SSNV, Berlind Viktorsdóttir, Icelandic farm Holidays,
10:30-11:15	Students - undergraduates	Anna Margrét Jakobsdóttir, 1nd year student DRT, Sigurður Borgar Arnaldsson 2nd year student DRT, Jónheiður Sigurðardóttir, 2nd year student DRT, Nína Hrefna Lárusdóttir, 1st year student DES, Hanna Rún Ingibergsdóttir, 1st year student DES, Berglind Ragnarsdóttir, 3rd year student DRT, Sonja Þórisdóttir, 3rd year student DRT, Hans Kristjánsson, 3rd year student DRT
11:15-12:00	Students, post graduates, research, alumni	Dan Govoni, grad student DAFB, Amy Fingerle, grad student DAFB, Soizic Nicole Lucile Le Deuff, former grad student DAFB, current staff, Barbara Wenzl post graduates DES, Arndis Brynjólfssdóttir post graduates DES, Kristín Halla Bergsdóttir post graduates DRT, Sif Helgadóttir post graduates DRT, Unnur Gottsveinsdóttir post graduates DRT
13:15-14:15	Senios Management on accreditation and reviews	Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, rector, Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, Director of DAFB, Guðrún Helgadóttir, director of DRT, Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir, ass. Professor DRT, Helgi Thorarensen, ass. Prof. DAFB, Víkingur Gunnarsson, Director of DES,
14:15-15:00	Department of Rural Tourism	Guðrún Helgadóttir, Head of DRT, Guðrún Þ. Gunnarsdóttir, assistant professor DRT, Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir, assistant professor DRT, Laufey Haraldsdóttir, assistant professor DRT, Sigurður Borgar Arnaldsson, student, Anna Margrét Jakobsdóttir, student,
15:00-16:00	Open meetings	
16:15	Closing meeting with Rector and senior staff	Erla Björk Örnólfsdóttir, rector, Guðrún Helgadóttir Head of DRT, Guðmundur B. Eyþórsson, Director of Finance, Bjarni Kristófer Kristjánsson, Head of DAFB, Hjördís Gísladóttir, Quality officer, Víkingur Gunnarsson, Head of DES, Helgi Thorarensen, ass. Prof. DAFB, Sigurbjörg B. Ólafsdóttir, Human Resource Manager,