

Quality Enhancement Framework
For Icelandic Higher Education

**INSTITUTION-WIDE
REVIEW**

University of Akureyri

June 2014



Content

Preface	4
1.1 The Review Process	5
1.2 The University of Akureyri.....	6
1.3 Mission and Strategic Objectives	7
1.4. Organisation and government	7
1.5 Recent developments.....	10
1.6 Response to previous reviews/accreditation exercises	11
1.7 Production of the Reflective Analysis.....	12
1.8 Evaluation	13
2 SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS	14
2.1 Overview	14
2.2. Institutional approaches to managing standards.	15
2.3 The Quality Council and its relationship with other groups	15
2.4 Course monitoring, validation and review.....	18
2.5 Use of learning outcomes.....	19
2.6 Assessment practices	20
2.7 UNAK Evaluation of Assessment Processes	21
2.8 ICT platforms.....	22
2.9 Distance delivery.....	22
2.10 Student Survey data.	23
2.11 Staff support, appraisal and development.	24
2.12 Accuracy and Quality of Public Information.....	26
3 THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE.....	27
3.1 Overview.	27
3.2 Recruitment.....	29
3.3 Student induction	30
3.4 International students.....	30
3.5 Student retention and progression and implications for teaching and learning strategies	31
3.6 The development of graduate attributes (see also section 2.12 above).....	34
3.7 The learning environment and student support services.....	35
3.8 Support for postgraduate students	37
3.9 Linkages between teaching and research.....	38
3.10 Appeals and complaints	40
3.11 The student voice.	40
3.12 The student learning experience: summary evaluation	43
4. ENHANCEMENT	44
4.1 Overview	44
4.2 The strategic approach to managing enhancement.	45
4.3 Using external benchmarking to support enhancement.....	46
4.4 Supporting enhancement through the dissemination of good practice.	48
4.5 Managing Enhancement: Evaluation	48

5. CONCLUSION 50
Annex 1: Action plan from the reflective analysis..... 53
Annex 2: Schedule for meetings with students and staff..... 59

Preface

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

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

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

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

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Chair

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Manager

¹ See: http://www.rannis.is/media/gaedarad-haskola/Handbook_complete_1558767620.pdf

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) as described in full in the *Quality Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education (2011)*. All seven Higher Education Institutions in Iceland are being reviewed between 2012 and 2015. This is the report of the fourth review, that of the University of Akureyri (UNAK).

The review was conducted by the Quality Board with support from RANNÍS, in accordance with the procedures described in the 2011 *Handbook*. The Review Team (the team) comprised Professor Tove Bull (chair) and Professor Norman Sharp (vice-chair) – members of the Quality Board, together with Dr Crichton Lang (independent expert), associate professor Maria Sundkvist (independent expert), and Anna Björg Guðjónsdóttir (student representative). Dr Einar Hreinsson (review secretary) and Viðar Helgason from RANNÍS provided administrative support.

In preparation for the main visit by the team, the vice-chair commented on the first draft of the institution's Reflective Analysis (RA), which was then revised. After the receipt of the final version of the RA together with additional documentation, the chair and secretary of the team set up the visit schedule in consultation with UNAK staff. The preparation of the University's Reflective Analysis and the arrangements for the visit were overseen by the Rector, Stefán B. Sigurðsson, and the Director of Quality Management, Sigrún Magnúsdóttir. The review visit took place on March 25–27 at the Solborg University campus. Following an initial campus tour of 2½ hours with various presentations by the University, 21 meetings were held with staff (academic and administrative) and students (including distance-learners and international students), alumni, University Council members and representatives of stakeholders.

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

1.2 The University of Akureyri

The University of Akureyri was founded in 1987. Located in northern Iceland, UNAK is the largest university outside the Reykjavík area. It is a teaching and research institution, offering programmes at undergraduate and graduate level. It is currently completing a process of preparing an application to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC) for accreditation to offer doctoral programmes and award doctoral degrees. At present, UNAK is accredited in the fields of social sciences, health sciences and natural resources and agriculture. It is organized into three schools: (1) The School of Health Sciences (SHS), comprising the Faculty of Nursing (FN), the Faculty of Occupational Therapy and the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS); (2) The School of Business and Science (SBS), comprising the Faculty of Business Administration (FBA) and the Faculty of Natural Resource Sciences (FNRS); and (3) The School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS), comprising the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), the Faculty of Education (FE), the Faculty of Law (FL) and the Centre for School Development (CSD).

Within an Icelandic perspective, UNAK is a medium sized university with a total number of 1568 students (October 15, 2013) and a total number of permanent staff of 178 (December 2012). A striking characteristic of the institution is the high number of distance-learners. The institution offers all programmes as both on-campus and distance programmes with the exception of law, which is only available on-campus. In general, the on-campus and distance-learners share the same curricula, are most commonly taught together and undertake the same assessments. A total of 38% of the students study on-campus with the remainder as either distance-learners or students enrolled in phase-structured masters level courses.

1.3 Mission and Strategic Objectives

The location of the university in northern Iceland is an important strategic point of departure for the institution. UNAK has come to play a central role in promoting university education, research, development and innovation in the region in which it is located, and, indeed, in the rural areas of Iceland in general. In relation to research, all Schools within UNAK are expected to be fully research active. The institution has created a particular niche specialism in the area of Arctic research.

In its Strategic Plan 2012–2017, UNAK has defined its vision for the future in the following areas: (1) research and innovation; (2) learning and teaching; (3) social responsibility; and (4) internal operations and human resources. The strategy emphasises that “[t]he University of Akureyri is the lead in the field of distance-learning in Iceland and has presented an opportunity for many students to attend university. The university meets the needs of its students e.g. by introducing more flexibility into the studies.”

During its 25–30 years of existence, the University has contributed to the development of northern and rural Iceland by providing these regions with well-educated manpower. Compared to the universities in the capital, UNAK is a small institution with a limited number of staff. Thus, the team was pleased to learn about UNAK’s significant societal impact and that the mission which the University undertook through its establishment in 1987 is continuously being fulfilled.

Needless to say, the financial crisis in Iceland in 2008 and the following years has had a hampering effect on the institution and has compelled it to modify its ambitions. The team was therefore also pleased to learn that the University has managed to clear its previous deficits and is now operating in a more positive financial environment.

1.4. Organisation and government

The University of Akureyri operates under the Higher Education Institution Act 63/2006 and the Act on Public Higher Education Institutions No. 85/2008. The institution is

governed by a University Council, chaired by the Rector, and including two representatives of the academic community, appointed by the University Assembly, one student member, appointed by the Student Union, one representative appointed by MESC and two members appointed by the representatives of the University Council themselves.

The Rector is appointed for five years by MESC, in accordance with the University Council's recommendations. The Rector appoints a deputy from the group of Deans of Schools. The University Council sets the overall strategy for teaching, learning and research, shapes the structure of the university, carries out general supervision, and is responsible for the operation of the University in compliance with current laws and regulations.

The day-to-day management of the university is in the hands of the Management Board, comprising the Rector, the Deans of the three schools and the Managing Director. The University Office, under the direction of the Managing Director, serves the schools with units for finance, staff, computing and administration, student registration, student counselling, marketing and public relations, research and development and library and information services.

A separate Quality Council (QC) is responsible for the implementation and running of UNAK's quality management system.

There is, moreover, a consultative body, the University Assembly, where the discourse on the development and promotion of the work of the university takes place. The Assembly has a very broad representation. The Rector, Deans of Schools and Directors within the University Office have the right to meet in the Assembly. In addition, all the schools and faculties have a group of nominated representatives, and the students also nominate six members. The University Council may consult the Assembly on any issue.

Besides chairing the University Council, the Rector also chairs the Management Board, the University Assembly and the Quality Council. Since the Icelandic Act on Public Higher Education Institutions in Article 6 states that the Rector is the chair of the University

Council, UNAK has little discretion in this matter. The team would, however, recommend that the institution consider seriously whether an organisational structure in which the Rector chairs all the central significant governing and strategic bodies is the optimal structure for a university. The current arrangements can put the Rector in a difficult position where he or she would face conflicts of interest. Moreover, in the role of chair the Rector would always have to defend proposals and would thus risk denying senior committees effective access to competing perspectives and diversities of views.

Even though the financial crisis forced UNAK to reduce the number of support staff substantially, the team learned that students are very satisfied with the support they get. Frequently, mention was made of the extremely user friendly library personnel. The help and support given by IT personnel was also repeatedly reported as being commendable.

The existing three-level organisational structure (central level, schools and faculties) of UNAK dates back to 2008–2009 when a New Act on Public Higher Education Institutions (2008) was passed and then followed by specific regulations for UNAK (2009). The previous four faculties were organised into three Schools, which again were divided into faculties, and, in some cases, these faculties are further divided into departments. The highest authority within the schools are the School Assemblies and, within the faculties, the Faculty Meetings. The School Assemblies may delegate certain responsibilities to School Councils.

For a relatively small institution like UNAK, these organisational structures might seem somewhat bureaucratic. However, notwithstanding the advantages of informal communication between colleagues in informal contexts, the team is very aware of the importance of the role and necessity of formal structures, amongst other things, to secure the quality of the students' experience and the standards of their awards. The team heard from some students and staff of difficulties of communication and sharing across school and/or faculty boundaries. Given, in particular, the nature of the university's student population and the wish of the University to offer flexibility, the team therefore recommends that the University should consider how more effective vertical and horizontal links may be built through and across schools and faculties for both staff and students.

1.5 Recent developments

Faced with having to cut expenditure, UNAK chose to close the Faculty of Information Technology and the study programme in Environmental and Energy Science, and also to reorganise the delivery of masters programmes. In spite of the cutback, UNAK has experienced a constant increase in student numbers since 2007. At the same time, the proportion of distance-learners has increased significantly. Over the same period, however, the number of permanent staff has decreased. According to the statistics available to the team, this decrease has primarily affected administrative and support staff.

Nonetheless, the team was very aware of a strong drive at UNAK to overcome the effects of the financial crisis and face the future positively and energetically. At the time of the team's visit to UNAK, the institution had reached the stage where it had been able to stabilise its financial situation having repaid all its debts. Having been able to do this testifies to an impressive ability to economize in hard financial times, and will allow the university now to build its future on the basis of a sounder financial foundation. For this achievement, the University is to be commended.

The Strategic Plan forecasts a gradual increase in student numbers, emphasising a continuous development of flexible and distance-learning opportunities. Doctoral studies are being planned. There are also plans for new masters degree programmes, in collaboration with other universities, in Iceland and abroad.

The team learned of the importance to UNAK of the current national project to increase cooperation between the Icelandic public universities. This is a well-funded national project involving all the public universities to support shared development across the public sector institutions in a variety of areas. The team was aware of the outcomes of this project in relation to the new database in place at UNAK and also the funds to enable UNAK to hire a teachers' consultant. While this national network initiative is welcomed by UNAK, and was spoken of very positively by staff whom the team met, there seemed to be some specific problems in relation to the new IT platform which are discussed later in this report.

1.6 Response to previous reviews/accreditation exercises

UNAK was accredited by MESC 2007–2008 in the fields of social sciences, health sciences, and natural sciences and agriculture. At the time of the Review, three of UNAK's eight faculties had completed their institution-led reviews at the subject level (a related component of the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework), i.e. the Faculty of Business Administration (FBA), the Faculty of Education (FE) and the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS). Their self-review reports formed part of the documentation on which the RA is based, and the RA has a separate chapter providing a summary of these reports. According to these summaries, recommendations by the teams have already resulted in direct changes, e.g. in the learning structure of the undergraduate programme in the FBA, which has been changed to better meet the needs of the distance-learners. The case study component of the RA, submitted as part of this exercise, contained an analysis of the realisation of this quality enhancement process derived from the institution-led subject review. From both its reading of the material and meeting with related faculty staff, the team was able to confirm the efficacy of this subject-level review.

For the upcoming Institution-led Subject Level Reviews, UNAK anticipates that the already completed reviews will be of great help. For example, the faculties at the School of Health Sciences aim to follow the same processes as those tried and tested in the previous exercises. This process of sharing practices, experiences and ownership across schools and faculties is indeed commendable and is a process that could valuably be extended.

For the Quality Board's Institution-wide Review these faculty-led evaluations have been extremely helpful in terms of providing a deeper insight into the teaching and learning strategies of the respective faculties, the quality enhancement processes and the curriculum development strategies. Even though the FSS report is very different from the other two in tone and tenor, the three reports have all provided the team with valuable knowledge of UNAK and, in themselves, have clearly resulted in positive changes for the faculties and, most importantly, their students.

Some of the recommendations in these reports imply a need for additional funding, e.g. replacing old technology with new, and more modern, hardware and software. Understandably, the institution has not been able to meet all such recommendations. Nevertheless, the team finds the recommendations both justifiable and important, given that distance-learners constitute the majority of the student population, and well-functioning technology is a prerequisite for a sound, high quality learning experience for these students. The team was pleased to see that the subject-level reports did not shirk away from making such recommendations. In general, the team was impressed by the constructive and highly professional way in which these subject-level reviews were both carried out and followed through.

1.7 Production of the Reflective Analysis

The production of the RA was a substantial task for UNAK, as it is of course for all the Icelandic universities, particularly when it is being carried out for the first time. The editor of the report was the Director of Quality Management, with the help of a self-evaluation committee consisting of the Rector, student members, the Deans of the three schools and representatives from the administration. Several working groups of teachers, administrative staff and students worked on different parts of the report, as the explicit aim was to actively involve as many staff and students as possible in the process. This aim appeared to have been achieved, as the team found that the RA was well known to, and appreciated by, most of the members of the academic community at UNAK. Thus, the team concludes that the self-evaluation process has resulted in full institutional ownership of the content of the RA.

The structure of the RA follows closely that suggested in the *Quality Enhancement Handbook*. The RA was accompanied by comprehensive reference material, either linked to the RA or provided in a specifically composed electronic folder remotely accessible to the team (via SFTP), helpfully organised in accordance with the structure of the RA. An action plan of 40 different items formed a central part of the RA. In a separate document, the Action Plan is supplemented with a timeline for individual actions and identification of all the specific individuals responsible for specific actions. This is a very important document, which will be

activated when UNAK, in the near future, starts the follow-up processes following this review (See Annex 1).

In addition to being a very useful internal document, the RA provides a helpful, detailed and substantiated insight into the university for external audiences. It is a clearly-structured, analytical, comprehensive, evidence-based and well-written document: it both looks at the evidence of the past, but uses this to be forward-looking, identifying many issues for further action. When difficult or controversial issues are touched upon in the RA, they are discussed in an open and self-critical manner; an attitude that also prevailed during all the discussions with staff, students and others at the university. The University is to be commended for its production of a clear, open and honest, well-supported and action-orientated RA.

1.8 Evaluation

UNAK has a clear mission and a distinctive role to play in higher education in contemporary Iceland. It offers students and staff excellent facilities on the campus area at Sólborg in Akureyri. The regional importance of UNAK appeared to be strongly valued by all, and was heavily stressed in most meetings during the site visit, including meetings with alumni and external stakeholders. With regard to the community and societal role of UNAK, the university should consider taking further measures in support of this role and project this area of strength more clearly in the image and positioning of the institution.

The high percentage of distance-learners is both an asset and a challenge to the University. It is an asset because over the years students studying at a distance have represented a significant proportional increase within UNAK's student population. In addition, the future strategy of the University builds further on its ability to offer opportunities to distance-learners. However, to teach students at a distance, and even more so, to provide for distance-learners and on-campus students simultaneously, brings with it specific pedagogical and technological challenges, into which the University is recommended to look more deeply. The costs of continuously renewing technological equipment for distance-learning on an ideal timescale add to the financial challenges for the institution. However, its capacity to stabilize its financial situation during years of cut-back is indeed commendable and this

secure financial management will hopefully allow it to gradually address some of these technological matters and also demonstrate the value of investment in UNAK.

Throughout the RA and also permeating the meetings of the site visits and pervading the 40-point action plan, a commendable capacity for open self-reflection and self-criticism emerged. This represents both considerable strength and a future opportunity for the institution. The inclusive nature of the RA and the process behind it has furthered an important sense of shared ownership and commitment among students and staff.

The Review Team formed the view that management of the university is in the hands of a team of competent and committed individuals who have a strong sense of the specificities of the institution and the special role UNAK plays in providing higher education to mostly rural areas. The management team is, moreover, strongly committed to the region in which UNAK is located and has a strong sense of societal responsibility. It might, however, consider the benefit of delegating authority within the senior team for taking prime responsibility for the different governing and senior management committees and councils to maximise the value of specialists' capacity and diversity within this senior group.

2 SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS

2.1 Overview

The management of quality and standards at UNAK is located firmly within the Quality Enhancement Framework as described in the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education. The team commends UNAK for the enthusiasm and rigour with which it is embracing the Quality Enhancement Framework, and for the positive and open ways in which it has conducted both subject-level reviews and the current institutional review. This has been very obvious, for example in the RA, the accompanying material and the associated dialogue during the review visit. This institutional approach and culture presents UNAK in a most positive light as being highly self-aware and proactive in its approaches to quality, which in itself further reinforces the team's confidence in the institution's management of

quality and standards now and in the future. The 40-point action plan, which UNAK has itself identified (and presented) through preparation of the reflective analysis is testament to this.

2.2. Institutional approaches to managing standards.

The core processes and responsibilities for the management of quality and standards are set out in UNAK's Quality Handbook. The aim of the Quality Handbook, as described in the reflective analysis, is to provide access to all rules, regulations and process descriptions in use at the University, continuously updated as required. The team found that both staff and students were generally aware of and familiar with the Quality Handbook and found it a useful point of reference.

2.3 The Quality Council and its relationship with other groups

The overall responsibility for quality and standards within UNAK lies ultimately with the Rector. However, to support this area of responsibility and management, UNAK has established a Quality Council. This key committee, chaired by the Rector, includes the Deans of the three schools, the Managing Director and in addition two student representatives, one representative of the academic staff, one representative of the support and administrative staff, and the UNAK Director of Quality Management.

The stated remit of the Quality Council is:

- to be responsible for the implementation of the University's quality system
- to ensure that the University always fulfils the external requirements set for the quality of its work
- to draw interest to quality considerations within the University
- to be a forum for discussion and decision-making on the quality considerations of the University

- to contribute to improvement and development of teaching and assessment within the University
- to approve, supervise, and ensure periodic review of departments and degrees
- to monitor research quality within the University
- to compile, evaluate, and respond to that information on the operations of the University which relates to quality
- to take a stand on important changes in the operations of the University that may affect quality in its operations
- to discuss preparation and implementation of a self-evaluation and external evaluation of the University and to ensure follow-up

This remit represents a wholly appropriate range of actions and responsibilities for the purpose of underpinning both the assurance of quality and standards and also quality enhancement within UNAK. The Quality Council has already demonstrated its effectiveness through the implementation of internal subject-level reviews, preparation for the institutional review and the formulation of the 40-point quality-related action plan noted above.

However, the RA and action plan both acknowledge the need to improve the visibility of the Quality Council and its membership across the staff and student bodies and to find better ways for both groups to raise agenda items for the Quality Council to consider. The team would support this action and also encourage the Quality Council to consider further its own relationship and lines of accountability with other senior committees (the University Council and the Management Board) and with the management structures operating within the three schools.

In practice, the day-to-day operational responsibilities for quality management primarily lie within the three schools. The team formed the view that within each school institutionally agreed processes and policy were being taken forward in broadly the same manner, although with local variation in part determined by the size of each school and the complexity of its underlying faculty and departmental structures. For example, there are variations in the precise arrangements and lines of responsibility for reviewing and acting upon student survey data and for staff appraisal, although in all cases the Deans report upwards to the Quality

Council on issues and actions within each school, both through their membership of the Management Board and of the Quality Council itself and through annual school reports. The team would encourage the Quality Council to assure itself that all of this does indeed happen on a systematic basis.

Although the team has no concerns about the capacity of the current arrangements to secure quality and standards it would encourage UNAK to examine the current arrangements with a view to considering:

- If the current arrangements allow the Quality Council to be directive enough in requiring or promoting changes in practice or performance within curriculum or support teams or of individual staff
- Whether a review of performance indicators or targets, and of schemes of delegated authority and reporting would be beneficial in achieving the above objective
- Given the size of the institution and of the staff base, whether the duplication of quality processes within each school is sustainable, and if new cross-school fora or committees might be an alternative.
- Further to the above point, whether the current arrangements are in fact acting as barriers to the sharing of best practice across schools and faculties or to maximising the impact of enhancement initiatives across the whole institution.
- How in practice the Quality Council, its members and its priorities can be made more visible to, and directly engaged with, the wider staff and student body (when doing this perhaps building on the staff development days and cross-school initiatives such as the recent work on student retention).

The Quality Council reporting to the University Council will presumably take ownership of the 40-point action plan, and this may present an ideal opportunity to consider the above bullet points in the context of progressing those actions.

The team also met with members of the University Council, the highest authority within the University, which supervises matters concerning the University in general, and develops an overall strategy for the University. The University Council contributes to, organises, and

supervises cooperation between schools and communication with parties outside the University. University Council members were aware of the work being undertaken by the Quality Council (which reports to it) and of its importance. Again, the team would encourage the use of the 40-point action plan as a possible basis for reviewing models for reporting and performance management, this time from the Quality Council up to the University Council. In general, in the view of the team, the University Council may wish to consider the extent to which it is receiving the appropriate information and evidence on which it can robustly base its oversight and planning responsibilities.

2.4 Course monitoring, validation and review

Student course evaluations are a key element of course monitoring within UNAK. Students evaluate courses at the end of each semester (and in some pilot cases mid-semester). Evaluations are considered by teaching staff and groups within the schools and faculties (with some variation in the precise arrangements across the three schools, although in all cases these are clearly documented). The RA states that this evaluation is directly linked to career development interviews: this aspect is discussed later in this section.

Students generally reported that they welcome the opportunity to evaluate courses, although they were not universally convinced of the merit of the current arrangements. The Quality Council has already been working closely with the Student Union to improve the low student participation rates in evaluations and to give better evidence to students that their feedback has been used to inform change. These are common challenges for Higher Education Institutions, and the Quality Council is encouraged to continue this work. Distance-learning students articulated some particular concern about how easily their evaluation and feedback might be attributed back to them individually, and this is one specific point that the Quality Council might wish to consider. The Quality Council may also wish to consider other techniques for gathering student views on the quality of their experience, for example, the use of student-led staff/student consultative committees. Student evaluation are further discussed below, see paragraph 3.11.

The RA states that the Quality Council has a general oversight of information arising from student evaluations, and that this is discussed at least once a semester, with a verbal report from each school submitted to the Quality Council. The team would simply encourage the Quality Council to reflect on the value of asking for formal written reports from the schools and to consider how it uses that data (and other management information at its disposal) to direct change where required. Although the team was reassured that almost all staff responded constructively to student feedback and evaluation (and indeed there is much good practice in terms of on-going dialogue between staff and students in addition to the formal evaluation), the team also noted that in isolated cases individual staff may be less willing to make changes in response to unfavourable student feedback or to poor levels of student achievement. In such cases the team was told, on more than one occasion, that there was little that could be done if staff were underperforming and unwilling to change their practice. If this is indeed correct it should be a key point for the Quality Council to consider.

The teaching staff that the team met indicated that they were given considerable academic freedom to shape the precise detail of curriculum content and assessment, within the definitions of approved courses and modules and with due reference to agreed learning outcomes. The faculties and schools all have appropriate arrangements in place for the approval of changes to courses and for periodic curriculum review. There are also robust processes in place for establishing entirely new curricula or making substantial changes to existing curricula, although some staff indicated that the necessary time frames for submission of proposals are too narrow (in terms of an annual planning cycle), and the Quality Council had therefore agreed to review the processes. That last point aside, the team was of a view that these processes were robust while at the same time not presenting unnecessary barriers to the academic freedom of teaching staff to enhance or evolve their curriculum, or to adapt it to any change in staff profile and expertise.

2.5 Use of learning outcomes

UNAK has been actively engaged in the implementation of learning outcomes since 2007. This is an example of an area being progressed through cross-school working, supported by

the UNAK Bologna team, which has members from all schools. Learning outcomes for courses are now clearly visible through the online course catalogues. The team very much welcomes the observation made by the Director of Quality Management that, although this work started from the perspective of compliance with Bologna requirements, it has now moved into the broader utilisation and consideration of learning outcomes as important benchmarks for curriculum design, delivery and assessment. The team were pleased to learn that ongoing work on learning outcomes is increasingly moving into a pedagogy, a teaching practice and an enhancement space (now also supported by UNAK's recently appointed teacher's consultant). The team look forward to learning about the outcomes from these further developments.

2.6 Assessment practices

University regulations on course assessment were reviewed in 2011 to accommodate variations in practice across the institution. Beyond core regulations around roles and duties of supervising teachers, other teaching staff and the Examinations Manager, the regulations describe examination periods, procedures, registrations and marking requirements as well as requirements for external examiner appointments. Schools and faculties may issue further local rules subject to approval by the University Council.

The balance of continuous assessment and assessment via final exam varies between schools and faculties, as do criteria for minimum grades to be achieved in individual assessment elements. Although there is much variation, this is well documented and neither staff nor students raised any issues with the variation in practice. In the view of the team, this diversity, while not currently problematical, is a matter that the Quality Council may wish to keep under review if there is a significant increase in the flexibility for students to combine courses from different departments, faculties or schools within their programmes of study.

The team noted the reduction in the use of external examiners, which had been implemented following budget constraints. It was reassured that these reductions had been implemented in a considered way (retaining the use of external examiners

for graduation projects for a Masters degree). The team was pleased to learn that the maintenance of external examiners within Masters programmes was a matter on which the Quality Council had been able to exercise its ultimate authority for the assurance of standards.

The quality action plan in the Reflective Analysis does acknowledge three discrete areas for further consideration:

- Clarifying the role of the Examinations Manager in relation to online examinations (predominantly through Moodle at present).
- Reviewing the extent to which it is possible to avoid student assessments relying on the view of only one examiner.
- Ensuring that the Quality Council has a system for monitoring and reviewing assessment practices at UNAK

The Review Team commends UNAK for formulating appropriate actions to maintain institutional oversight of this area.

2.7 UNAK Evaluation of Assessment Processes

The RA contains a substantive section on the evaluation of assessment processes, particularly the return of marks and feedback to students and the use of summative and formative assessment. This evaluation draws together information from a number of sources (including surveys on implementation of learning outcomes, Spring 2013 student course evaluations, subject level self- review (Faculty of Education) and the Spring 2013 Attitude Survey on the Learning Environment at UNAK). In itself this is commendable in the way in which UNAK has drawn together relevant information from various sources. It is also notable that the follow-up actions span not only technical developments in relation to the use of UGLA and Moodle, but also include the development of support for teaching staff, and improved processes to support distance-learners in relation to assessment feedback, all aimed at improving both the quality and equivalence of teaching and support for all students. This evidence-based approach is commendable, and the team would not only encourage the

Quality Council to progress these actions, but also to reflect on the potential of such approaches to the evaluation of other areas of academic operation (the work of the Student Retention group being another example of such an approach).

2.8 ICT platforms

In the meetings the team had with both staff and students, the move to UGLA was still not viewed as wholly positive by many individuals. Students were both appreciative of the use of social media platforms and other forms of ICT-based support (for example through Moodle and Facebook) utilised by staff, but were also at times worried and confused by the lack of consistency and quality in the use of various platforms by staff. In a sense this is a positive observation, as the early adopters or enthusiasts for technology-enhanced delivery become more visible to students, so students become less tolerant of those staff not engaging effectively with the available technology. Staff were also aware of the need to make effective use of these platforms but also of the requirement for more training and support to enable them to do so. Importantly, UNAK should, through an addition to the action plan, address the problems created by different parts of the university using different digital platforms and social media and begin to evolve a University-wide strategy and approach with associated staff development and student support.

2.9 Distance delivery.

All groups that the team met recognised growth in distance or blended delivery models as fundamental to UNAK's mission and future strategy. It was clear to the team, and to all staff they met, that there will be a need for substantial and carefully planned investment in equipment and staff support for this to be achieved effectively. The distance delivery students that the team spoke to were, without exception, positive about their overall experience, the support they received and the opportunities afforded to them through distance delivery. There were also clear instances of teaching teams responding positively to issues faced by distance delivery students (the case study from the Business Faculty described within the Reflective Analysis is one particularly good example). However,

students also reported a variety of approaches and competencies in online delivery or real-time video-conferencing (from excellent to poor), and both staff and students reported technical issues with equipment and the need for better staff support and training in the use of technology and pedagogical approaches to blended learning.

The team fully acknowledges the positive steps that UNAK is taking in this respect: for example; the work presented in the Business Faculty case study; the appointment of a Teacher's Consultant to support staff development and pedagogical initiatives; the production of guidance and instruction for learning centres around examination procedures; and the engagement with other HEIs internationally to learn from the approaches they are taking to blended delivery and supporting learners at a distance. However, the team developed the impression that, at the present time, individual staff and curriculum teams are free to take whatever approaches they wish to distance delivery and that there is no clear overarching institutional policy or framework for this key aspect of UNAK's developing work. The team therefore formed the strong view that there is an urgent need for UNAK to formulate a full institutional strategy and a related investment plan to address the challenges of the growing provision of distance-learning, building on knowledge and experience gained to date across the University, including that embodied in the case study. This need relates to both technical and pedagogical matters.

2.10 Student Survey data.

The RA contains a wide range of data relating to students and staff including information on student satisfaction in relation to many aspects of their experience in applying to and studying at UNAK. The team was also presented with a digest of surveys conducted within UNAK since 2007, primarily with the student body and to a lesser extent with staff. This data is primarily derived from periodic 'Attitude Surveys' of student views and also from focus group activities. Some surveys align with preparation for institutional or subject-level review and others are associated with specific themes of enquiry (such as student retention, which is discussed more extensively in section 3.5). Student attitude and levels of satisfaction are further measured through the annual course evaluations.

UNAK is to be commended on the efforts it is making to capture data relating to the student experience in this way and to use it to inform quality-related developments and actions. Students did not report that they felt that the number of surveys was excessive, rather that they valued the opportunity to give their views. However (and as noted earlier) students did state that they would welcome clearer indications of what actions had been taken in response to their feedback, and the Quality Council is encouraged to consider this. Furthermore, data available from these surveys and from UGLA is an increasingly rich resource which the Quality Council should make full use of in formulating measurable targets for, or measuring the impact of, many of the quality-related actions and projects it has already framed within its action plan. As appropriate, it might also be useful to share some of this data in suitable forms with the University Council to assist it in its overall monitoring and strategic development roles.

2.11 Staff support, appraisal and development.

It is important to note at the outset of this section that the students at UNAK consistently informed the team that they hold the staff, collectively, in high regard. Inevitably they report variations in staff teaching styles and engagement with the student body, but on the whole students recognise and genuinely value the professionalism, commitment and approachability of the teaching and support staff.

Within UNAK there are appropriate processes in place for the appointment of new staff and the appraisal of staff for promotion. There are also documented processes for the reception, induction and support for new staff appointees. There is a stated requirement for all staff to submit an annual report outlining their research output, teaching, innovation and development, as well as administrative duties. This leads to a points-based evaluation of their outputs, which can result in support for salary increases or evidence for promotion. This evaluation may also relate to applications to UNAK's Work Assessment Fund, which allocates payments for research and innovation in teaching that exceed the normal work duty. Professors (full, associate, assistant or adjunct) can also apply for sabbaticals, this scheme having recently been reintroduced after a period where it did not run because of

budgetary constraints. Administrative and support staff have access to a similar scheme to undertake professional training leave.

The Reflective Analysis also documents a system of staff development interviews, which all staff should be offered at least once every two years. These interviews, with a senior member of the administrative staff (i.e. Rector, Head of University Office, Deans, Heads of Faculty) are intended not only to offer staff counselling in relation to their careers, but also to discuss issues requiring improvement and the results of students' course evaluations. This is stated as being a key part of the course evaluation process.

The team was aware that the University recognises that there are issues with how all of the above processes are, in practice, understood and implemented by members of staff and within the different schools and faculties. The University acknowledges that there is no single HR Manager and that the job of coordinating the necessary activities in relation to the appointment of new staff falls to several individuals, that staff reception and induction is not always taking place, and that the provision of a staff handbook on UGLA is not yet complete (although planned for 2014). Similarly, the existence or implementation of staff development interviews was recognised as being very patchy across the institution.

This all accords with the various experiences of both new and established staff, and their line managers, as discussed in their various meetings with the team. On a positive note it was reported that schools and faculties are small, and that much of the due process does occur albeit in an informal manner. On a negative note the team was told that some new staff had received no induction or guidance in developing their teaching and that in some cases documented professional review meetings had not been offered for many years (or conversely that staff failed to attend these meetings when they were scheduled). When taken alongside the point made in several meetings that underperformance of staff could not be addressed unless the member of staff concerned was willing to engage with the issue, this variation and lack of consistent adherence to formal process is, if accurate, a point of concern. The team therefore strongly recommends that UNAK prioritise implementing and also monitoring effective processes for staff induction, development and performance

reviews, covering all schools (based upon the actions it has already identified in section 2.6 of the RA).

Within UNAK each school also runs professional staff development days that all staff within the school are encouraged to attend at least once per semester. In addition, the Bologna Working Group and the IT support staff have run support and information sessions for staff as part of their work. The staff with whom the team spoke reported that these activities were very helpful, but a common theme in dialogue was that more training in the use of ICT equipment especially for distance delivery of teaching and for the effective use of online platforms such as Moodle and UGLA would be highly desirable.

Although each school is clearly taking steps to support staff development, staff suggested that more opportunities to engage with colleagues across schools would be helpful in relation to sharing professional practice, opening up opportunities for collaboration or simply to strengthen their peer network. In different contexts the same issue of opening up more cross-school opportunity for interdisciplinary learning and study was also raised by current students and alumni as being something that would be beneficial to the learner experience and the development of graduate skills (acknowledging that some examples of this already exist). UNAK is encouraged to reflect on these points and ensure that both staff and students have an appropriate level of opportunity to engage across the institution and to build on existing examples of cross-School working and interdisciplinarity. (See also below, section 4.)

2.12 Accuracy and Quality of Public Information.

UNAK's website is a primary point of access to information for the staff and student bodies of the University as well as for the general public. Icelandic and English versions of the website are in place with much information (and most core information) available in both languages. The maintenance of the website is the responsibility of the Office of Marketing and Public Relations. The team found both the website and the printed brochure on studies at UNAK to be very well designed and accessible and to be comprehensive in the materials and information they provided. The website has an editorial committee with representatives

from the University Office and the schools' office managers. The editorial committee is responsible for keeping the information on the website up to date. UNAK recognises that a large number of staff have writing privileges for the website and that information may not always be updated as often as it should be. A webmaster has been appointed on a trial basis and the processes for the administration of the websites will be reviewed in an attempt to ensure that the standard and accuracy of the website is maintained in the future. Overall the team was impressed with new developments in the marketing strategies of the university, including the quality of on-line and printed materials.

Enrolled students also get information about their studies and their grades through the learning platform Moodle. Although not related to accuracy or quality of information per se, students reported that staff approaches to using the platform vary. For ease of use the students indicated that they would prefer that staff use one or two standardised templates for placing courses materials on Moodle. The team noted that a commitment to designing and implementing these templates had been noted as an action by the Quality Council. The team would support the students in this matter.

3 THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

3.1 Overview.

This section of the Report provides an analysis of the student journey from recruitment to graduation, commenting on the learning environment experienced by undergraduate, postgraduate, campus-based and distance-learning students. The commentary draws heavily on the Reflective Analysis and associated material submitted by the University and also the discussions held with a wide range of students, staff, alumni and local/regional stakeholders during the Review Visit.

The student population at the University is diverse. There is a consistently high proportion of female students (some 78% of total students in 2013), a high proportion of older students (some 50% of students in 2013 over the age of 29), and, a majority of students engaging with

their studies through distance-learning (in 2013, around 38% of students engaged with their learning on a face-to-face basis). With the exception of the undergraduate law programme, all provision is currently available on both campus-based and distance-learning formats. UNAK is therefore a major provider in Iceland of distance-learning. Since only some 25% of its students come from the capital area, it is also a major provider of education to the rural population of Iceland.

Given the diverse nature of the student population, it is clear that the learning experience of the students is also diverse. As described above in Section 2, the University has in place a framework for systematic course evaluations submitted by students on completion of all courses. In addition, a range of surveys is carried out on specific aspects of the student experience by the University Research Centre (URC). The Quality Council of the University has established a survey team to oversee the execution of these surveys carried out by the URC. In 2013 surveys were carried out in relation to:

- Student drop-out at UNAK Spring 2013
- Attitude surveys on the learning environment among students at UNAK
- Attitude surveys among graduates from the Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Social Science in 2008 and 2011
- Attitude survey among graduates from the School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Natural Resource Sciences in 2008 and 2011

In 2012, the work of the URC included undertaking a survey among students in the Faculty of Business Administration who were enrolled for studies in the 2011 fall semester but did not continue their studies in the 2012 spring semester.

This same systematic approach to developing an evidence-based approach to supporting learning was further apparent in the Case Study submitted by the University as part of its Reflective Analysis for this Review. The University is to be commended for the extensive and systematic gathering of evidence on key aspects of the student experience. However, it is recommended that care be taken to ensure that the outcomes of this work are widely

disseminated among the students, faculties and schools and is also used to support the policy making and monitoring functions of the Quality Council and University Council.

3.2 Recruitment

In the main, student recruitment is the responsibility of the Office of Marketing and Public Relations acting in concert with the individual faculties and schools. Given the competitive nature of student recruitment, the University devotes considerable effort to its recruitment activities, both in terms of the materials produced and in direct contact with its communities. The team was pleased to note the increasing involvement of students in these activities. UNAK takes a full part in the national Icelandic University Day alongside the other higher education institutions. In addition, presentations are given in the upper secondary schools supported by booklets prepared by the Office of Marketing and Public Relations. A more recent initiative is to bus young people into the University from upper secondary schools as well as inviting individuals to come into the University in order to sample university life by becoming ‘students for a day’.

The main University prospectus and the University website have both been recently revised to increase transparency and ease of use. The new format for the website is smart-phone friendly – an increasingly important feature in the student market. The University is to be commended for these developments in its electronic and printed material. It is clearly extremely important that the messages being communicated are consistent, accurate and up-to-date. In this context, the team would encourage the University to continue to make progress with establishing clear rules for authoring rights regarding the main University website, as discussed briefly above (paragraph 2.13). Equally, it was observed that some of the material was out of date and it is recommended that the University takes steps to ensure that there are clear responsibilities to ensure that all material put into the public domain is accurate and fully up-to-date.

The dominance of females in the student population has been noted earlier. It was argued to the team that this was, at least to some extent, a reflection of both the nature of the curriculum available at UNAK and the part-time nature and age distribution of the student

population. However, the point was made strongly on many occasions by groups and individuals met by the team (including, importantly, stakeholders from the local/regional community and alumni), that this imbalance must be limiting the horizons for young males in the local/regional population. Given the importance of UNAK as a vital resource for the local community (and, indeed, for the rural population of Iceland) the team recommends that the University give serious and urgent consideration to how this imbalance might be addressed.

3.3 Student induction

All new students are invited to attend induction days. These are organized by the Director of Marketing and Publications and include introductions to the nature of the academic studies about to start and the support and information services available to sustain the students in their future studies. The Student Union – both the University-wide and the Faculty Student Unions – also plays an active role in the induction days. In the 2013 student attitude survey carried out by the URC, some 51% of the students who returned the survey indicated that they had attended an induction day in 2012. Various improvements were made to the arrangements for induction in 2013, and the groups met by the team reported an increased uptake and a higher level of student satisfaction. There has been an increasing involvement of existing students in the induction process, and the timing of induction days now timed to be adjacent to the start of formal teaching. This latter element was reported as being extremely important for part-time distance-learning students. It was also reported positively that more effort was being made to integrate the campus-based and distance-learning students during induction, a move that was strongly welcomed by both groups.

3.4 International students

All international students are allocated a ‘buddy’ who is a volunteer from the existing student body who will help the international students to settle into both the University and the local community. However, in general, the team was informed that the international students were largely contained as a separate group rather than being more integrated with other students

on their course or indeed in the University. While there are obvious language issues that have to be addressed, the University is encouraged to find ways to fully integrate international students into the life and work of the University and the local community. It is through such integration that the University and its students will gain most from the presence of international students, and the international students, in turn, will gain from their studies in Iceland in general and at UNAK in particular.

3.5 Student retention and progression and implications for teaching and learning strategies

As discussed above (paragraph 3.1), the student population at UNAK is different from a 'traditional' university student population in that a majority of UNAK students study at a distance and, in 2013, approximately half of the students were over the age of 29. This is relevant in the area of retention and progression given international evidence on the comparative dropout rates of these categories of students compared with fulltime campus-based students continuing their studies within a few years of high school completion. The Reflective Analysis indicated that the drop-out rate after one year between 2000-2012 averaged 29% with a spread from 10% or less (Faculties of Nursing and Occupational Therapy) to around 40% (Faculties of Business Administration and Natural Resource Sciences). The graduation rate for the same years was reported to be an average of 53% with a spread from 89% to 39%.

The issues surrounding student dropout and graduation rates have been extensively researched by the University. For example, the Student Retention Team on behalf of the Quality Council carried out a survey of all 1,437 students registered in April 2011 with a response rate of 32.6%. An attitude survey among graduates from the various Faculties in 2008 and 2011 was carried out to identify perceived strengths and weaknesses. In 2012 a telephone survey was carried out among students in the Business Faculty who were enrolled for studies in the fall semester but did not continue their studies in the 2012 spring semester. In addition, the team was informed about a study visit undertaken to Norway to investigate their handling of issues of student dropout, particularly in the first semester. The University

is commended for the extensive and thorough gathering of evidence to inform itself of the underlying nature of these problems and on which potential policy may be based.

In the main, these surveys have been commissioned by the Quality Council through a Student Retention Team established in 2010. Following the 2011 survey, two pilot projects were initiated in Modern Studies and Fisheries Science involving close links between students and an academic advisor during the first semester. Although lack of resources did not allow this initiative to be fully developed, the team was informed that the initial indications were that this initiative reduced dropout by some 10%. The team would strongly encourage the University to explore how and when this form of support might be rolled out across the University.

In general, the outcomes of these surveys indicated, unsurprisingly, a marked difference in dropout and graduation rates among campus-based and distance-learning students, with the former achieving significantly higher completion rates. The surveys indicate that with campus-based students reasons for dropout were more likely to be related to course-related factors in comparison to the distance-learning students. The latter category of students was more likely to have significant family and work responsibilities and dropout was reported to be linked to the challenges of managing these competing pressures. Notwithstanding these challenges, the team was informed of initiatives being taken by the University to alleviate the impact of some of these problems. A prime example of this was described in the adjustments being made to the approach to distance-learning provision in the Business Faculty as outlined in the case study submitted by the Business Faculty for which the Faculty is to be commended.

There were a number of areas where the team was aware of the need for further development to support the students, in particular the distance-learning students. For example, the team was informed by some students that some lectures were not recorded and that, if they could not be joined at a distance “live”, these were simply unavailable. The team was pleased to learn in subsequent discussion that this situation is being remedied. While not a universal view, there was a perception amongst a significant number of students that the confusion in electronic platform added to their woes. In some cases, the team was informed

that staff utilized only the Moodle platform for all communication and material, which reportedly worked well. In other cases, allegedly, staff struggled to use the UGLA platform for some communications, Moodle for others and simple e-mail for others. This unsystematic mix was reported as causing confusion at best and leading to total breakdown of communication at worst. Students also reported significant variation in the quality of the equipment available to staff and also in staff expertise in the use of the equipment. This problem was seen to be further confounded by the absence in some cases of appropriate pedagogic approaches being adopted to support effective learning at a distance. In such cases, albeit that it appeared to the team to be in a small minority, the style of delivery was offering no opportunities for any active engagement of the learner at a distance.

In making these critical points, the team is conscious of the enthusiastic commitment of both students and staff to the success of the endeavour. The students whom the team met talked consistently of the importance and value of their studies, their appreciation for the efforts of the staff and their high regard for the University. The students themselves also had undertaken valuable initiatives to support each other. For example, the team was informed of the serious importance of the Facebook communities amongst the students and their role in self-help and in sustaining each other through difficult periods. The team is also conscious of the commitment of staff to providing effectively for their growing community of distance-learners. However, as a consequence of financial constraints, the University has not been in a position to invest in technology appropriate to supporting a growing population of students learning at a distance. This is a key area in the future strategic development of the university and we recommend that, as soon as practicable, this should receive attention. However, this is not simply a matter of capital investment. We also recommend that, as a matter of some priority, the University should engage in a process of sharing and developing good practice in pedagogy for supporting learning at a distance. The University has learned much from its diverse experience in this area, at least some of which has been captured in the survey evidence collected. The team met many experienced and committed staff in this area. While we are not suggesting a total uniformity of approach, it is important that the University as a community should agree on a teaching and learning strategy that will support all its learners (distance-learners and campus-based) most effectively. Finally, alongside the development of the strategy will be the serious requirement for staff support and

development to enable all staff both to contribute to shaping the strategy and then to its successful implementation. We therefore recommend that alongside the investment in new technology should run the creation of a University-wide general approach to supporting all learners together with a programme of staff development. For the avoidance of doubt, this recommendation is not intended to be critical of existing staff, processes and initiatives, but rather intended to stress the importance of building on staff expertise to achieve the goals that the University has set itself.

3.6 The development of graduate attributes (see also section 2.12 above)

The various surveys of UNAK graduates carried out by the University's Survey Team available to the team indicate a very high level of satisfaction in the way their studies prepared them for life after graduation. This was a view strongly supported both by the UNAK alumni whom the team met, and also by the group of local/regional employers who engaged with the team. Some 90% of UNAK graduates were reported to be in a permanent job within three months of graduation with 81% in a job directly related to their studies. Given the vocational objectives of the programmes at UNAK this is an important achievement.

It is interesting to note in passing the strong commitment to the University of both the alumni and the representatives of local/regional employers met by the team. Both groups stressed the importance of the University in providing much needed opportunities for the educational and personal development of both school-leavers and the adult population. The University was also seen as an important local resource in supporting the enhancement of local businesses and the local/regional community more generally. In the areas of Education and Health Studies, in particular, these links were already well developed.

All whom the team met from the local/regional community enthusiastically declared their willingness to be more involved in supporting and contributing to the University and its students.

Representatives of the University have been heavily involved in the development of the Higher Education Qualification Framework for Iceland and it is clearly in evidence in the description of the awards of the University. In this context, learning outcomes have been introduced throughout the institution. However, the team was not aware of the impact of this development beyond the description of the curricula. The team was informed of the intention, through the newly appointed pedagogical specialist and otherwise, to explore further the implications of learning outcomes for teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Moreover, the team was informed that further work on graduate attributes is likely to take place in this context. The team would support this intention and looks forward to learning of further developments in this area.

3.7 The learning environment and student support services

All campus-based students and staff whom the team met indicated a very high degree of satisfaction with the environment in which they studied and worked. In general, the user-friendly environment was supported by approachable and positive staff. It was mentioned to the team, for example, that if there were ever an apparent lack of a room for a small discussion group, the staff at the ‘front-of-house’ desk would very quickly find one if requested. In the 2013 student survey of the learning environment (*op.cit*), 88.4% of the students indicated that they were either happy or very happy with the learning environment. Importantly, there was not a significant difference between campus-based students (89%) and those learning at a distance (87.1%). The team concludes this brief paragraph by agreeing with the comment in the Reflective Analysis that the University is indeed ‘housed in a beautiful environment that students and staff alike think highly of’.

The team was informed that, due to the joint teaching of campus-based and distance-learning students, the pressure on laboratories could be very intense at specific times (such as during intensive on-campus study weeks for distance-learners), but was generally manageable. The team also learned that there was very high pressure on the laboratory facilities shared by academic staff, graduate and exchange students. In the light of the expressed intention to increase both the number of graduate students and research intensity, the team would agree that this is a matter requiring attention, and note the plans of the

University in this context. It was also noted that the University intends to modernize the equipment in the Occupational Therapy laboratory.

Without repeating any of the points expressed in full above (paragraph 3.5 and elsewhere in this report), the team notes the requirement for significant investment in the IT infrastructure. In relation to student support services in IT, the Reflective Analysis notes that the IT Centre provides support to students and staff in relation to the use of UNAK's in-house hardware and software. The IT centre also supervises the use of videoconferencing for both teaching and meetings. It also provides support to the various centres outwith the main campus. The team also heard that the IT Centre provides support for students using their own equipment. The 2013 student Attitude Survey on the learning environment (*op.cit.*) ranked the service they received from the IT staff very highly, with some 80% of students saying they were either satisfied or highly satisfied. The IT help-desk also met with a high degree of student satisfaction. The lowest level of satisfaction was noted against the maintenance of the computer hardware. This reflects the challenge, expressed to the team on several occasions, of keeping equipment beyond its efficient shelf-life, a point with which the team would strongly agree as expressed above.

In relation to the University of Akureyri Library (UAL), the Reflective Analysis indicates that the "aim of UAL's staff is to provide outstanding professional and personal library services to both students and staff of UNAK". In addition to its own collection, the library participates in the Iceland Consortium for electronic subscriptions to journals and databases. The library also participates in (and, indeed, initiated) the online institutional repository of Icelandic University Libraries.

The UAL and, in particular, its staff, met with universal praise from all students and staff whom the team met. The library is constrained by financial realities and the librarian informed the team that she would wish to expand provision in relation to information literacy and also increase the availability of e-books. Notwithstanding these aspirations, the service provided by the library staff was clearly very highly valued by staff, by campus-based students and by students learning at a distance. It was frequently commented that the service was approachable, flexible and responsive. In the 2013 survey, some 90% of students were

satisfied or very satisfied with the ‘service orientation of library staff’. In addition, some 85% of students expressed themselves satisfied or highly satisfied with the information available on library services. The areas which score less well in the survey are those areas directly dependent on resources, including ‘regular renewal of books’ which gained around 45% satisfaction. The team commends the highly professional and supportive service provided to students and staff by the library staff.

3.8 Support for postgraduate students

At the time of the Review, UNAK did not have PhD accreditation in any areas, although the team was informed that it was the intention of the University to apply for this in the near future. In 2013, out of a total student population of 1,568, the Masters students comprised 302. The Reflective Analysis and associated material indicated that some Masters programmes were relatively tightly defined while others were more open to individual negotiation. In the School of Business and Science “Guide for the Masters Programmes, Draft 24 October 2011” provided in the supplementary material it is indicated that these individual programmes, once negotiated between the student and the supervisor, were then taken for approval to the Masters Programme Committee of the School. It is also indicated that a maximum of 18 ECTS credits could be taken from the undergraduate portfolio, and that the Research Project should comprise between 60 and 90 ECTS credits. It further specified that the taught component should be between 30 and 60 ECTS credits. It is also indicated that credits may be taken from outwith the particular school or faculty and, indeed, from outwith the University, nationally or internationally. It appeared to the team that these regulations were entirely appropriate to support Masters standards while providing and encouraging entirely fitting flexibility, well suited to this level of study. However, it was not clear to the team, or indeed to some of the postgraduate students whom the team met, whether these were the current regulations and the extent to which they applied across the University. The team would recommend the explicit harmonization of regulations for Masters awards across the University and the publication of up-to-date handbook(s) available to all students and potential students.

The range of IT problems referred to elsewhere in this report also caused some concern to postgraduate students. This related again to confusion over the use of different platforms, the dated nature of some of the equipment and the expertise of staff in utilizing the technology.

In general, the postgraduate students met by the team felt that they were served well by the University, commending in particular the academic context in which they studied, in particular in relation to: flexibility of programme; approachability, expertise and availability of supervising staff; the excellent support from the library and library staff; the links with the research of the professors; and, the general family-friendly and employment-friendly environment in which they studied. In the School of Health Sciences, one of the requirements is to publish jointly with the supervisor in refereed journals. Since 2008, this has resulted in 45 published articles in peer-reviewed journals. In general, the links between the students' studies and the professors' research was highly commended by the students. The students also greatly appreciated the ability to take credits from outwith the University as part of their programmes. On a less positive note, some students were critical of the challenges that seemed to be apparent in working across schools or faculties, and this is a matter, which, in the view of the team, the University should consider further. It is interesting to note that this problem was also raised in the Report of the "Self-review of the Faculty of Education, University of Akureyri 2013".

Given the centrality of the Research Project in the structure of the Masters degrees, the team was very pleased to learn that external examiners were utilized in the assessment of all Research Projects. The University is to be commended for its universal maintenance of external examining for all Masters Research Projects to help sustain the standards of these awards.

3.9 Linkages between teaching and research

The University Strategy 2012-2017 is explicit in indicating the expectations that all staff should be research active and be engaging generally in scholarship within their broad subject

area. The Strategy also indicates an expectation that students should be encouraged to engage with staff research. The team learned of various examples where this was clearly the case, including the laboratory sessions in Natural Resource Sciences, Nursing and Social Sciences. More generally, it was evident to the team that the research projects of Masters students dovetailed well with the research interests and activities of their supervisors and professors.

The linkages between teaching and research are obviously dependent to a large extent on the research culture of the University. The examination of research and the research culture *per se* is currently outwith the scope of these Institution-wide Reviews. However, one interesting dimension was raised with the team, namely the role of research points. These points are allocated on a scale agreed with the University of Iceland based largely, the team was informed, on publication in international peer-reviewed journals. While such a measure is important, it was argued to the team that this did not universally sit comfortably with the regional nature and responsibilities of the University of Akureyri. This point was raised both by some staff and by local stakeholders whom the team met. Also, it is interesting to note the nature of some of the research activity in the Faculty of Education that was highlighted in the Self Evaluation Report of the Faculty of Education referred to above. It is very clear from this document that professors from the Faculty of Education are heavily involved in a wide range of local and national initiatives and structures linked directly to supporting the local and national education system. While these two dimensions of research are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they may involve inherent tensions. These tensions may also have some impact on the ease with which students could become involved in particular projects. In any case, this potential tension is a matter to which the University might usefully give some attention.

In general, the team was aware of good practice in the area of linking research and teaching, particularly at postgraduate level. However, the team would agree with the conclusion reached by the University itself in the RA, that it would be helpful to explore how this aspect could be more systematically assured throughout the curriculum. In this context, it may be helpful to reflect further on the nature and implications of the research culture it wishes to sustain as mentioned above.

3.10 Appeals and complaints

There is a formal process for considering complaints enshrined in both University regulations and national legislation. Internally, the regulations are laid out in the 'Formal Complaints by Students to the Director of Quality Management'. This process was established in 2010. In addition to these internal processes, students have the right to use the national process of submitting appeals to the national Committee of Complaints for University Students. In relation to appeals, the Regulations indicate that students have the right to ask for an external examiner to review assessments.

The students whom the team met were generally aware of the arrangements for complaints and appeals, and were also aware of where they would turn for further information, help and advice. Furthermore, the students indicated that the culture at UNAK was generally open, and that any complaints would be raised promptly with the relevant staff directly or, if there was any problem with this, through the local student union representative. There also appeared to the team to be a good understanding and awareness amongst students of when it was appropriate to escalate a complaint to the next level and the processes through which this might be done.

3.11 The student voice.

Students are well represented at UNAK on most committees that affect directly the student experience right up to the Quality Council and the University Council. The main formal vehicle for obtaining student feedback is the course evaluations, which are submitted at the end of each semester. The student voice is also heard through the Student Union and its system of representatives throughout the Faculties and Schools. In addition, the students consistently highlighted to the team that UNAK is a relatively small and open university community, and therefore informal mechanisms are also effective in getting the student voice heard.

In addition to these routine mechanisms for hearing the student voice, the University carries out systematic research into the student experience through a variety of attitude surveys among the students. These surveys, referred to in previous sections of this Report (for example, see above, paragraph 3.1), are carried out by the University's Survey Team on behalf of the Quality Council. Individual faculties also carry out individual research projects to amplify the student voice. An excellent example of this is the use of focus groups and surveys by the Business Faculty in the Case Study presented as part of the University's RA. The University is commended for these systematic explorations into aspects of the student experience.

In Section 2 of this Report the course evaluation mechanism is discussed in relation to its role in helping to safeguard quality and standards (see above, paragraph 2.4). The following comments are provided in relation to the effectiveness of course evaluations in providing an effective mouthpiece for the student voice. Many members of staff and students met by the team expressed only limited satisfaction in the effectiveness of the course evaluations. This, of course, is a problem not unique to either UNAK or, indeed, to Iceland. The very low response rate of course evaluations alone limits their potential use for effectively representing the student voice. The lack of feedback to students on consequent action was seen to limit their usefulness, as did the fact that they were done on course completion when any change would not impact on current students. It is interesting to note that the Quality Council is now experimenting with mid-semester evaluations. Notwithstanding the delicacy of some of the issues involved, the students met by the team stressed the potential value to future students of making the outcome of these evaluations more publically available in some form. In addition, distance-learning students also raised with the team the potential problem of lack of anonymity if they were completing evaluations on their own computers which may well allow identification of individual respondents. The suspicion of such a problem, even if not a reality, would limit participation and bias the student voice being heard through this mechanism. These problems are added to by the fact that the evaluations are, in some cases, completed before the final examination. It was argued to the team by some students that this increased the apprehension regarding lack of anonymity for any student making any highly critical points in the evaluation. For all these reasons, it would be

useful for the University to continue to consider further ways in which it might collect course-based information of the nature of the student experience.

The team was aware of the very diverse nature of the student body and, in particular, of the large proportion of students learning at a distance. The distance-learning students met by the team were very conscious of the difficulties of getting their voice heard – not through any deliberate actions of the University, but simply due to their lack of presence on campus and to the family and employment demands made on their time. While there are very real challenges in this area, the university is encouraged to continue to ensure as far as it can that the voice of all elements of the student body can be effectively heard.

The Student Union at UNAK has been growing in strength and influence in recent years and now has a well-developed network of union representatives throughout the faculties and schools. Externally, the UNAK Student Union in general, and its past-President in particular, have been influential in facilitating discussions across the student bodies of the Icelandic higher education institutions which have led recently to the creation of a national student union in Iceland. Internally within UNAK, the Student Union has been very effective in amplifying the student voice and is a well-respected vehicle for the student voice throughout the University.

In general, the University is to be commended for the range of diverse ways in which it seeks systematically to listen to the student voice. The team was aware of the many ways in which the students were full partners within the University community, and concluded that their voice was indeed clearly heard.

Inevitably perhaps, the team was also aware of ways in which this might be further enhanced. The team heard, for example, of the lack of training, preparation and support given to new student members of senior academic committees. In the absence of such support and assistance it is simply unrealistic to expect student members, at least in the short-run, to make meaningful contributions to complex debates alongside experienced and knowledgeable senior academics. It might also be helpful in some cases to consider the appointment of at least two students to committees to avoid the potential isolation of

singletons. A further development might also be to consider how the university might create or encourage opportunities for student representatives to meet with their constituents, both to provide feedback and also to listen to their perspectives and concerns.

Finally in this context, the team would encourage the University to ensure that it gains maximum advantage from the extensive soundings it takes of the student voice. For example, it was not immediately apparent to the team that the University Council received all the information it might to help it to understand fully the experience of UNAK students. Access to this potentially powerful kind of evidence base could be extremely useful to the Council in undertaking its analysis and policy-making. For the avoidance of doubt, this is not to be critical of the University Council itself, but simply to make the point that there is potentially a very rich database to which it would be helpful to have access. It may also be the case that the Quality Council would also benefit from being able to systematically consider the implications of all the data that is increasingly available from across the University.

In general, however, the University has been very successful in establishing a vibrant partnership with its student body and the University clearly goes to considerable lengths to implement a variety of mechanisms for listening to the student voice. The above suggestions are offered to assist in receiving, considering and acting on the messages.

3.12 The student learning experience: summary evaluation

The University goes to considerable lengths to inform itself of the nature of the student learning experience, and it is commended for the extensive efforts it makes to collect systematically a wide range of evidence on the nature of the learning experience of its students. The team would encourage the University to progress with its efforts to improve the collection of course evaluation information. In general, the team would also encourage the University to ensure that the wealth of information which it does collect is made available more widely to support developing practice across the institution generally and also policy making and evaluation. One area where this might be of particular value is in relation to distance-learning. While there is considerable expertise and experience in this area, the

team formed the view that there would be much to be gained by sharing good practice and developing a University-wide strategy on pedagogy to support effective learning at a distance – and indeed, managing the tensions of sharing sessions between campus-based and distance-learning students. As the University is aware, this is an area also in need of capital investment to modernise the infrastructure available to all staff and students. These developments would bring in their wake the need for a related staff development strategy and implementation of that strategy. In the same vein, the team was impressed by the application of learning outcomes throughout the University, and would encourage the University to continue this development by exploring the implications of learning outcomes for approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. The student support services were generally spoken of highly, in particular the support provided by the University library and its staff, which was uniformly commended by all staff and students whom the team met. The international students appeared to the team to be somewhat isolated from the rest of the University, and all would gain from a closer integration of the international students into the wider University and local community.

The student voice is clearly articulated through the new structure of the Student Union, and those concerned are to be commended for this work both at a local and national level. While the University has created a comprehensive framework of representation of students on committees and working groups, the partnership with students could be further enhanced through the provision of some wider support and briefing for student representatives.

4. ENHANCEMENT

4.1 Overview

In general, the team found that UNAK integrated its management of enhancement effectively within the general context of its management of assurance of quality and standards. This was evident both in the RA and associated material and in the discussions during the visit. This is an approach which has considerable strengths, as is evident from the team's comments throughout the earlier sections of this report. The following paragraphs,

therefore, rather than repeating material already covered, provide a selective focus on specific key areas viewed by the team as being of particular relevance and importance in the context of the University's strategic management of enhancement. These issues relate in the main to the importance of university-wide strategy and policy. In highlighting these issues, the team is not inferring that a single uniform approach should necessarily be applied across the University. It is recognized that the particular contexts and challenges of the different schools will require application best fitted to its particular circumstances.

4.2 The strategic approach to managing enhancement.

In general, quality enhancement at UNAK is decentralized to the schools and faculties, while at the same time being anchored in the University Quality Council. With the Deans as *ex officio* members of the Quality Council, the school and university-level considerations are brought together and a whole University perspective can be taken. To some extent, this construction seemed to the team to have been successful. It has resulted, for example, in quality assurance and enhancement practices that, although they differed between schools and faculties, were still recognizable across the University. However, the team heard from various constituencies that there was a danger that schools and, to some extent, faculties operated on the basis of silos making sharing experiences and developments across boundaries difficult. As mentioned in section 3 of this report in the context of enhancing programme flexibility for students, the team would encourage the University to explore mechanisms for increasing the sharing of developments and experiences between Faculties and Schools. It is clear that the Quality Council may have an important role to play in this context.

Another key element of UNAK's strategic approach to managing enhancement is the pervasive use of evidence-based strategy and policy. In the previous sections of this report the important work of the Quality Council and the various survey units have been commented on. However, from its various discussions, the team formed the view that this rich seam of data available to the university might be mined more productively through a wider sharing of the outputs both formally and informally, with invitations to various groups and committees to consider the implications for their own part of the operation. The Quality

Council, and indeed perhaps also the University Council, would be able to draw on these analyses in developing and monitoring university-wide strategy, policy and practice.

A third dimension of the University strategy on enhancement is the support and development of its staff. In section 2.11 of this report, we highlight some of the positive aspects of staff development. However, we also comment there that for various reasons staff development has tended to become less formally organized, for example the staff development interviews are not uniformly systemic. Within the context of the strategic management of enhancement, staff support and development, in the view of the team, is fundamental. In general, the team was not aware of a systemic approach or agenda for staff development across the University. Given the University's intentions, for example in relation to distance-learning, the enhancement of the student experience will be dependent on effective support for the staff of the University. As indicated throughout the report, the team is conscious of the commendable efforts of staff and existing staff expertise across the university. The team is also aware of recent initiatives such as the appointment of the teaching consultant. However, the team was not aware of an overall strategy and plan to bring all this together in an action plan for staff development based firmly on a University strategy for teaching and learning. As the University moves forward, the team is of the view that strengthening its strategic and operational management of staff support and development will allow it to gain greatly from the strong foundations already in place. In addition, it would be important to monitor the implementation of these policies and continue to develop as appropriate.

4.3 Using external benchmarking to support enhancement

UNAK has a valuable and productive number of engagements with other Universities in Iceland as part of the Icelandic Public Universities Network from which the benchmarking and sharing of key statistics and performance indicators may, in the future develop (as it may also through a common data initiative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture). In addition, the University is also a very active participant in the recently re-constituted Icelandic Quality Council. Once this national Council becomes fully operational, its activities will provide increasingly important national benchmarks in key areas relating to the quality of

teaching and learning. In the view of the team, UNAK will be well placed to be, not only a leading player in the generation of such benchmarking information, but will also derive significant benefit from its application. In addition to these important domestic links, UNAK also maintains active relationships, including reciprocal site visits, with universities in Scotland, Denmark and Norway. These international links have provided the University with valuable benchmarking intelligence in a number of key areas including: information and strategies for quality management; pedagogy; enhancement of teaching and learner support; and, very importantly, the specific challenges of distributed delivery models. The team was pleased to learn of these very useful and productive initiatives and of UNAK's intentions to take further these initiatives to develop benchmarks with similar foreign and domestic Universities to support its internal quality enhancement processes.

It should also be noted that a number of programmes within UNAK, for example in Nursing and Education, are particularly closely related to employers and the labour market. In these disciplines, but also in other areas, employers reported that there were appropriate opportunities for them to engage with internal curriculum teams in the design of curriculum, and that the academic skills and knowledge of graduates were kept in line with those necessary for the workplace. At a more general level, the students met by the team appeared to be unaware of the development of employability skills in the curriculum. Indeed, this did not appear to be a matter of any concern to students outwith the directly vocationally related programmes. On a wider basis, students reported little opportunity for work placement, internship or indeed any direct support in the form of careers guidance. However, it is important to stress that the local employers whom the team met did not raise any concerns regarding the graduates' labour market abilities. Given the lack of concern by stakeholders met by the team, the team would not frame this as an issue of serious concern, but nonetheless it may be an area for potential enhancement of student experience that UNAK may wish to consider. The team is conscious of the very diverse nature of UNAK's student population, and the range of expectations they hold regarding future destinations. The team is also conscious of the high employment rates among UNAK graduates. Nonetheless, the team would wish to highlight the potential importance of employability matters to significant groups of UNAK's students. In addition, the team would highlight the fact that both the

developing Alumnus Society and regional employers whom they met suggested that they would be pleased to support initiatives in this area.

4.4 Supporting enhancement through the dissemination of good practice.

There is repeated reference throughout this report to examples of good practice in teaching and learning cited to the team by both staff and students. The team learned, for example, of some excellent practice in some courses in engaging with learners at a distance. However, it was clear in discussion with a range of students that these were isolated islands of excellence in these particular regards. Equally, the team learned of the good practice in staff development days in some faculties that appeared to be largely unknown to staff in other faculties. Indeed, there appeared to be little shared knowledge at all across the faculties in this area. In general, the team would encourage the Quality Council to consider ways in which it can identify, celebrate and disseminate good practice in supporting a high quality learning experience. This appears to be of particular importance in relation to supporting learners at a distance.

4.5 Managing Enhancement: Evaluation

In general, UNAK has successfully integrated its approach to managing enhancement with its strategy for managing the assurance of quality and standards, and this is reflected in the comments throughout this report. The purpose of this section has been to pull together some of the key threads of the team's comments that are of particular importance in the strategic and operational management of enhancement. There are a number of core areas where the University has been particularly active in seeking to enhance provision, and in which some commendable strides have been taken. Two clear examples of this (not entirely unrelated) are the areas of effectively supporting students learning at a distance, and addressing the challenges of non-completion and student dropout. In its management of enhancement, UNAK has strong foundations on which to build. The team was aware of many isolated examples of good practice and interesting developments, which were capable of generating wider benefit to the University and its students. It is in this context that the

team would encourage the further development of the commendable work on benchmarking and sharing of practice from both national and international sources. Good and interesting practice also exists within the University, but there may currently be a danger that it remains largely unknown and uncelebrated, and not disseminated more widely throughout the University. It is important that mechanisms are developed or refined to ensure the spread of good and interesting practice. This is not to say that practice may not vary throughout the institution. It is simply to suggest that it would be valuable for the University to consider moving forward on common fronts. The staff of the University are, of course, its major asset. The quality of the student learning experience is dependent on the skills and knowledge of staff. Supporting staff through systematic development opportunities is critically important, in particular in the rapidly changing technological and pedagogical environment of distance-learning. It is for these reasons that the team recommends that the University should consider strengthening its strategic and operational management of staff support and development.

One of the major strengths of quality management in the University is the pervasive collection of evidence through, for example, the extensive surveys undertaken. In its future management of enhancement, the University is encouraged to ensure that it maximizes the benefits to be derived from this evidence base by spreading the dissemination of the evidence (and associated analysis) both across the University (schools, faculties and service providers) and vertically to support the work of all the relevant staff and committees of the University.

In taking all this forward, the work of the Quality Council (and, perhaps, also the University Council) will be of particular importance. Ultimately, responsibility for the policy for, and monitoring of, strategic management of enhancement across the University rests with the Quality Council. The team therefore recommends that the Quality Council (and others as appropriate) should consider how good practice from without and within the University can be shared; how systemic approaches to supporting staff across the University might be improved; and, how the use of evidence might be more productively shared across the institution. For the avoidance of doubt, these comments are made in the context of having in many areas commendable foundations and initiatives on which to build.

5. CONCLUSION

Following its consideration of the Reflective analysis and associated evidence submitted by the University of Akureyri, and the visit to the institution on 25 – 27 March 2014, the Institutional Review Team commissioned by the Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education wishes to commend the following strengths and elements of good practice:

- the strong commitment to flexible and distance-learning, appropriate to the mission of the institution, in keeping with the university's role as a main provider of higher education in rural areas
- openness, and a convincing capacity for self reflection and self criticism, evident in the Reflective Analysis, the Institution-led Subject Level Reviews, the team's dialogue with staff, and the action plans for future development
- the seriousness with which the university is engaging with the national quality framework
- the provision of a well designed and appointed physical campus that supports effective learner engagement
- new developments in the marketing strategies of the university, including the quality of on-line and printed materials
- a university community that provides willing and responsive access for students to information and support
- a highly professional and user friendly library service for both staff and students, including those learning at a distance
- a commitment to supporting a strong student voice at the university
- a professional, committed and approachable community of academic staff
- the use of institution-wide surveys and projects aimed at enhancing the learning experience
- the stabilization of the university's financial position allowing it to build for the future on the basis of a more secure financial foundation

Areas which the team considered to be in need of further development include:

- embedding the role and work of the Quality Council more fully within the organisational structures of the university, both strategically and operationally
- evaluating, with a view to assuring equivalence and sharing best-practice, the operational and strategic processes utilised within the schools and faculties for the application of institutional policy in quality-related areas
- encouraging and promoting further opportunities for collaborative academic endeavour – for both staff and students across Faculties and Schools
- strengthening and securing the reporting lines within the quality management framework
- considering carefully the chairing of the senior committees of the university to ensure that the potential for conflicts of interest are avoided and responsibilities are delegated to maximise the value of diverse contributions from within the senior management team
- addressing, through an addition to the action plan, the problems created by different parts of the university using different digital platforms and social media
- formulating a full strategy and an investment plan to address the challenges of the growing provision of distance-learning, building on knowledge and experience across the University, including that embodied in the case study
- formulating and making use of an appropriate set of performance indicators relating to student achievement, including masters' students
- integrating international students more fully within UNAK's campus life
- implementing and monitoring effective processes for staff induction, development and performance reviews, covering all schools

The team concluded that:

- **confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the University of Akureyri's present and likely future arrangements to secure the **academic standards of its awards**;

and,

- **confidence** can be placed in the soundness of the University of Akureyri's present and likely future arrangements to secure the **quality of the student learning experience**

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

Annex 1: Action plan from the reflective analysis.

2.1.2. The Quality Council

What	Who and how	When completed
1. Improve the visibility of the QC, e.g. by sending abstracts of its minutes by e-mail to students and staff.	Rector's Office	Constant
2. Make it more visible who sit on the main councils by adding photos to their names on the QC's webpage.	Rector's Office and the Web Management Team	Immediately and constant
3. Encourage all representatives in the QC to suggest items for the council's agenda.	Rector and the Director of Quality Management	Constant

2.2.1. Course evaluations at the end of semesters

What	Who	When completed
4. UNAK's administration, students and all teachers will be encouraged to work together to raise the rate of participation to or beyond its former level. Teachers need to promote the course evaluations by demonstrating to their students how they use survey results to develop and improve their courses.	Quality Council, Students' Union and the Team on Students' Course Evaluations	Constant

2.2.4. Programme review processes at institutional level

What	Who	When completed
5. The QC has decided to appoint a committee to review the process for programme review and write more detailed guidelines than UNAK has today with different timelines.	Rector and Deans by appointing a workgroup	Spring 2015

2.3. Use of learning outcomes

What	Who	When completed
6. Continue the work of the Bologna Team and involve the new teachers' consultant in its	Bologna Team	Constant

work with a view to increasing the awareness of all teachers of the usefulness of the LOs and continually offer courses to help them organise their teaching methods.		
7. Appoint students' representative in UNAK's Bologna Team.	Rector and the Students' Union	Spring 2014

2.4.1. Assessment practices

What	Who	When completed
8. A study will be made of the assessments with the aim of assuring that UNAK can as often as possible not only rely on one examiner, i.e. the teacher, to comply with the ENQA standards.	Rector by appointing a workgroup	Spring 2015
9. The Schools will make an effort to formulate explicitly the assessment philosophies of their faculties, and the QC will ensure that a system will be in place for monitoring and reviewing assessment practices at UNAK.	Rector by appointing a workgroup	Spring 2015
10. Clarify the role of the Examinations Manager with regard to online examinations.	Rector by appointing a workgroup	Spring 2015

2.4.2. Evaluations of assessment processes

What	Who	When completed
11. Encourage teachers to be more formative in their assessment marking and give better and clearer feedback on assignments.	Deans	Constant
12. Appoint a working group with the task of checking how Uglu and Moodle reveal information on when the teachers give their marks and if they can generate lists of teachers who exceed their time limits in returning marks. The group shall also suggest to the	Rector by appointing a workgroup	Spring 2015

QC possible follow-up action on late returns for the schools.		
13. Implement an easy to use process for assessment clarification for distance learners.	Director of Quality Management	Constant

2.5. Uses of externals and other benchmarks

What	Who	When completed
14. Define what is considered acceptable performance with regard to UNAK's key indicators and make that visible to staff and students.	University Council, Rector, the Management Board and Quality Council	Autumn 2014
15. Benchmark with other similar foreign and domestic universities and preferably under the guidance of an expert for example from CBS.	Rector, the Management Board and the Director of Quality Management	Autumn 2014

2.6.2. Staff induction

What	Who	When completed
16. Finish writing job descriptions for all UNAK staff and post on the intranet.	Records Manager in co-operation with administrators and staff	2014
17. Review the process for receiving new staff and implement it again.	Management Board and the Director of Quality Management after offering administrators training	Spring 2014
18. Finish the staff handbook on the intranet in 2014.	Records Manager with representatives from teachers and support services staff	2014

2.6.3. Staff appraisal

What	Who	When completed
19. UNAK's members within IUN will promote the idea of redefining the value of teaching in the evaluation of teachers' work as quality enhancements in teaching require more of teachers now.	UNAK's representatives in IUN's Management Board and evaluation committees	Spring 2014
20. The QC will formally appoint a Professional Development Team responsible for planning an agenda of professional	Workgroup appointed by Rector with the Teachers' Consultant as Chair	Spring 2014

development events for the coming academic year.		
21. Continue implementing staff development interviews and review the methodology and forms currently used.	Quality Council	Spring 2014

2.7. Management of student admissions

What	Who	When completed
22. Prioritise the task of making UGLA a reliable tool for the admissions process.	UNAK's representatives in Uglá's Project Group	Constant

2.8. Accuracy of public information

What	Who	When completed
23. Following the six months trial period with a webmaster, and in light of other changes of staff, the administration of UNAK's websites needs to be reviewed as well as the duties of staff with writing privileges on them.	Web Management Team and the Managing Director	Spring 2014
24. Design and implement templates for UNAK's courses in Moodle.	Teachers' Consultant and Moodle's Manager	Autumn 2014

3.2. Student retention rate and progression

What	Who	When completed
25. Address the retention issue especially amongst the distance learners. Monitor the recent changes made in FBA's distance learning programme.	Students' Retention Team	Constant
26. Implement a programme to improve retention.	Students' Retention Team	Autumn 2014

3.5.1. UNAK's facilities

What	Who	When completed
27. Monitor the trial of providing facilities for group studies.	Managing Director, the Manager of Real Estate and Operations and the Board of the Students' Union	Spring 2014

3.5.2. Facilities for clinical training and labs

What	Who	When completed
28. Reorganise the lab classes in Borgir as an action to meet the increased numbers of distance learners.	Dean of SBS	Ongoing
29. Renew the equipment of the occupational therapy lab.	Dean of SHS	Ongoing
30. Solve the SPSS issue.	Director of the Financial, Staff and Administrative Section	Ongoing

3.7. Support for research students

What	Who	When completed
31. Gather information on the participation of students in teachers' research projects and grants.	UNAK's Research Administration	Autumn 2014
32. Update all handbooks for master's programmes.	Deans	By the end of 2014

3.8. Research/teaching linkages

What	Who	When completed
33. Hold a meeting at UNAK for staff and students to discuss current practice of integrating teaching and research and identify new possibilities.	Management Board and the Board of the Students' Union	Autumn 2014

3.9. The student voice, representation and feedback

What	Who	When completed
34. Strengthen the students' voice within UNAK where possible by appointing at least two students' representatives in councils and committees.	Rector	2014
35. Reward students for their participation in UNAK's councils and committees by making a note of that in their graduation certificates.	Director of the Student Registry, Deans and representatives from the Board of the Students' Union	By February 2015

4.1. Approach to collation and dissemination of good practice

What	Who	When completed
36. Collect information on the extent to which survey results are analysed, presented and used as a basis for action and follow-up.	Quality Council	2015
37. Write a professional development plan with representatives of staff and present it to the QC for discussion and approval.	Professional Development Team	Autumn 2014
38. Encourage and enable UNAK's staff to take part in quality enhancement and quality assurance events.	Quality Council and the Director of Quality Management	Constant

4.2. Strategic approach to managing enhancement and enhancement in strategic planning

What	Who	When completed
39. Write measurable and better defined goals for UNAK's action plans in future.	UNAK's Strategy Team	Autumn 2014
40. Renew the human resource strategy and ensure its follow-up.	A workgroup appointed by Rector	Autumn 2014

Approved by UNAK's Quality council 18th March 2014

Annex 2: Schedule for meetings with students and staff.

Tuesday 25th March

Time	UNAK	Participants	Topics
08:30-11:00	Presentations from UNAK	Ögmundur Knútsson, Acting Rector	
08:30-09:30	A guided walk on campus A welcome by Rector	Astrid M. Magnúsdóttir, Director of Library and Information Services	
09:30-09:45	Information literacy training	Kristín Ágústsdóttir, Director of Marketing and Public Relations	
09:45-10:00	The Student Union's new structure	Leifur Guðni Grétarsson, former President of UNAK's SU	
10:00-10:15	Students' induction days	Rúnar Gunnarsson, Project Manager of International Relations	
10:15-10:30		Pórhildur Edda Eiríksdóttir, President of UNAK's SU	
10:30-10:45			
11:00-12:00	Rector/VRs/Finance	Ögmundur Knútsson, Acting Rector Ólafur Halldórsson, Managing Director Úlfar Hauksson, Director of the Financial, Staff and Administrative Section	Governance issues, relations central level – schools – faculties – delegations, key issues for evaluation from the institution's perspective, finances, budgetary issues, UNAK's national role
12:00-13:00	Lunch		
12:45-13:00	Short panel meeting		Sum up impressions so far
13:00-13:45	Representatives of the self-evaluation teams (steering group, working groups and focus interview groups)	Ögmundur Knútsson, Acting Rector and Dean of SBS Arnheiður Eyþórsdóttir, Adjunct, SBS Árún Sigurðardóttir, Dean, SHS Hafdís Skúladóttir, Assistant Professor and Head of FN Leifur Guðni Grétarsson, former President of UNAK's SU Sigrún Magnúsdóttir, Director of Quality Management Sigrún Stefánsdóttir, Dean, SHSS Sigurður Kristinsson, Professor, SHSS Solveig Hrafnadóttir, Student Counsellor	Understand self-evaluation process and extent of institutional involvement; how useful was self-evaluation for UNAK (emerging issues, function in strategic planning processes)? Are self-evaluation data still up to date?
14:00-14:45	University Council	Ögmundur Knútsson, Acting Rector Hafdís Erna Ásbjarnardóttir, Student Hermína Gunnþórsdóttir, Assistant Professor, FE Hjalte Jón Sveinsson, School Master Hjörleifur Einarsson, Head of FNRS Kristín Ástgeirsdóttir, Director	Governance and management issues, issues of organizational structure. Strategy. Finance. Delegation practices. Quality.

Time	UNAK	Participants	Topics
15:00-16:00	Deans of Schools, Heads of Faculties and Heads of Departments	<p>Ágúst Þór Árnason, Head of Department, FL</p> <p>Árún Sigurðardóttir, Dean, SHS</p> <p>Bragi Guðmundsson, Head of Faculty, FE</p> <p>Elín Díanna Gunnarsdóttir, Head of Faculty, FSS</p> <p>Hafdís Skúladóttir, Head of Faculty, FN</p> <p>Helgi Gestsson, Head of Faculty, FBA</p> <p>Hjörleifur Einarsson, Head of Faculty, FNRS</p> <p>Kristín Sóley Sigursveinsdóttir, Head of Faculty, FOT</p> <p>Sigríður Halldórsdóttir, Head of Faculty, FGS</p> <p>Sigrún Stefánsdóttir, Dean, SHSS</p> <p>Ögmundur Knútsson, Acting Rector and Dean, SBS</p>	Relations between different levels in the organization; input in self-evaluation from the different levels, role of quality control activities at different levels. Quality management and strategic management. HR. Staff development.
16:15-17:00	Support services, e.g. IT, library, counselling	<p>Astrid M. Magnúsdóttir, Director of Library and Information Services</p> <p>Auðbjörg Björnsdóttir, Teachers Consultant (Skype)</p> <p>Elín Díanna Gunnarsdóttir, Associate Professor and Head of FSS (Student Retention Team)</p> <p>Erlingur Harðarson, Systems Manager</p> <p>Guðrún Rósa Þórsteinsdóttir, Director of UNAK's Research Centre</p> <p>Hjördís Sigursteinsdóttir, Specialist (Survey Team)</p> <p>Ingibjörg Smáradóttir, Office Manager, SHS</p> <p>Kristín Ágústsdóttir, Director of Marketing and Public Relations</p> <p>Óskar Þór Vilhjálmsson, IT Centre's Service Desk Attendant</p> <p>Solveig Hrafnisdóttir, Student Counsellor</p> <p>Stefán Jóhannsson, Director of the Students' Registry</p>	Issues related to the different support services, e.g. student counselling. How are these services to distant learners managed?
17:00-17:30	Stock taking with Senior Management		
17:30-18:00	Panel meeting		Sum up the day, plan tomorrow

Wednesday 26th March

Time	UNAK	Participants from UNAK	Topics
09:00-10:00	Senior management on QA, accreditation and reviews, Members of Quality Council	<p><u>Representatives of the QC:</u> Ögmundur Knútsson, Acting Rector/d Dean, SBS Finnur Friðriksson, Associate Professor, FE Sigrún Magnúsdóttir, Director of Quality Management Sigurður Kristinsson, Professor, SHSS</p> <p><u>Members of Faculty Curriculum Committees and the Bologna Team:</u> Anna Ólafsdóttir, Associate Professor, FE Arnheiður Eyþórsdóttir, Adjunct, FNRS Guðrún Pálmadóttir, Associate Professor, SHS Sigrún Sveinbjörnsdóttir, Professor, SHSS Daníel Freyr Jónsson, Administrator of Exams and Distance Learning</p>	On site learners versus distance learners? Same safeguarding of standards, same quality? Learning outcomes, assessment, teaching processes? Implications of the high number of mature students, and female students? Do students and staff make use of the Quality Handbook?
10:15-11:15	Undergraduate on campus students , group 1	Ari Brynjólfsson, FSS Arnbjörg Jónsdóttir, FSS Birgir Hrannar Stefánsson, FSS Friðrik Smáráson, FL Halla Mjöll Stefánsdóttir, FSS Júlía Mist Almarsdóttir, FOT Karen B. Elsudóttir, FSS Katrín Erna Þorbjarnardóttir, FN Marsibil Anna Jóhannsdóttir, FOT Ólöf María Brynjarsdóttir, FSS Valdemar Karl Kristinsson, FL	Students' views on their learning experience, students' input in quality control and strategic decision making
10:15-11:15	Undergraduate on campus students, group 2	Anton Helgi Guðjónsson, FNRS Arnór Helgi Knútsson, FSS Erna Sigrún Hallgrímsdóttir, FE Greta Kristín Ólafsdóttir, FBA Guðný Vala Þorsteinsdóttir, FNRS Katrín Björk Þórhallsdóttir, FBA Kristín Ísleifsdóttir, FE Laufey Jónsdóttir, FE Þórhildur Sigurðardóttir, FNRS Alvis Bless, FL Courtney Carlberg, FSS Ari Hólm Ketilsson, FL Heiðar Ríkhartsson, FE	Students' views on their learning experience, students' input in quality control and strategic decision making Exchange students at UNAK and the buddy system
11:30-12:30	Undergraduate distance learners	Auður Ósk Emilsdóttir, FNRS Birna Guðrún Konráðsdóttir, FSS Björg Þórðardóttir, FNRS Brynjar Eldon Geirsson, FSS Catharina Marie Berta Krentel, FE Christine Sarah Arndt, FE Dagný Ragnarsdóttir, FOT	“ “ “ Comparison with on site learners, advantages and disadvantages with being a distance student

Time	UNAK	Participants from UNAK	Topics
		Eydís Hantze Pétursdóttir, FSS Guðrún Sif Gísladóttir, FSS Gunnar Bergmann Steingrímsson, FN Ingibjörg Snorradóttir Hagalín, FSS Íris Gunnarsdóttir, FNRS Jóna María Þorgeirsdóttir, FBA Kjartan Þorvaldsson, FSS	
12:30-13:30	Lunch and Panel discussion		Summing up, planning of afternoon sessions
13:30-14:30	Postgraduate students	Deborah Julia Robertson, SHS Ingibjörg Ösp Stefánsdóttir, FBA Sigrún Harpa Bjarnadóttir, ML Snæbjörn Ómar Guðjónsson, SHS Stefán Smári Jónsson, FE Steinar Beck, FNRS Tinna Baldursdóttir, FSS	Same as undergraduate students + issues of research. Research based teaching? Research collaboration with academic staff, supervisors? How do the individual programmes function for the postgraduates?
14:45-15:30	Alumni	Elías Gunnar Þorbjörnsson, School Master Eva Hrunn Einarisdóttir, Lostæti Eyrún Elva Marinósdóttir, Freshfish Price Directorate Gunnar Ingi Ómarsson, Þekking Ltd. Njáll Trausti Friðbertsson, ISAVIA Valur Ásmundsson, Samherji Ltd. Þorbjörg Ásgeirsdóttir, Akureyri Art Museum	Relation to UNAK after graduation? Relevant jobs? Relevant education for their jobs?
15:30-16:00	Panel meeting		Summing up + planning
16:00-17:00	External representatives, stakeholders	Arngrímur Jóhannsson, Cairman of the Board of the Polar Law Institute Ágúst Ólafsson, Icelandic National Broadcasting Service Gunnar Gíslason, Akureyri School Authorities Halldór Gunnar Ólafsson, Biopol Marine Biotechnology Inga Dagný Eydal, Akureyri Primary Health Care Centre Jón Kjartan Jónsson, Samherji Ltd. Þóra Ester Bragadóttir, Akureyri Hospital Þórgnýr Dýrfjörð, Akureyri Cultural and Marketing Office	Relations of UNAK with external partner of private and public sectors. UNAK's societal role?
17:00-17:30	Stock taking with senior management		
17:30-18:00	Panel meeting		Summary + planning

Thursday 27th March

Time	UNAK	Participants from UNAK	Topics
09:00-10:00	Academic staff with long experience from UNAK, including one or two Supervising Course Teachers	Árni Pálsson, Adjunct, FL Birgir Guðmundsson, Associate Professor, FSS Guðmundur Heiðar Frímannsson, professor, FE Hermann Óskarsson, professor, SHS Oddur Vilhelmsson, Professor, FNRS Sigfríður Inga Karlsdóttir, Associate Professor, FN	Role of QA at faculties and departments + individual teachers. Staff development, promotion, motivation policies, recruitment of new staff. Academic autonomy. The role of Supervising Course Teachers.
10:15-11:00	Representatives of the Business Faculty – the Case Study	Ögmundur Knútsson, Acting Rector and Dean SBS Guðmundur Kristján Óskarsson, Associate Professor, FBA Hafðís Björg Hjálmarasdóttir, Assistant Professor, FBA Jóna María Þorgeirsdóttir, Student (Skype)	Why this case? What have they learned? What has changed? Results?
11:15-12:00	Elected student leaders and representatives	Þórhildur Edda Eiríksdóttir, President of UNAK's SU Berglind Ósk Guðmundsdóttir, Representative of Þemis Birgir Marteinsson, Vice-president of UNAK's SU Eggert Páll Einarsson, Representative of Kumpáni Guðbjörn Ólsen Jónsson, Representative of Eir Hafðís Erna Ásbjarnardóttir, students' representative in UC Hafðís Haraldsdóttir, Representative of Magister Jóna Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, students' representative in QC Katla Hrunn Björnsdóttir, Representative of Stafnbúi Sigrún Birna Kristjánsdóttir, SU's Cashier Þorsteinn Helgi Valsson, Representative of Reki	Students' impact on strategies, QE- development. Institutional internal role, national role?
12:00-12:45	Academic staff, relatively recently appointed at UNAK	Bergljót Borg, Adjunct, FOT Brynhildur Bjarnadóttir, Assistant Professor, FE Guðmundur Torfi Heimisson, Assistant Professor, FSS Hrafnhildur Lilja Jónsdóttir, Assistant Professor, FN Júlí Ósk Antonsdóttir, Temporary Lecturer, FL Kristinn P. Magnússon, Professor, FNRS Vera Kr. Vestmann, Adjunct, FBA	Appointment procedures Staff handbook of help? The role of Professional Development Team in relation to newly hired staff? Research opportunities? Any mentoring?
12:45-13:30	Lunch		
13:30-	Open meeting – students		Topics raised by them

Time	UNAK	Participants from UNAK	Topics
14:00			
14:00-14:30	Open meeting – staff		Topics raised by staff
14:30	Closing Meeting with Rector and Vice Rectors		