

Quality Enhancement Framework
for Icelandic Higher Education

INSTITUTION-WIDE REVIEW

Reykjavik University



September 2012

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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:

- Institution-wide Review.
- A transparent comprehensive programme of subject level reviews led by the institutions 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 Quality Enhancement Framework is available at the RANNIS web site.¹

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

THE REVIEW TEAM

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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 six Icelandic Higher Education Institutions are being reviewed between 2012 and 2015 and this is the report of the first review, of Reykjavik University.

The review was conducted, on behalf of the Quality Council and in accordance with the procedures described in the 2011 *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education*,² by the Quality Board with support from RANNIS.

The review team comprised Drs Frank Quinault and Barbara Brittingham, from the Quality Board, as chair and vice-chair respectively, together with Drs Thomas Jensen, Jenny Rees and Wolfgang Thomas, and Lilja Dögg Jónsdóttir as the student member. Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon and Gudlaug Þóra Kristjánsdóttir, both from RANNIS, provided the administrative support.

Frank Quinault and Magnús Magnússon made two one-day visits to Reykjavik University in preparation for the main visit, which took place between Tuesday 27 and Friday 30 March 2012. After a half-day of presentations by the University, which included a short tour of the campus, 17 meetings were held with staff, students, trustees, and members of the business community. The review team designed the visit, in conjunction with the University, after reading the institution's own Reflective Analysis and the documentation to which it referred (see Annex 1). Some additional documentation was provided during the visit itself.

² See: <http://rannis.is/english/qef/>

The preparation of the Reflective Analysis and the arrangements for the visit were overseen by the Rector, Professor Ari Kristinn Jónsson, and three of his colleagues: Steinn Jóhannsson, Dr Þórunna Jónsdóttir and Dr Kristján Kristjánsson. The Quality Board is particularly grateful to Reykjavik University for agreeing to be the first to participate in Institutional Review, as it is to RANNIS for ensuring a smooth start.

1.2 Reykjavik University

Reykjavik University (RU) is a recent foundation. It was first established, in 1998, by the Icelandic Chamber of Commerce, with just two departments, Business and Computer Science. Law was added later, followed, in 2005, by Science and Engineering through a merger with the Technical University of Iceland. Each of these four areas is now organised as a School. A fifth division, the Reykjavik Open University, offers various pre-university and continuous education courses.

With 2,900 students, 240 full-time staff and a similar number who are part-time, RU is the second largest university in Iceland. It is nevertheless small by international standards, and this is one of its key characteristics. Another is its status as a private, non-profit university, owned by several Icelandic business organisations and permitted to charge tuition fees in addition to receiving a per capita subsidy from the Icelandic government.

1.3 Strategy and Strategic Objectives

RU defines its role as being to “create and disseminate knowledge in order to enhance the competitiveness and quality of life of its students and society”. The links to business and industry that helped to bring the University into being are still an important part of its ethos.

The University reviews its strategic objectives regularly to ensure that they remain relevant. It described a recent exercise, designed to engage as many staff and students as possible in this process and utilising its annual “Compass” forum, in a short Case Study written for the review team. Twelve strategic objectives were listed in the Reflective Analysis and these helped to determine the topics explored by the review team during its visit.

1.4 Organisation and Governance

RU is governed by a Board of Trustees whose responsibilities include the appointment of the Rector. The primary decision-making body within the University is its Executive Committee, comprising the Rector, four Deans, three Executive Directors and the chairs of the Research and Curriculum Councils.

The four Schools – Business; Computer Science; Law; Science and Engineering – vary significantly in size and internal structure. Each is governed by a Dean, appointed by the Rector.

The Curriculum Council oversees undergraduate and postgraduate education and formulates the University’s Teaching Strategy. The Research Council formulates the Research Strategy. Both are essentially consultative without direct decision-making powers except when delegated by the Rector.

The review team met several members of the Board of Trustees, who were drawn from the Icelandic Chamber of Commerce, the Confederation of Icelandic Employers and the Federation of Icelandic Industries. The financial situation of the University is one of their primary responsibilities, as trustees, and was especially preoccupying of late because of the problems facing the national economy. In common with two other senior figures from industry whom the team met during the opening presentation by the University, the

trustees regarded the relationship between RU on the one hand and business and industry on the other as fruitful. They can help students to find placements and internships that enable them to apply their learning to real-world situations while the University helps to create the innovations that will be essential for success as Iceland moves from an economy based on natural resources to one more dependent on knowledge and research. The trustees agreed that this productive relationship can be further strengthened through some increase in formalisation, at various levels, from the management of student placements through to their own terms of appointment as trustees.

The review team also met members of the Executive Committee and of the Curriculum and Research Councils. What it learned from them has been incorporated elsewhere in this report.

1.5 Recent Developments

As already stated, Reykjavik University is itself a recent creation. Student numbers have grown rapidly, from some 300 in 1998 to almost ten times that figure today, and there has been a parallel change in the character of the institution, from one focused almost entirely on teaching to the research-active university it now is.

In common with all Icelandic universities, RU has had to deal with the impact of the national economic crisis. This did not prevent it from moving to its new campus in Nauthólsvik, but it did necessitate major savings. The cuts affected all parts of the University, but RU also decided to prioritise its focus on technology, business and law, consequently closing its School of Health and Education in 2011, just seven years after it had been established.

The review team discussed the closure with the University's trustees. The decision had been a very difficult one to take but it had enabled the

University to concentrate on its core strengths and thereby further focus its mission. There was careful oversight of the closure to ensure that students already in the School were not disadvantaged. The review team also asked about the place of Law within the current portfolio and were told that the School's special strengths, in such areas as patents, natural resources and European law, were a very good fit with RU's concentration on business and technology.

1.6 Response to Previous Reviews/ Accreditation Exercises

All award-bearing programmes delivered by RU are currently accredited by the Icelandic Ministry for Education, Science and Culture following reviews by expert panels conducted between 2006 and 2010.

The review team welcomed the fact that the University has sought additional external evaluation for some of its programmes from international accreditation bodies. What would add further value, however, would be a more systematic and documented procedure for responding to external evaluations at the School or subject level, to ensure that appropriate actions have been taken and that lessons which may be relevant to other programmes are indeed disseminated.

1.7 Production of the Reflective Analysis

As the first university to engage in Institutional Review, RU had to begin compiling its Reflective Analysis before the Quality Council delivered a workshop on this topic and to complete it in less time than will be available to institutions coming later in the schedule. Initial guidance was provided by Dr Quinault, who also commented on a draft version that was seen by the other members of the Quality Board. It is important to note that their comments

were only about the general content and structure of the Reflective Analysis and did not stray into any evaluation of the University's management of standards or quality.

The Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education includes a possible outline structure for a Reflective Analysis,³ which RU decided to follow. Aware of the importance that the University attaches to its research profile, the Quality Board invited it to add an extra section, dealing with research and its links to teaching, and this was done.

The Reflective Analysis was drafted by a four person committee, which sought feedback on its work from bodies such as the Curriculum Council and from special focus groups. The review team found RU's Reflective Analysis to be a solid foundation on which to base its work.

1.8 Evaluation

Throughout its short existence, and notably so in the most recent years, RU has been an institution with a clear sense of mission and vision. It values its special ties with business and industry and they are reflected in its style of teaching as well as by the disciplines on offer. It set itself the goal of becoming a research university and has made major strides in that direction. When the national economic situation necessitated retrenchment it took decisive action by closing one of its Schools.

This capacity for developing a clear strategy and then implementing it emanates from the top of the institution, from its Rector, Board of Trustees and Executive Committee, but it is bidirectional, with genuine opportunities for staff to participate in goal setting. The annual Compass forum is an

³ See: <http://rannis.is/english/qef/qef-handbook/>

example of this. Initial suggestions are gathered from staff in all Schools and in support units; these are grouped and prioritised by a task force; that process is taken further by the Compass meeting, which involves over half of the University's full-time staff; and the end result is a set of key objectives with implementation timelines. The inclusive nature of the process creates a sense of ownership and commitment that was evident among the staff interviewed by the review team. The reviewers wish to *commend* this focus on the clear institutional mission, which informs the University's planning and resource allocation.

As already acknowledged, the Board of Trustees has played an important part in creating that focus. The Board may nevertheless wish to consider whether it would now benefit from diversification, by recruiting members with, for example, a research background or an international perspective and by seeking a better gender balance.

2. SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS

2.1 Institutional Approach to the Management of Standards

Management, and therefore the management of standards at Reykjavik University, is overseen by the University's Executive Committee (RUEC), and supported by the work of the Schools, the Curriculum and Research Councils, and support services. These internal processes are strengthened by the University's participation in various external quality exercises including accreditation and benchmarking exercises so that the University examines its standards against international expectations. The University benefits from having a faculty whose collective academic preparation and prior work experience help it to have a broader-than-Iceland perspective on academic quality and standards.

The establishment of programme learning outcomes, while not yet uniformly connected with assessment methods, helps to set expectations for student learning and represents a valuable step in ensuring quality as well as communicating with students, prospective students and the public. RU's learning management system, MySchool, provides considerable potential to extract management information for monitoring quality in courses and programmes.

The management of quality at RU is becoming increasingly formalised as RU develops. The University recognises that some aspects of students' education, such as internships, would benefit from more formalised methods. For example, while standards among the Schools are said to be 'similar,' there is not yet a framework in place that could provide evidence of reasonable consistency. As another example, the Curriculum and Research Councils are both relatively new, and the travel of documents and issues is not always clear; for instance, how and by which groups the findings of the previous accreditation reports are used has not been fully sorted out. As the

Councils develop their agendas, RU is finding sufficient overlap of the issues to consider developing a faculty or university senate or other structure that recognises the complementary relationship between teaching and research. Also, the Councils are learning to balance the agenda of items that come to them (for example, proposals for new programmes) with institution-wide considerations that could benefit from formal policies (for example, for dual or joint degrees). In particular, the lack of clear definition of dual and joint degrees represents a potential threat to RU's ability to safeguard its standards; the review team encourages the University to develop policies that are in line with international practice and that ensure that students who earn two degrees do significantly more academic work than students who earn a single degree and that dual and joint degrees are subject to the same quality assurance mechanisms as RU courses and programmes.

As the Curriculum and Research Councils mature and the institution re-considers the position of Provost, RU is advised to consider whether they have the appropriate amount of authority over the various issues that come before them. Going forward, the University will benefit from more centralised and formal processes for the management of quality, while maintaining flexibility appropriate to the different disciplines and allowing for creativity.

2.2 External Reference Points and Benchmarks

Reykjavik University has demonstrated a keen interest in gaining external feedback on its research as well as its curriculum and otherwise situating its programmes and achievements in an international context. Notably, RU agreed to be the first institution to participate in the institutional review process established by the Quality Board. As noted elsewhere, the Reflective Analysis prepared for the review was thorough and generally candid in its description and appraisal of how the University addresses and assures

quality. The University's business programmes are accredited by AMBA and E-PAS, and the School of Computer Science participated in an exercise benchmarking itself against the best Danish universities in 2009 and 2010. More recently, the University administered questions from the UK National Student Survey, as discussed below in Section 3. These external reviews, along with the institution's own annual assessments in research and teaching, have led to several improvements in teaching and support for student learning.

That said, the team noticed that the examples of good practice came more often from some Schools than others. Law, in particular, may be challenged, as it is inherently a local topic without easy access to international accreditations or benchmarks; and its faculty, by habit, look more at documents and history than to quantitative data.

2.3 Use of Management Information

Reykjavik University gathers an impressive amount of information through surveys, annual reviews, and data gathered through MySchool. A University dashboard is used to track key indicators in teaching and research such as the proportion of graduating BA/BSc students who have received entrepreneurship training and admissions yield; data are shown for the University overall and by School from 2007 through 2011. In conjunction with the reviews discussed above, the data from these surveys and reviews can paint a rich picture of the student experience and, potentially, of student learning outcomes.

As RU develops deliberative bodies such as the Curriculum Council and the Research Council – and perhaps a Senate that might combine the functions of both those bodies – the institution will have an increasing number of cross-school as well as within-school groups to review and make productive use of

these data. It may also find it useful within the next few years to develop a centralised capacity to regularise data gathering, store and be able to mine the data, and ensure that individual offices, Schools, and deliberative groups have the information they need at the time it will be most useful to them. This centralised capacity can also help the University identify additional data needs. For example, while the University seeks to serve Icelandic industry, there is currently little information available on the success of RU's graduates.

2.4 Design, Approval, Monitoring and Review of Programmes

As RU has developed and added programmes, it has also clarified its mission, due in part to difficult economic times that required the difficult task of programme curtailment. In recent times, the process for developing and approving new programmes has become more formalised. The School of Business in particular has further explicated the overall University process and illustrates how a level of decentralisation can support innovation and good practices that can be adopted or modified by other units.

Currently there is not a University-wide requirement that the process of developing new programmes incorporate an external perspective. The review team sees this as a key opportunity for improvement and fully in line with other University practices of using external perspectives.

Similarly, there is not yet a systematic process for annual monitoring of programmes or of periodic programme review incorporating an external perspective. The School of Business, which has led in seeking external programme accreditations, does have a programme review process, and its experience to date could help inform other units in the development of systems appropriate to their programmes. The subject-level reviews of the QB should be helpful, and as the University prepares for them, it can also

address identified needs for additional information, such as a more systematic feedback from industry regarding the preparation of graduates, that will support these reviews.

2.5 Admissions Criteria and Selection Procedures

Admissions requirements for Reykjavik University operate within the framework of national law; however, unlike public universities, RU need not take every qualified applicant, and review of applicants is differentiated by programme. The University is appropriately focused on its ability to admit students who can be successful in their chosen area of study. Currently, RU admits 65% of applicants for undergraduate degrees and 71% for Master's degrees. A goal is to be able to select students from a larger pool, thereby balancing growth with increased selectivity. As the University grows in quality and reputation, it can become more selective in admission at the undergraduate as well as graduate levels.

Applicants who are not accepted into technical undergraduate programmes due to lack of appropriate preparation can enter the Preliminary Studies programme in the Open University, as discussed below in Section 3.

As the University gains sophistication in its admissions processes, it could productively also turn its attention to retention, as the dropout rate is significant in some programmes. Data from MySchool, surveys, focus groups, and other means can help the University understand why students drop out and consider what changes or enhancements might be useful in addressing this challenge.

2.6 Assessment Policies and Regulations

Reykjavik University has taken several steps to strengthen its assessment policies and regulations. General support for teaching is organised through the Teaching Affairs and Registry office.

RU has put in place several mechanisms to improve the quality of assessments. For example, faculty are required to turn in their examinations for review by a central authority 48 hours before they are administered; more recently, there are developing practices of in-school peer review, which can hone disciplinary dimensions as well as overall test practices.

The appointment of a Teaching Coach has led to workshops on teaching and assessment, individual consultation and other means of professional support. University regulation requires that assessments in all courses have multiple methods, and with the support of the Teaching Coach, RU no longer has courses that depend 100% on a final examination for student assessment. As the role has developed, attention can be balanced between, on the one hand, ensuring basic markers of teaching quality are in place, and, on the other hand, providing consultative support to faculty seeking to innovate in the classroom.

Other good practices can be cited: multiple markers and external examiners in some programmes, and the implementation in Spring 2012 of Turnitin, which detects academic plagiarism. There is evidence of peer moderation, but here again, more formalised procedures might be helpful. Teaching evaluations are conducted twice per semester. As is the case at many institutions, RU reports more success in assuring that learning outcomes are stated than in being able to point to course-based assessments that cumulate to assessments at the programme level (i.e. beyond the individual course level). The team heard examples of faculty considering the level of particular courses and the demands being made on students. In sum, with respect to assessment, while there are considerable accomplishments, much remains to

be done, placing the University squarely in the mainstream of international higher education. The University's growing practices in gathering and using data may foretell great success in this area.

2.7 Staff Induction, Appraisal and Development

As noted in its Reflective Analysis (RA), the University has deliberately taken steps to formalise and improve recruiting, assessment and advancing processes, particularly for full-time faculty.

The process of hiring faculty has been made more systematic, leaving the appropriate flexibility for "opportunity hires." Changes include advertising of positions, screening processes, formal interviews (both electronic and in person), and an increasing focus on the nature of the vacancy the University seeks to fill. More formality may be useful, for example, in assuring that gender issues are appropriately considered. Ensuring the appropriate balance between formality and pursuing opportunity will be important here as with several other aspects of the University.

The University does not offer tenure, a decision made early to ensure "flexibility." And while RU gives three months' notice for faculty whose performance is not satisfactory, it does not have an appointment cycle (e.g., a one-year or three-year appointment). Both the faculty and administration are interested in arriving at an appropriate change in current practice that can both provide the continuity needed in academic programmes and research while preserving flexibility for a still-young and dynamic institution.

The normal assignment for faculty is three courses per year plus supervision of student projects/theses/dissertations (50-60%), research (30-45%), and administration (5-10%). RU recognises the need for flexibility in these assignments, including increased teaching by those who are not actively producing research outputs. The recent, rapid development of PhD

programmes at Icelandic universities, including RU, may have outpaced the formalisation of procedures and regulations. For example, given the significant commitment faculty need to make to supervising and supporting PhD research, RU would be well advised to refine the faculty assignment protocol to articulate its expectations for faculty working with doctoral students and also limit the number of PhD students any one faculty member can supervise. Rapid growth in the PhD programmes and the assignment of faculty time to support students in these programmes could threaten the ability of the Schools to ensure stability in the assignment of qualified full-time faculty to support the undergraduate programmes.

A system of faculty review and evaluation seems to be well in place, enjoying sufficient success to predict future enhancements through experience. As with most universities, RU is more advanced in measuring faculty success in research than in teaching, but it recognises the imbalance and appears to be committed to ensuring that teaching can be evaluated and therefore rewarded with the same level of rigour as research.

RU recognises the importance of staff development, though its progress has been undercut by the economic downturn. Going forward, staff development has been identified as a priority area. A Development Fund, much appreciated by faculty, which was used to support teaching innovations as well as to build up research and for specific projects intended to strengthen RU and its staff, is no longer operational. While all understand why support for faculty development and faculty initiatives has been curtailed, it will be important to restore these investments for the University to support and retain its faculty members.

2.8 Published Information: Accuracy and Completeness

As noted in the Reflective Analysis, the University publishes information on courses, programmes, and related policies, rules and regulations through three principal media: 1. University web site; 2. University intranet (MySchool and the RU intranet); and 3. Printed publications.

Responsibility for the material included in the various media has largely rested with the individual Schools. In Fall 2011, the University has initiated two groups designed to strengthen its publications: a Communications Advisory Group to ensure the perspectives of the Schools are accurately portrayed in University publications; and a Web Committee to advise on the structure and strategy of the University's website. Together these initiatives promise a more integrated communications strategy.

Publications and the website are generally attractive and well-organised, with a relatively consistent look, including the University logo. While all universities are challenged to maintain the completeness, accuracy and currency of the information on their websites, RU is further challenged to display its information in both Icelandic and English. The English version of the website is not as complete as the Icelandic version and while this is understandable, the English version does not always contain the information that would be helpful to international students who may wish to consider studying at RU.

A Student Handbook is published in Icelandic and English, in print and on the web, with quality being assured by the Communications Department and Student Services. While in the future it may be useful to ensure that the academic perspective is included in the preparation of the Handbook, students generally seemed to understand their responsibilities and opportunities.

2.9 Evaluation

Overall, there is much to commend at Reykjavik University in how and how well it safeguards its academic standards. Many good practices are in place, there is a spirit of innovation, and the trajectory suggests that the University will gain in sophistication in assessment, benchmarking, and making use of internal and external feedback.

The review team wishes to *commend*, in particular: the attention given to teaching through the establishment of the Curriculum Council and the appointment of a Teaching Coach/Adviser; and RU's commitment to using external perspectives to benchmark and evaluate its programmes against regional and international standards.

The information available to date shows that this benchmarking has been useful to the University as it developed its prioritised agenda for the next three years. The prioritised agenda lists increasing the quality of education and teaching as the top priority, and emphasis is given to development of students' critical thinking skills and ethical standards.

The institution's general habit of allowing the various Schools to find their own solutions to issues of quality has the strength of providing motivation without uniformity and can provide a laboratory in which the various Schools learn from each other.

However, RU needs to continue formalising its procedures and the review team *recommends* that the University: ensures external involvement in the approval of new programmes; develops a more systematic approach to certain aspects of quality assurance, including the annual monitoring of programmes and follow-up to external reviews; and finalises its approach to periodic review at the Subject Level. In this last regard, the review team notes that RU has provided a schedule for its Subject Reviews that has been

endorsed by the Quality Board, but now needs to decide in some detail how they are to be conducted.

3. STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

3.1 Overall Framework

Two core beliefs underlie Reykjavik University's approach to student learning. First, that the best way to motivate and engage students is to employ diverse methods of teaching and assessment. Second, that continuous improvement depends upon being open to student feedback, although not to the exclusion of other pedagogical or practical considerations.

3.2 The Student Journey: from Recruitment to Graduation and Employment

This section of the Reflective Analysis describes the process of applying to RU, the orientation programme for new students, and help that is available to them at later stages, including preparation for employment.

Two representative groups of undergraduate students were asked about their experience of these different stages in separate meetings. Most were from the greater Reykjavik area but a few came from further afield in Iceland and each group included an international student. Their comments on recruitment and induction are dealt with here; what they said about subsequent stages is reported further on (3.4 & 3.7).

The students had been attracted to RU by a reputation for teaching that is practically oriented and makes considerable use of group and project work. Several mentioned that it suited them better than what they believed, or knew from personal experience, to be what one called the "more academic" approach of the University of Iceland. They commended the way in which they had been inducted as new students.

For students who may not be adequately prepared for higher education, the RU Open University offers a Preliminary Studies programme that is specifically designed to bridge the gap between school and university. In

particular, it caters for students seeking the academic qualifications needed to enter engineering or computer science, either at RU or elsewhere. While the team talked with only a small number of students in the Preliminary Studies programme, they were uniformly positive about what they were able to learn, through the intensive curriculum and the motivation and support of instructors and staff. Average student ratings for the teaching evaluation in this programme are 4.13, higher than the overall RU average. Given the interest in many countries in increasing the pool of students prepared to enter STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), the Preliminary Studies programme has the potential of advancing RU's reputation beyond its borders and the review team *commends* the University for introducing it.

3.3 Scholarships and Awards

As a private university RU is permitted to charge its students tuition fees. Grants, based on merit, are available to undergraduate and Master's students for the first semester of study, and undergraduates who achieve the very best examination results go on the Dean's list and enjoy a fee waiver the following semester.

The cost of study at RU was mentioned as a possible disincentive by some students but most did not consider tuition fees to be a significant obstacle, for them or for others, because they can be met through the national student loan scheme.

3.4 Teaching and Learning Methods

Reykjavik University has a Teaching Strategy that emphasises "small group teaching, active student participation, real-life projects and a practical

approach to teaching". Responsibility for implementing this strategy rests with the University Curriculum Council, the Teaching Affairs and Registry Department and the four Schools. The first two bodies compile an annual report on teaching and learning.

The students who met the review team were generally complimentary about the teaching they were receiving. Some classes are large, with as many as 200 attending a lecture, and there was a call for more interaction in these situations, but others were as small as 5 or 6 with plenty of active participation by all.

One example of activity-based teaching cited, with approval, by students, was the simulated courtroom, enabling students in the School of Law to try their hand at presenting a case and later watch and examine a video-recording of their performance.

All undergraduate programmes devote 3 weeks of the spring term to a project course that is designed to integrate the preceding year's work and apply it to, for example, the construction of a business plan or a software system design. The University has been able to draw upon its close ties with business and industry when developing these projects and the projects have, in turn, led to job opportunities for many students.

The University makes considerable use of part-time teachers who are drawn from business and industry and, in the School of Law, from the legal profession. The review team met some of these adjunct staff, who were clearly very committed to their role. The student interviewees did report that some guest lecturers were not very proficient as teachers but they also said that the University responded well if this were found to be the case, by providing training or, if necessary, by ending the appointment.

The students told the review team that they are expected to work hard and expect this of themselves. However, they also said that the workload is

occasionally too heavy for the number of ECTS credits allowed, a claim that the University accepts and has recently begun to address.

3.5 Learning Outcomes

Reykjavik University has used intended Learning Outcomes to specify the expected attainments of students for several years, in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework announced by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 2006. Good progress in developing these was already being made when Social Science subjects were being accredited at RU in 2007. However, the accreditation team did point out that in order to demonstrate whether or not learning outcomes have been achieved it is necessary that each be linked, explicitly, to the most appropriate form of assessment. Such linkages were absent from any of the documentation seen by the accreditation team.

The present review team was therefore pleased to learn not only that RU is revising all of its learning outcomes, to ensure conformity with the Ministry's own 2011 revision of the National Qualifications Framework (with the assistance of the University's new Teaching Adviser, who produced that Framework when employed by the Ministry), but that it is also checking that methods of assessment are both varied and tied to learning outcomes as part of this same exercise.

3.6 The Student Voice: Representation, Use of Feedback

This section of the RA described, in considerable detail, RU's system of student representation and its formal mechanisms for gathering feedback from students.

All students are members of the RU Student Association, which has an executive board that includes the chairs of each of seven discipline-based student unions. The board members meet the Rector every two weeks and the chair has observer status on the RU Board of Trustees; the vice-chair sits on the Curriculum Council and there is also a student representative on the University's Ethics Committee. Representation at School level, including the Open University, varies in accordance with the structures of the individual Schools.

The review team was able to meet the senior officers of the Student Association and of most of the subject unions. There are no sabbatical posts and none is paid for their services. The student leaders confirmed what was stated in the RA about regular meetings with the Rector and with Deans. They considered these representational arrangements to be effective, as did those members of the general student body whom the review team met in later meetings.

Student satisfaction is monitored regularly, by means of individual course assessments (middle and end of semester), an annual survey of support services and other contextual factors, focus groups, and an annual opportunity for student cohorts to meet directly with the Rector.

The review team *commended* the University on its readiness to elicit the views of students (and staff) through various surveys and meetings. The most recent example of this was RU's decision to administer the main questions from the UK's National Student Survey (NSS) to its own students on a trial basis this session. A first comparison with aggregated data from UK universities has shown that the responses by RU students are within the general range of responses from UK students. This initiative by RU will be helpful to the Quality Board as it explores, with the Quality Council, the possible use of the NSS or a similar instrument across the sector.

Members of the Curriculum Council were asked how RU was dealing with two matters that had been raised by students: the use of computers in examinations, in place of hand-written answers; and a move to anonymous marking. The team was told that the possible introduction of computer-based examinations is being actively explored but that some at least of its members had pedagogical as well as practical reservations about anonymous marking. Experience elsewhere suggests that it is not difficult to resolve the practical problems, for conventional examinations, and this is something that RU may wish to consider further. The School of Law already has a facility for anonymous marking.

The University may also wish to consider whether a student representative could join the Executive Committee, except for items concerning individual students or staff; whether a postgraduate student might usefully join the Research Council; and, whether more use could be made of students as members of working parties looking at particular aspects of learning and teaching. The RA acknowledged that the annual turnover of student representatives limits continuity. However, this is the case in most universities and may best be dealt with, as proposed by RU, through careful induction and training.

3.7 Teaching and Learning: Facilities and Support Services

The University moved into a new building in 2010 and the review team was given a short tour on its first day. This was not intended to do more than provide a general overview but was sufficient for the review team to conclude that the building appears to be functioning well and to provide students with good opportunities for small group working. Students welcomed the fact that they can enter the building at all hours, and can look for work space in any of the classrooms when these are not already in use. However, the library is closed at night except during examination periods and

the review team was told that students would welcome longer opening hours.

The review team was able to visit the library, briefly, and to speak to the Director of Library and Information Services. RU has followed a deliberate policy of restricting its print collection to the most essential items in favour of investment in electronic resources. There is a trend towards library staff working more closely with individual students, helping them to locate information efficiently, and with academic staff. The team was told that RU is investigating the security issues that currently impede an extension of library opening hours and is also seeking to provide more working spaces in the library, as also requested by students. There was praise for the library services from the group of newly appointed staff who met with the review team.

A competent and service-oriented group provides IT support at the University. The RU Library participates in the national library system, providing enhanced access and efficiencies of operation. The IT staff convey a positive attitude and understand the need to set realistic limits. Both are key to fulfilling their general charge of supporting administrative functions as well as to Schools that vary widely in their needs and expectations for IT for teaching and research in the respective disciplines. This demanding work landscape results in wishes and priorities that vary significantly from the less- to the more-technologically engaged disciplines. As technology evolves, a challenge facing RU is to maximise the use of MySchool while figuring out how to ensure faculty and students have a course management system that keeps pace with rapid change. Also, as the IT group notes, RU has defined its IT strategy in overall terms, with further refinement needed to prioritise the specific changes and investments for the future.

The review team was able to pay a short visit to one laboratory, for Engineering students, who were well satisfied with the facilities there.

RU also supports students through its Student Services, which includes Career Services, through its unit for Teaching Affairs and Registry, and through its School administrators. The review team was able to meet several members of staff from each of these categories.

Some 200 students with a learning disability – mostly dyslexia – or other condition affecting their academic work are known to Student Services. Various forms of assistance, such as extra time in examinations, are made available to them although students who receive the assistance are responsible for the cost of any diagnostic testing. The team met one student who had been helped in these ways, who was very appreciative. Other services available to students include advice on stress management, assistance with returning to study after a break and counselling in general. The first port of call for students needing advice is often the School administrator.

Measures to help students find employment upon graduation begin earlier, with placements and internships. These build upon RU's close ties with business and industry but the review team was told that it has been difficult to find additional companies offering such opportunities. Over 80% of graduands have already found a job before leaving RU. The team was told that many Engineering students go abroad after graduating.

The review team also asked about the work of the International Office, having previously met several students from other countries who were generally very pleased with RU, including its buddy system for inducting international students. One student did, however, mention that not speaking Icelandic is sometimes a barrier notwithstanding the University's efforts to circumvent it. RU has exchange arrangements with very many overseas universities but is seeking to refine its list of partners. It would like to attract more students from overseas for full degree programmes, especially at Master's level, and to increase the number of its own students spending

some time abroad. RU does not, at present, utilise any standard test of English when selecting international students. This is something that it may wish to consider doing.

The support staff confirmed that they are included in RU's annual staff appraisal scheme and are encouraged to attend staff development courses. The review team was impressed by their evident commitment and wishes to *commend* the proactive character of the University's support services.

3.8-9 Rights and Obligations of Students (3.8) and Appeals and Complaints (3.9)

Information about all these matters is provided through various written documents and is communicated to new students as part of the orientation process when they are also given advice on the need to avoid plagiarism. All Icelandic universities are now introducing the use of Turnitin through a project sponsored by the Ministry.

The students who met the review team said that they were satisfied with these arrangements and would know how to proceed if they wished to make a complaint or lodge an appeal.

3.10 Evaluation and Conclusions

The review team concluded that RU does indeed follow its own precepts by providing students with opportunities for learning that are varied, encourage active participation, often through group work, and frequently have practical applications; and by seeking feedback from them, regularly and by various means.

The students who met the reviewers seemed well-matched to the institution. They were attracted by the programmes that it offers and by its reputation for an applied, hands-on approach to education. They reported satisfaction with teaching methods, and felt they had a voice that helped to shape the learning environment. They are expected to work hard and are challenged but they are supported by faculty who care about and are available to them. The students were also comfortable stating improvements that they would like to see: more opportunity to do collaborative projects with industry, and in some cases, more interactive teaching or clearer ways of getting feedback on their work.

Overall, the review team found much to *commend*, including, as already highlighted in this section of its report: the University's Preliminary Studies programme; its readiness to elicit the views of students through various surveys and meetings; and the proactive character of its support services.

In its final meeting with senior staff the review team asked which individual, other than the Rector, could be said to have overall responsibility for students. There is no such person at present, so this may be something that the University would wish to consider.

4. RESEARCH

4.1 Overview

Since its foundation in 1998, and especially during the last five years, RU has undergone a rapid development, from a teaching college (mostly for technical subjects and engineering) into a research university. This transition was implemented and supported by a broad spectrum of measures to be discussed in more detail below. During the review process it became clear not only that RU had convincingly declared its ambition to be a research university, but that a great deal of progress has already been made, within a very short time. Indeed, the University has already achieved a highly respectable place in the international landscape of research – in all areas where it is represented.

Starting from the documents provided by RU, in particular from Section 4 of the Reflective Analysis (“Research, Research Students and Linkages between Research and Teaching”) and from the University’s own Research Strategy, the review team addressed issues of research in several of its meetings at RU, especially those with established and recently appointed staff, with postgraduates, and, most prominently, with members of the RU Research Council.

4.2 Research Activities of Faculty

Following its Research Strategy, RU has set up a comprehensive framework of bodies, processes, and procedures for guiding and monitoring its research activities. Research at RU is based on sound principles, as stated in the opening passages of its Research Strategy, which stress ties to the international research community and the assessment of impact via peer-

review, and which acknowledge the essential role of individual creative researchers.

The main instrument for monitoring the research of RU's academic employees is the annual Faculty Contribution Record, containing an assessment of research activities by each scientific employee. A panel of international experts then assesses their output. This provides a comprehensive picture of the scientific work of RU's faculty, taking into account virtually all information that can be captured in a quantitative manner.

RU has improved its number of publications significantly over the last five years. The number of articles and peer-reviewed conference contributions (papers, posters, abstracts) has tripled from 2007 to 2011. This is an impressive record, showing that the commitment to research has had a clear impact. RU should continue to encourage publication in top outlets.

The central body for research is RU's Research Council (RC), supplemented by research councils in each of the four Schools. The RU Research Council is an important element in the organisation of RU. In the review team's meeting with the RC, the Council and its chairman conveyed an excellent understanding of all issues involved in monitoring and organising research at RU. Specific points, discussed in more detail below, were concerned with the links between research and teaching and the role of business and industry as partners in research.

As emphasised by the chairman of the RC, the essential criterion for excellence in research is impact. Impact can be measured to a large extent in terms of the number of academic publications in outlets of high international reputation and by high values of citation indices. But apart from this, further – sometimes less quantitative – criteria may play a role, e.g., patents, invitations to deliver (keynote-) lectures, invitations to serve on top level programme committees or editorial boards, etc. RU is definitely encouraged

to pursue this policy of enhancing impact. Among the concrete steps to be envisaged is the development of an IPR policy (Intellectual Property Rights policy).

As highlighted in Item C.3 of its Research Strategy, a convincing policy for promotions and salaries is a prerequisite for keeping the current drive that all faculty members conveyed during their meetings with the review team. The team acknowledges that the existing severe financial problems imply tight limits in this respect, and that an optimal path has been pursued over recent years. Nevertheless, it completely agrees with the Rector's judgement that RU's ability to attract and keep internationally reputed talent is a key issue for the years to come.

4.3 Research by Doctoral Students

Doctoral studies are a relatively new part of RU. All four Schools have been accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture for PhD studies and the first PhD students have graduated. RU has established a task force on doctoral studies and has begun thinking about whether it would be desirable to have a research school, either at RU or at the national level.

The development of a PhD programme is a positive element that is an essential part of RU's ambition to become a full-fledged research university.

The task force has a number of concrete issues to address. Three of these issues are the following. It still needs to be defined more precisely how many PhD students a supervisor can have and how to deal with a disagreement between a student and a supervisor. Also, the review team was informed that PhD students may sometimes have had to pay the cost of attending a conference at which they were presenting a paper. RU should look into how to offer support for conference presentation – it is part of making the University known in the world. Finally, the specific conditions of PhD student

education in the four Schools of RU could possibly be integrated – at last to some extent – in a uniform framework, which could be a joint doctoral School or some more flexible framework in which the common interests of all doctoral programmes are merged.

4.4 Integrating Teaching and Research

Research is an integral part of many curricula at RU. The Reflective Analysis produced by RU provides a list of examples of this integration, and interviews with students and staff confirmed this. Graduate students can be involved in research projects and are strongly encouraged to attend research seminars organised by the Schools. Members of academic staff talk about their research to undergraduates through seminars and through the yearly “Lecture Marathon” where 42 RU academic employees present mini-lectures with the diverse subjects drawn from the research carried out within the university.

Research freedom for each individual academic member is an axiom at RU. At the same time, RU organises some (but not all) of its research into thematic research labs or centres. At present, the creation of such centres happens at the initiative of the individual researchers. However, if RU wishes all of these research centres to achieve international recognition, it may need to introduce systematic, albeit light-touch, procedures for their initial licensing and subsequent review.

4.5 Linking Academic and Industrial Research Activities

As expressed in its Research Strategy, a “key potential source of external funding at RU is the business community”. This potential, while as yet not fully exploited, offers enormous opportunities, even beyond Iceland. RU is

encouraged to pursue the issue by fostering research oriented contacts with business and industry – and to do this on an international level. RU has developed a profile which can and should attract partners from research oriented companies in Iceland and abroad, including enterprises of international prominence. Such cooperation helps in acquiring funds (e.g., for European research projects where industrial partners are required), provides excellent opportunities to equip graduates and postgraduates with expertise that is desired by the labour market, and can serve as a basis for building up a strong supportive international network of partners and alumni. By systematising these links, RU can enhance its reputation for application oriented research – however always keeping its independence and not in any way giving up its strong dedication to fundamental research.

Also, on the level of individual researchers, and taking a broad view of what is meant by knowledge exchange, it has to be recognised that good research can be documented and acknowledged by other types of production than publications. For example, industrial collaboration may produce a new insight that is first documented through a patent (which prevents publication in conferences and journals while the patenting process is on-going). Another example is the production of software (be it open source or not), which can express the results of research and whose distribution can have as much impact as a publication.

4.6 International Perspective

RU has developed international connections on all levels of research, from the level of advanced students via doctoral research to research by young and advanced faculty. While in the first decade of RU's existence the main emphasis of RU was correctly put on acquiring a good reputation within Iceland, the current (promising) standing of RU requires a shift towards securing international links. In the Reflective Analysis and also the Research

Strategy, the international dimension is referred to repeatedly. To have all these efforts combined in a unified framework of internationalisation may help to accelerate the gain in international standing. The essential issues are – of course – the attraction of international Master’s and PhD students, and the continuation of RU’s success in hiring (and keeping) international faculty. However, other activities, such as the role of RU as a host for top level scientific meetings, can also help to strengthen its profile.

4.7 Evaluation

RU has succeeded in establishing in a very short period of time (of just 14 years) an emerging reputation as a research university where several research units already have achieved international visibility. The review team wishes to *commend*, in particular, the impact that research is already having on the teaching of both undergraduate and Master’s programmes and the University’s emerging PhD programmes, which are developing towards their intended international comparators. The research team considers that RU has reached the stage at which a more systematic approach – in such matters as links with industry, international relationships and the further integration of teaching and research – would be beneficial. In particular, it *recommends* the introduction of tighter procedures for the establishment and review of research centres and institutes, partly to ensure an effective environment for doctoral studies. However, the overall picture as presented during the review showed that RU is on an excellent track and that its success in research should continue, driven by a faculty that combines top-level competence with a distinctive spirit of ambition.

5. ENHANCEMENT

5.1 Overview

The Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education (QEH) encourages universities when preparing their reflective analysis to consider particularly the institution's strategic approach to the management of enhancing the quality of the student learning experience; the use of external and internal reference points in the management of enhancement; and the institution's approach to the collation and dissemination of good practice.

The Institutional Review team concluded that confidence can be placed in the soundness of RU's present and likely future arrangements to secure the quality of the student learning experience. This section highlights those aspects covered elsewhere in the report that bear upon RU's commitment to, arrangements for and opportunities to enhance the quality of the student learning experience in the context of the foregoing expectations of the QEH.

As the introduction highlights, the University attaches importance to its research profile and chose to include research as a section of its RA. Section 4 of this report therefore considers not only the University's arrangements for assuring the quality of the research student experience but also the more general approach it has taken and the progress it has made in pursuing its research goals. In that context this section considers the University's approach to enhancing its research profile as an integral part of the University's current and likely future approach to quality enhancement overall.

The University in its Reflective Analysis (RA) indicated that the Rector and the RU Executive Committee are ultimately responsible for quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms with the Deans being responsible within their Schools for quality and enhancement matters. The RA indicated that the

Quality Assurance System, developed in 2008, guided the enhancement process.

The RA described the overall institutional approach to enhancement and then considered separately: studies and teaching; research; academic staff; support services; role of students; and incentives for staff and support for innovation. This section follows the same headings.

5.2 Studies and Teaching

The Teaching Strategy of RU, in the context of offering students an outstanding education, highlighted a range of factors and intentions through which this would be delivered. While students experience only the programme on which they have enrolled, the basis for enhancement of the student's experience is the development and assurance of that and all other programmes. The RA suggests that the processes described elsewhere in this report for the development of a new programme, and for annual and periodic review of a programme or subject area are recognised as still being developed. The review team would encourage the University to complete this work to create the necessary underpinning for enhancement.

Students clearly valued the generally small classes, extensive use of practical work, real-life assignments, diverse methods of assessment and the accessibility and approachability of staff. Some students whom the team met suggested that staff could build on this engaged and engaging culture to further challenge students to enable them to achieve more. Staff also saw scope for enhancement, for example to further develop the critical thinking capabilities of their students. Students whom the team met all reported that they had made a conscious choice to study at RU, attracted by its culture and reputation. They also reported that their expectations had been met. However, it is the responsibility of the University and in the spirit of

enhancement, to define its intentions and deliver them, potentially exceeding the expectations of its students. The University will wish to develop a shared understanding of its direction of travel in further enhancing the quality of the students' learning experience. In that context the clear statements in the Teaching Strategy may be the basis for a review of how far and how consistently the University has progressed in its intentions to enhance teaching and learning.

As highlighted in Section 2, while all universities gather and use management information, RU has developed a sophisticated and extensive approach, currently based on its own system MySchool, through which it records, analyses and reports on data on student admissions, progress and outcomes. This provides it with a firm foundation for enhancement.

A particular example of the University making good use of its management information is in relation to admissions; in distinction to the state universities, RU is able to select its students. It has undertaken analysis to determine which characteristics of its admitted students best predict a student's success in staying on course and doing well. Analysis has shown that a sound standard in Maths, Icelandic and English is important. The University can direct applicants to take the Preliminary Studies programme if, for whatever reason, they do not meet the standards expected for success. This informed approach to selection and preparation should enhance the match between applicants and their programme of study and support an enhanced quality of experience for students admitted. The review *commends* RU's use of admissions data to guide student selection.

Levels of drop-out nonetheless are substantial. The University, however, does not at this time appear to consider student drop-out to be a significant concern although it has already undertaken some analysis of the factors affecting it. Both that analysis and the views of staff and students whom the team met suggest that reasons for drop-out are complex and may be

changing over time. Given the University's data warehouse and analytical capability, there is an opportunity to enhance the analysis of factors that appear to be associated with drop-out so that academic and pastoral support can be directed to where it might have greatest effect.

The University already offers academic support, for example through reading groups in law and shortly in science to students who have failed subjects and are preparing to retake them. The support service staff whom the team met and the Teaching Coach (TC) both reported work they did to support students in difficulty, academically and pastorally. There were mixed views among the staff whom the review team met on the extent to which the University should formally monitor student attendance or activity or be proactive in the event of evidence of student disengagement.

For students who are disengaging from their current programme the University may offer the opportunity for them to enter another programme or they may move to another university. While both students and staff considered that students drop out from a programme rather than a complete student career, nonetheless, the student will have fallen behind by a year or more. Apart from the individual human and financial cost of dropping-out, it is in the University's financial and academic interest to retain the students it has already recruited. In general, it is obviously beneficial to ensure, as far as possible, that its recruitment strategies can be streamlined to focus on selecting only those students best fitted in terms of qualifications and attitude to succeed.

While the University's attention is not currently fully focused on retention, it nonetheless has the capability to develop a good understanding of the factors associated with it. Further it has engaged support services and accessible academic staff providing a potentially sound basis for combating dropout. In this context, the University has the opportunity to enhance the learning

experience of the full range of its students so that the largest possible number succeed.

As a further example of the University's data warehouse and analytical capability, the team saw evidence of the reports on student and course performance that could be provided from MySchool. It also heard of the use being made of these data, for example to compare the distribution of module results of different staff, providing the means to identify and address possible inconsistency or grade inflation. In the context of annual and periodic review of programmes, the University will wish to determine its expectations for the provision and use, as a basis for enhancement, of quantitative and qualitative data.

The University's system MySchool is both a learning management system and a virtual learning environment which is well-used by staff and students and which has been extensively developed over time in response to feedback. In itself this is an exemplar of the University's responsiveness to its own community and its commitment to enhancement. Given the pace of change in such matters, the University will though, in due course, wish to review what configuration of systems will best meet its needs in the future. While MySchool at present meets a multiplicity of needs, future solutions may be very different and it will be a mark of the University's commitment to enhancement if it can be open-minded in reflecting and planning to meet its future needs, taking care to maintain the analytical capability which provides the basis for enhancement described above.

The University moved recently into a single, modern and purpose-designed campus which is well equipped with learning spaces, IT and learning resources and specialist facilities. To that extent the University has already enhanced the student learning environment and has further plans for the campus, albeit presently on hold for financial reasons.

5.3 Research and Links to Business and Industry

The review team had learned of the University's foundation and development, directly supported by the three associations of commerce, business and trade in Iceland. These associations sought to broaden university education in Iceland to focus more on technology and adding value to business. The links to business and industry that helped to bring the University into being are still an important part of its ethos, and industry stakeholders whom the review team met considered that the University was delivering the founders' intentions. They were keen to provide student internships and project work as well as employment opportunities for the University's graduates. Discussion in meetings with staff and students suggested that there could be greater consistency and more equality of access to the opportunities available. The curriculum at RU has benefited from the University's close ties with business and industry and the review team *recommends* that these positive benefits be consolidated.

As the previous section demonstrates, the University has chosen to develop its research profile with a current focus on publication in internationally recognised journals as a major measure of impact. This could create a tension with its business and industry stakeholders, and yet those stakeholders whom the team met respected the University's direction. The founding ethos of the University, augmented by its subsequent development of a strong research profile may be particularly propitious circumstances for a close alignment between research and business.

Certainly students appeared conscious of the opportunities open to them to engage with research and to apply their developing knowledge in practical contexts. When enquiring about the linkage between teaching and research, one of the students whom the team met coined the phrase for her University as being 'Where research comes to life'. For research postgraduates whom the team met, the linkage between the University's research activities and

their own programme should be and was evident. Students on Master's degrees, including those who had taken their first degree elsewhere, spoke favourably about, for example, the opportunities to work jointly with staff, particularly on their thesis. It was at undergraduate level that the strength of the University's commitment to enhancing the student experience through research was particularly evident as, for example, students were aware of opportunities to undertake summer research internships, working for research-active staff. Students reported also being invited to and attending departmental research seminars as well as hearing staff talk about their own research during classes or when working on practical assignments. This widespread awareness of and involvement in the research work of the University by undergraduates as well as postgraduates is a strength; the University could further enhance the student experience by developing a framework of expectations within which each department could make explicit how students could expect to experience the University's research environment.

In the context of assuring the quality of the student's learning experience, the University appears to have avoided many of the risks associated with its drive to build its research profile. The University does have a category of 'teaching only' or adjunct staff who are not expected to develop a research profile but such staff were by no means the majority of the staff who taught students. There were examples of the University using this grade of staff as a means to appoint staff with industry experience to enrich the student experience. The evident rewards for research excellence, at least in terms of esteem and opportunities for promotion, were balanced, to some extent, by offering a Teaching Award based on student evaluation.

Given the University's commitment to active links with business and industry as well as to research, the University may wish to develop a similar framework of expectations to guide each department when planning the

practical opportunities that each student may experience of working with and learning from the business or industry sector relevant to their degree programme.

The University has developed an annual staff appraisal system using a Faculty Contribution Record which provides for each member of staff a range of measures and indicators of their progress and contribution to research. The University intends to develop indicators of teaching quality to complement these measures. The review team *commends* the introduction of the Faculty Contribution Record and welcomes the way in which it is being developed. The inclusion of indicators that demonstrate a member of staff's engagement with business and industry would result in a full profile consistent with the University's ethos and strategy.

5.4 Academic Staff

Enhancement of the student learning experience rests on all members of staff developing their own practice. A culture where ideas are supported, for example through development funding, or where innovative practice is recognised, for example through a teaching award, should not overlook the good practice that exists across the University. Dissemination of good practice can be difficult and should be supported by both formal and informal means. Procedures such as regular reports to committees or presentations at staff conferences provide a formal expectation that staff should both report developments in their practice and have such developments to report. The University will wish to develop these procedures, probably as part of its consideration of the role of the Curriculum Council.

However dissemination of good practice is unlikely to arise solely through formal channels such as committee minutes and annual reports. The new campus has provided good space for staff to interact and some attention has

been paid to co-locating different groups of staff to encourage informal interaction in shared break-out space. The RU as ONE activities provide means for staff to meet across departmental and academic/ support boundaries. The University has a tradition of holding open meetings and events which can also be valuable in enabling ideas to be shared. The University should give active consideration to how good practice can be disseminated, including the range of means it employed to develop its strategy.

The role of the Teaching Coach had been judged a success; the team met the former TC who had just moved to a post outwith the University and also her replacement. Initially the emphasis for this new post had been on supporting staff in developing learning outcomes and on working with staff new to teaching or those where student feedback had indicated room for improvement. The Curriculum Council has been proactive in insisting that all staff should use varied approaches to assessment. This provides the opportunity for the University to use the different ideas and experience of the new TC, now described as Teaching Consultant or Adviser, to support further development in teaching, with varied approaches to assessment as a priority. This post and the appreciative culture within which it operates support the development and dissemination of good practice.

5.5 Support Services

Support staff provide a comprehensive service to students including induction; orientation for foreign students; library and IT facilities and help; support for students travelling abroad; support for students with disabilities and special needs; and careers advice. At the time of the review team's visit, many services were about to move to a new configuration to be even more accessible to students. Support staff themselves appeared open, innovative and responsive to staff and student feedback. The review team met

administrative staff from Schools who also recognised their role in the quality of the student experience.

5.6 Role of Students

Students understood how their system of representation worked, knew who their representatives were and were confident that their representatives would raise issues on their behalf. They could cite examples where action had been taken by the University or their department in response to concerns raised. To that extent, the student representation system complemented and augmented the many other means, ranging from formal surveys to informal accessibility, by which the University gained the views of its students to enable them to direct action to improve the student experience. While the students appeared confident that action would be taken in response to their representations, the review team concurred with the RA's own recognition that the means for feeding back to students on actions taken were not yet fully developed. The team would urge the University to capitalise on its single campus and good IT systems to develop a range of means to ensure that students are aware of changes in the University, notably those developed in response to student feedback.

At University level, students were full members of certain committees and attended certain others but were not represented on other groups. The University could not cite a rationale for these differences and indeed seemed minded to extend the level of student involvement in formal groups. At school level, there were differences in organisation between schools and hence in the name or nature of committees on which students could be represented. These differences did not though explain the inter-departmental differences in the extent and nature of student representation. The review team would urge the University and the Student Association together to establish the principles it considers should underlie student

representation on boards and committees. From that statement of principles, it will become clear where students should be represented; the Team expects that there will be more widespread and consistent representation on committees and in the business of the University, for example their presence on hiring committees.

Students whom the team met were confident and articulate and appeared well able to present their case when required. However the University has the opportunity to further develop its students' skills by providing explicit training and development to enable students to be active and effective participants in meetings and committees at both department and University level. As well as enabling students to contribute to the development of their department and University, students gain personal benefit as the skills and experience developed are relevant to employment and their future careers.

There were good discussions at certain meetings about the nature and benefit of student engagement in the quality assurance and governance of the University and its departments. It was apparent that the University's understanding of student engagement was developing from that strong starting point of being responsive to students towards a richer conception of student engagement. The Team encourages the University, in partnership with its Students' Association and its wider student body, to develop and enunciate a shared vision for student engagement to create a sound foundation for the enhancement of the student experience.

5.7 Incentives for Staff and Support for Innovation

The University relies on government funding and student fee income, the first of which has been reduced in real terms while the financial position of students and their families given the current and recent state of the Icelandic economy reduces the opportunity to uplift fees without significantly affecting

demand for university places. The review team were shown figures indicating that, even before the economic crash, spending on higher education in Iceland was below the OECD average and well below the level in Scandinavian countries. Thus it is understandable that the University has identified areas where they consider that lack of funding has had an impact and where further funding could beneficially be applied if available, notably highlighting a wish to increase the number of full-time faculty and to offer competitive salaries. Staff whom the review team met regretted that it was not currently possible to replace the short-term development fund that had supported a number of innovations in teaching and learning.

5.8 Evaluation

Understandably over the past four years the attention of the Board of Trustees, the Rector and RU Executive Committee has been on ensuring the financial viability of RU with a number of hard decisions having been made such as the closure of SHE. That the University has continued to develop its research and deliver a valued education to its students over that period gives confidence in the University's ability to continue to develop strategy and take forward its priorities, recognising that likely continuing financial constraints will affect the pace of development.

Staff across the University whom the review team met had evidently maintained their commitment to students and to their research through the recent difficult years and had generally participated actively in the development of University strategy. The review team recognised their frustration with the constraints of the financial situation and discerned some sense of distance between senior staff and others. In developing its approaches to enhancing the quality of the student learning experience the University will wish to continue to deploy various means to encourage,

recognise and reward staff for their commitment to innovation and the development of good practice.

Overall the review team considers that RU has an understanding of how it can continue to enhance the student learning experience and how it can work in partnership with its students to develop its strategies and plans across the foregoing headings of studies and teaching, research, academic staff, support services and through supporting innovation and the dissemination of good practice.

6. CONCLUSION

The Institutional Review process requires that two judgements be made, to determine the degree of confidence that can be held in the institution's ability to manage effectively and securely the academic standards of the degrees and other qualifications that it awards and the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students. In the light of this report and the documentation and meetings on which it is based, the Quality Board concludes that:

- *confidence* can be placed in the soundness of Reykjavik University's present and likely future arrangements to secure the academic standards of its awards
- *confidence* can be placed in the soundness of Reykjavik University's present and likely future arrangements to secure the quality of the student learning experience.

ANNEX 1

Submitted Documents

Reykjavik University: Reflective Analysis 2012

Reykjavik University: Dashboard 2007-2010

Reykjavik University: Data Fact Sheet 2012

Reykjavik University: Teaching at RU 2010-2011

Reykjavik University: The Academic Strength of Reykjavik University

ANNEX 2

Schedule for Meetings with Students and Staff

Monday 26th of March

Review team at RU in private session. Final arrangements agreed by the team chairs, Barbara Brittingham and Frank Quinault, and the RU contact(s).

Tuesday 27th of March

Time:	Suggested participants and topics from the QB:	Suggested participants from RU:
09.00-10.00	Introduction to RU – Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU	1. Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU 2. Þórunn Jónsdóttir, Executive Director of Administration 3. Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry 4. Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of RU Research Services
10.15-11.00	RU Strategic Work – Þórunn Jónsdóttir, Executive Director of Administration	
11.00-11.45	The Intra Environment at RU – The Learning Management System – Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry	

11.45-12.45	Tour of the Campus guided by Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU and Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry	
13.00-13.45	Lunch in room M305	
13.45-14.45	Meeting 1 Rector, Exec. Dir. of Finance, Board of Trustees, Strategy, finance, governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU 2. Þorkell Sigurlaugsson, Exec. Dir. of Finance 3. Jóhann Hjartarson, Director of Finance 4. Þórunna Jónsdóttir, Director of Administration 5. Members of the Board of Trustees (Finnur Oddsson Chair and other members according to availability).
15.00-16.00	Meeting 2 RUEC + Director of HR Management structure, resource allocation, responsibility for academic standards, use of management information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU 2. Björn Þór Jónsson, Dean of SCS 3. Guðrún A. Sævarsdóttir, Dean of SSE 4. Guðrún Högnadóttir, Executive Director of RU Open University 5. Guðmundur Sigurðsson, Dean of SL 6. Friðrik Már Baldursson, Dean of SB 7. Ásdís Hlökk Theodórsdóttir, Chair of the CC 8. Magnús Már Halldórsson, Chair of RC 9. Þórunna Jónsdóttir, Executive Director of Administration 10. Þorkell Sigurlaugsson, Executive Director of Finance 11. Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of RU Research Services 12. Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry
16.30-17.30	Meeting 3 Elected student leaders and representatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kristján Pétur Sæmundsson, President of the Student Association 2. Hilmar Þór Sigurjónsson, Vice Chairman of the Student Association 3. Sonja Sófusdóttir, Treasurer of the Student Association 4. Sigríður Inga Viggósdóttir, Secretary of the Student Association 5. Aldís Geirdal Sverrisdóttir, Communication Director of the Student

	Means and effectiveness of student representation, involvement with Reflective Analysis, students as partners, ethics and appeals.	<p>Association</p> <p>6. Valgerður Kristmundsdóttir, President of Atlas, Association of Sports Science Students</p> <p>7. Guðmundur Sveinsson, President of Tvíund, Association of Computer Science Students</p> <p>8. Karen Garðarsdóttir, President of Pragma, Association of Engineering Students</p> <p>9. Ómar Berg Rúnarsson, President of Lögrétta, Association of Law Students</p> <p>10. Silja Runólfsdóttir, President of Mentis, Association of Psychology Students</p> <p>11. Arnar Jónsson, President of Technis, Association of Applied Engineering Students</p> <p>12. Ingvi Brynjar Sveinsson, President of Markaðsráð, Association of Business Students</p>
17:45	BB & FQ liaise with RU contact	RU Reflective Analysis Committee (Kristján Kristjánsson, Þórunn Jónsdóttir and Steinn Jóhannsson) and Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU

Wednesday 28th of March

Time:	Suggested participants and topics from the QB:	Suggested participants from RU:
09.00-10.00	Meeting 4a	TBD

	<p>Undergraduates</p> <p>Meeting 4b</p> <p>Undergraduates</p> <p>The student learning experience.</p>	
10.15-11.15	<p>Meeting 5</p> <p>Teaching staff in post for several years</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Professor at SL 2. Katrín Ólafsdóttir, Associate Professor at SB 3. Bryndís Björk Ásgeirsdóttir, Assistant Professor at SB 4. Hannes Högni Vilhjálmsson, Associate Professor at SCS 5. Ágúst Valfells, Associate Professor at SSE 6. Haraldur Auðunsson, Associate Professor at SSE 7. Ólafur Andri Ragnarsson, Adjunct at SCS 8. Árni Árnason, part time teacher at SB 9. Jón Guðmundsson, Assistant Professor at SSE
11.45-12.45	<p>Meeting 6</p> <p>Recently appointed staff</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ýmir Vigfússon, Assistant Professor at SCS 2. Arnar Þór Jónsson, Senior Specialist at SL 3. Jack James, Professor at SB 4. Helgi Þór Ingason, Associate Professor at SSE 5. Hafrún Kristjánsdóttir, Adjunct at SSE 6. Kamilla Rún Jóhannsdóttir, Assistant Professor at SB 7. Páll Jensson, Professor at SSE 8. Þóra Hallgrímsdóttir, Specialist at SL 9. Sæunn Björk Þorkelsdóttir, Part time Teacher at SB
12.45-15.15	<p>Lunch in the School Canteen – Málið, followed by</p>	

	reading/reflection/discussion	
15.15-16.15	<p>Meeting 7</p> <p>Curriculum Committee + Director of TAR + Teaching Coach</p> <p>Curriculum design, learning outcomes, assessment, enhancement</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ásdís Hlökk Theodórsdóttir, Chair of CC 2. Hrafn Loftsson Associate, Professor at SCS 3. Málfríður Þórarinsdóttir, Director of Preliminary Studies 4. Þorlákur Karlsson, Associate Professor at SB 5. Ingunn Sæmundsdóttir, Director of undergraduate studies at SSE 6. Margrét Vala Kristjánsdóttir, Associate Professor at the SL 7. Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry 8. Hilmar Þór Sigurjónsson, student representatives 9. Rósa Gunnarsdóttir, current Teaching Coach at RU 10. Ása Björk Stefánsdóttir, former Teaching Coach at RU
16.30-17.30	<p>Meeting 8</p> <p>Programme teams</p> <p>Approval, monitoring and periodic review</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hrefna Briem, Director of Undergraduate Studies at SB 2. Vlad Vaiman, Director of Graduate Studies at SB 3. Auður Arna Arnardóttir, Assistant Professor at SB 4. Axel Hall, Assistant Professor at SB 5. Ingunn Sæmundsdóttir, Director of Undergraduate Studies at SSE 6. Ásdís Hlökk Theodórsdóttir, Adjunct at SSE 7. Páll Jensson, Professor at SSE 8. Haraldur Auðunsson, Associate Professor at SSE. 9. Rósa Gunnarsdóttir, current Teaching Coach at RU
17:45	BB & FQ liaison with RU contact	RU Reflective Analysis Committee (Kristján Kristjánsson, Þórunn Jónsdóttir and Steinn Jóhannsson) and Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector at RU

Thursday 29th of March

Time:	Suggested participants and topics from the QB:	Suggested participants from RU:
09.00-10.00	<p>Meeting 9</p> <p>Postgraduates – masters and doctoral</p>	
10.15-11.15	<p>Meeting 10</p> <p>Research Council + Director(s) of Masters programme(s) + PhD supervisor(s) + staff who make active use of research in their teaching.</p> <p>Research, especially how it links to teaching</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Magnús Már Halldórsson, Professor at SCS and Chair of RC 2. Marina Candi Associate Professor at SB and member of RC 3. Marjan Sirjani, Associate Professor at SCS and member of RC. 4. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Professor at SL and member of RC. 5. Karl Ægir Karlsson Associate Professor at SCS and member of RC. 6. Ingunn Sæmundsdóttir Director of Masters Programmes at SSE. 7. Vlad Vaiman director of graduate studies at SB 8. Sigurður Ingi Erlingsson Associate Professor at SSE and PhD Advisor. 9. Kristján Kristjánsson, director of RU Research Services
11.15-14.00	<p>Team discussion + reading/reflection and lunch at the Faculty and Staff area on third floor in Mars</p>	
14.00-15.00	<p>Meeting 11</p> <p>Key Student Support Service staff + Programme administrator(s)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Halla Hrund Logadóttir, Int. Liaison Coordinator 2. Birna Jóna Björnsdóttir, Int. Office Coordinator 3. Sigríður Hulda Jónsdóttir, Director of Student Services 4. Gréta Matthíasdóttir, Student and Career Consultant 5. Lóa Hrönn Harðardóttir, Student Counsellor 6. Guðrún Tryggvadóttir, Director of RU Library and Information

	Student Support	<p>Services</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Þóra Gylfadóttir, Librarian 8. Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry 9. Guðrún Ragna Hreinsdóttir, Programme Administrator for Undergraduate Studies at SB 10. Sigrún María Ammendrup, Administrator for Master Studies at SB 11. Jóna Kristjana Kristinsdóttir, Administrator Director at SL 12. Sigrún Þorgeirsdóttir, Administrator Director at SSE
15.15-16.15	<p>Meeting 12a</p> <p>IT support staff</p> <p>LMS (MySchool) and IT at RU</p> <p>Meeting 12b</p> <p>Admissions c'ee, TAR; statistician?</p> <p>Student retention, predicting academic success</p>	<p>12a</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heiðar Jón Hannesson, Director of IT 2. Jens Valur Ólason, Director of IT 3. Ásrún Matthíasdóttir, Assistant Professor at SSE and LMS Developer 4. Arnar Egilsson, IT Service Manager <p>12b</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry 2. Björn Þór Jónsson, Dean of SCS 3. Ingunn Sæmundsdóttir, Director for undergraduate and graduate studies at SSE 4. Hrefna Sigríður Briem, Director of BSc Programmes 5. Jóna K. Kristinsdóttir, Administrative Director at SL 6. Þórdís Lilja Gísladóttir, Assistant Professor at SSE
16.45 – 17.45	<p>Meeting 13</p> <p>Meeting with OU</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guðrún Högnadóttir, Executive Director of RU Open University 2. Málfríður Þórarinsdóttir, Director of Preliminary Studies 3. Salóme Guðmundsdóttir, Director of Continuous Education 4. Björg Hilmarsdóttir, Teacher at OU

18.00	BB & FQ liaison with RU contact	RU Reflective Analysis Committee (Kristján Kristjánsson, Þórunn Jónsdóttir and Steinn Jóhannsson) and Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU
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Friday 30th of March

Time:	Suggested participants and topics from the QB:	Suggested participants from RU:
11.00-12.00	Final meeting with RU senior management Team spends rest of the day (before and after) in private discussion.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ari Kristinn Jónsson, Rector of RU 2. Björn Þór Jónsson, Dean of SCS 3. Guðrún A. Sævarsdóttir, Dean of SSE 4. Guðmundur Sigurðsson, Dean of SL 5. Friðrik Már Baldursson, Dean of SB 6. Ásdís Hlökk Theodórsdóttir, Chair of the CC 7. Magnús Már Halldórsson, Chair of RC 8. Þórunn Jónsdóttir, Executive Director of Administration 9. Þorkell Sigurlaugsson, Executive Director of Finance 10. Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of RU Research Services 11. Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Teaching Affairs and Registry
12.00-13.00	Lunch at restaurant Nauthóll	