

November 2023

Institutional Review Year-on Report
for
University of Akureyri



**Háskólinn
á Akureyri**
University
of Akureyri

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List of abbreviations

BU Bifröst University

CTL Centre for Teaching and Learning

DQHR Director of Quality and Human Resources

IWR Institutional-wide Review

MHESI Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation

QC Quality Council

TQHR Team of Quality and HR

PTPD Center for Police Training and Professional Development

RA Reflective Analysis

UNAK University of Akureyri

1. Introduction

This is the University of Akureyri's (UNAK's) Year-on report as required according to section 72 in the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Iceland. The report provides an overview of progress made since the Institution-Wide Review (IWR) and a summary of actions taken by UNAK in response to the results of the IWR¹. The report also briefly informs about structural reformations made following the review, progress being made on key actions identified by the university in its Reflective Analysis (RA) as well as progress on recommendations from the commissioned review of the Police Science Programme in February 2023.

UNAK would like to express gratitude to the Quality Board and the Review Team for their support and cooperation when the review visit had to be changed into a virtual visit at the last minute. The virtual meetings were set up in a very professional way by the Review Team and our staff and students in unison described interactions and conversations with the Review Team as good and constructive. The Review Team set forth helpful and insightful recommendations supporting the issues emphasised in UNAK's RA; they also identified new enhancement issues important for further enhancement and strategic planning.

The report is organised into four sections. The first section outlines recent developments within the university; the second focuses on enhancement issues raised by the Review Team and UNAK's response to each; the third describes the status of UNAK's actions raised in the RA 2021 report; and the final section reports on progress made in the enhancement effort of the Police Science Programme after the follow-up review conducted in February 2023.

1.1 Recent developments

Over the course of the past year both internal and external, factors have affected the operation and/or future development of the university. In the fall of 2022, the university began developing a new strategy for 2024-2030. A new position of pro-rector was created, to take responsibility for developing the strategy with emphasis on a bottom-up approach whereby all staff, students and selected external stakeholders were invited to participate. During the past year, numerous meetings and workshops have been held with various combinations of participants. The first large workshop was held in October 2022, involving student representatives, various stakeholders and UNAK staff. The meeting was held in a hybrid format, with most participants on-site, Staff from all faculties and support services were encouraged to participate, and in order to ensure as great a diversity as possible efforts were made to invite people of all genders, including recently hired staff of both Icelandic and international origin. The meeting was attended by 80 people and provided valuable data through creating the first ideas for a strategy. This was followed by an online meeting, where all students were invited to participate. Over the course of the year, a combination of online, hybrid and on-site meetings were held for data collection, discussion, goal setting and identifying measurable actions. Currently, work is focused on

¹ The Review Team was led by Kimberly Bogle Jubinville and supported by Alan Davidson, Taina Pihlajaniemi, Oliver Vettori and Sandra Kristín Jónasdóttir.

finalising the goals for the university, individual faculties, support services and the student union. In addition, the steps needed to achieve each goal are currently being developed and measurable actions created. In order to strengthen the quality mindset in the overall mission of the university the actions that came out of the IWR process have also been incorporated into the development of the new strategy

The following are the three primary external factors which have influenced the university over the past few months. After a delay of several years, a new financial model for university funding was released by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation (MHESI) was last September. This new model appears to be significantly more transparent than the previous model, with a major focus on performance, e.g., number of students completing a course, number of students graduating at both bachelor's and postgraduate levels, amount received from grants, quantifiable measures of publication success, etc. A novelty in the model is that part of the funding will be based on what the ministry calls societal responsibility. The Icelandic universities are now in the process of evaluating the new funding structure and how it may affect them. Over the next few months UNAK will be studying the effects of the new model on the university and developing a new internal funding structure, as it has been postponing revisions of the internal funding structure in anticipation of the new governmental funding model.

Another significant external factor is the development of a joint admission gateway for the whole higher education sector in Iceland. The project is being conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation (MHESI), who estimates opening the gateway to accept admissions for 2024-2025. All seven universities have major reservations about the success of this venture in the time allotted and are involved in discussions with MHESI at the highest level. This of course influences internal work and preparations for admissions at UNAK, but we are focused on making sure the quality of the whole admission process is maintained.

The third external factor is the possible merging of UNAK with the University of Bifröst (BU). UNAK was approached by BU in early August where they expressed interest in exploring the possibility of a merger of the two universities. This fall we have been engaged in joint discussion and formal exploration of the viability of such a merger. This process has been financially supported by MHESI, but MHESI is not a formal part of the discussion. It is clear, that there are multiple benefits to such a merger, not in the least for students in Iceland. However, there are, also, numerous challenges that would need to be resolved before the two universities could agree on a merger. This initial exploratory phase is scheduled to be completed by December 15, with a recommendation regarding whether a merger should take place. It is important to note that discussions with all relevant stakeholders including the student bodies at both universities. are a part of this exploratory phase.

It is clear that while several external factors are currently in play that may have considerable impacts on UNAK, , the university is functioning well with the participation of an interested student body and a dedicated and engaged staff.

1.2 New rules and governance structure

New rules governing UNAK took effect on July 1, 2022, whereby more of the formal power and responsibility concerning academic and financial issues were transferred to the

faculties, with the Deans of each School having primary responsibility. The adjustment to the new rules has gone smoothly, with the success primarily due to the efforts of the support services, especially within the schools two administrative offices and the Team of Quality and HR (TQHR). Things have been somewhat complicated by the fact that over the past few years, there has been considerable turnover in the positions of Dean, and during the first year of integrating the new rules, the two schools were both run by interim Deans who had just taken on these positions. However, two new Deans were appointed in the past year providing stability to the governance structure and implementation of the new rules.

In early 2024, UNAK will conduct a review to assess the adjustment to the implementation of the new rules and identify necessary steps to continue towards a successful integration of the processes resulting from operating according to the new rules.

2. Areas for improvement

In the IWR Report, several areas for improvement were highlighted by the review team. The recommendations are listed below along with UNAK's response.

Strategy consideration

In developing the next phase strategy, the University should give careful consideration to the alignment between new school structures and institutional strategic vision and goals.

As previously mentioned, the university began development in September 2022 of a new strategy for 2024-2030. Both university staff and students have taken an active part in defining and formulating UNAK's new strategic vision and goals. This bottom-up approach has resulted in the setting of university-wide goals. Dedicated workshops focusing on linking individual units' goals and actions with UNAK's overall mission were held with the support services at the end of August, and with the two schools separately in mid-October. All goals and actions will be measurable to allow for quantification by a dashboard used to regularly monitor the progress of the strategic vision.

Programme Oversight

Refining and providing clarity across the University for the organisation and oversight of programmes within schools will provide transparency to students and staff, as well as permit further collaboration and increased efficiencies.

The Quality Council (QC) will lead the work on creating a clear job description for the role of Programme Director. The aim is to appoint a Programme Director for each programme before the beginning of the next school year. This is a matter of some complexity since changes to the role of Head of Faculty were implemented last year as part of UNAK's action plan. Therefore, their role needs to be updated in connection to this new unified role. The QC aims to have the first draft ready in January which will then be sent to the management teams in each school for feedback and discussion before the QC will update the job description of the Programme Director and the description of the role of Head of Faculty.

The “how” of teaching, learning and assessment.

Providing additional information, that is clear and consistent, on the “how” of teaching, learning and assessment would benefit both students and staff.

Further clarity on and consistency of the Flexible Learning model and its requirements will promote student-centred learning and unify experiences for students and external stakeholders.

This work will be led by the Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) which will along with the teaching consultants at CTL, develop a proposal on minimum threshold standards in terms of technical skills, teaching methods and assessment. During the first phase CTL will set up the minimum requirements for teachers regarding technical skills, and digital literacy. Each phase will initially be discussed at the QC for initial feedback followed by discussion with the academic management teams, which includes the Dean, Heads of Faculties and the Manager of the school Office. Setting these standards will have several positive impacts, such as being a key part of providing clarity and consistency on the Flexible Learning model. They will also form an important part of the onboarding process for new staff members and will support the work of both Faculty Heads and new Programme Directors.

Flexible Learning – Optimise and communicate.

The University is urged to optimise the blend of distance and on-campus activities in its programmes and ensure that expectations for each are communicated to students in a clear and timely fashion.

Last school year, the QC in cooperation with CTL, created guidelines for on-site study sessions to be implemented in all faculties; a key part of these guidelines is communication and consistency between all teachers within each faculty.

Flexible Learning – Community

Creating an effective on-campus sense of community with appropriate activities, without ignoring or disadvantaging distance-only students, is a matter that requires some urgency.

The need for creating a sense of community for all UNAK students is of utmost importance. In discussion with the students during the work on the university strategy this need came to the forefront. It is clear that creating both an on-campus sense of community as well as a “cloud community” is important, and it is not reasonable to expect the students to create such a community on their own. During these discussions with the students, an idea was brought up regarding creating a new position of a “student agent”. That role would be responsible for working with the students and the university to create a new kind of a university community. This idea is in the early stages of development but will be worked on together with the students during this school year, with the hope of starting formal work in the fall of 2024.

Flexible Learning – Clear structure and guidelines

Developing clearer structures and guidelines for Flexible Learning modalities across programmes will provide an opportunity to systematically document staff workload, and in turn ensure appropriate levels of contribution from full-time and sessional staff across the University.

Creating clearer structures and guidelines for UNAK's Flexible Learning model will be achieved through setting up quality standards for the "how" of teaching, assessment, and digital literacy and setting up a clear and consistent role of the Programme Directors. When it comes to Teacher's workload, two projects are in progress this school year. Firstly, a committee has been appointed with one member from each faculty to evaluate and suggest improvements to UNAK's model of distributing teaching credits. The current model mainly focuses on number of students, number of ECTS credits and type of course. The anticipation is that the new model will consider more factors that impact workload, such as types of assessment. Secondly, a project, initiated and led by the QC, is evaluating the use of sessional teachers with the aim of setting clear standards for their qualifications, the level of support and supervision they are given and to discuss their ideal level of contribution to the overall teaching.

Evidence based approaches.

The University should continue implementation and further development of systematic, evidence-based approaches to inform quality enhancement, for the use of data dashboards to inform quality assurance processes and enhancement activities.

This work has been led by the Director of Quality and Human Resources (DQHR) and the QC. Each faculty has its own data dashboard with its key data. To ensure that the data is systematically checked, a new template for Annual Review Reports was set up and implemented last year. A short statement needs to be written about each section of the dashboard in the annual report according to the Plan-Do-Check-Act quality cycle. Additionally, the report contains a short progress report on action plans, strategies, and human resources. The report is handed in at the end of the school year to DQHR and the relevant school's Dean. A clear benefit of this approach is to secure a transfer of knowledge between managers as well as being a key item in internal benchmarking processes.

Expanding the doctoral programmes

The University has been well served by its cautious approach to accepting its first doctoral students but is encouraged to expand the doctoral programmes as additional external funding becomes available.

An application is being prepared for authorisation for doctoral studies in the Faculties of Education and Psychology. Both faculties have been strengthened in research and recruited highly qualified academic staff. The funding for PhD candidates has been the main bottleneck in increasing the number of doctoral students at UNAK. In terms of funding the doctoral programme, the management team has high hopes regarding the government's new funding model, as it may open the possibility that new doctoral students could be at least partially funded internally by the university.

Part of the new emerging university strategy is an increased focus on building a support infrastructure that will help and encourage academics to apply for larger competitive funds capable of supporting PhD students. The university considers expanding the doctoral program a priority.

Training of doctoral supervisors

Training of doctoral supervisors has begun and needs, in the view of the Team, to be rolled out across all programmes. This would also support any planned additional doctoral programmes.

Doctoral supervisor training has been significantly expanded through collaboration with other doctoral degree-awarding institutions in Iceland. The [Icelandic Joint PhD Supervisor Training Programme](#) is a new initiative with the University of Iceland and UNAK leading the development of a year-long programme supporting all PhD supervisors across Iceland, with support from Reykjavik University. Training sessions have been designed and led by staff from both universities, with an international best practice workshop provided by Vitae. Attendance for UNAK academics at this session has been financially supported by the Centre for Doctoral Studies. Support is also being sought through the Universities Cooperation Fund to expand this programme further.

Expanding internationalisation opportunities

The University is strongly encouraged to expand internationalisation opportunities for teaching, research, and involvement for students, faculty, and staff. One example would be to support faculty in building international networks for the purpose of applying for research funding available through international mechanisms.

Participation in international networks was highlighted by UNAK academic staff as a key area for researcher development and training in the research support survey undertaken by the Centre for Doctoral Studies in April 2023. In response, a workshop on this topic is planned for early 2024 with the objective of sharing good practices and identifying challenges. One area of focus for supporting networks has been promoting participation in European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST Actions), working closely with the Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannís), to identify and promote relevant opportunities. COST Actions, which are open to researchers at any career stage, offer a pathway towards participation in international research collaborations eligible to apply for larger European Union grants.

Budgeting of new programmes

The University is urged to create clearer rules for budgeting new programmes and programme changes that acknowledge teaching workload and quality standards. These rules would be clear on the ideal contribution of sessional staff to teaching loads at individual programme level.

A draft of new guidelines is being developed by the Director of Finance and the DQHR. The new guidelines require faculties to provide more detailed information in terms of finances and workload. As an example, part of the financial information is to estimate housing needs, Information Technology (IT), cost of each course and level of expertise of teachers and if additional staff members are needed. In terms of workload, information is required on contributions from current staff, new staff, information on the current workload and finally the ideal contribution from sessional teachers.

As previously mentioned, the new funding model for universities was introduced this fall and is currently being evaluated by the universities. UNAK has postponed major revisions of the internal funding allocation structure in anticipation of the new external model. Over

the course of the next few months UNAK will study the effects of the new model on the university and making a comprehensive review and possible revisions of the internal funding allocation structure.

3. Action points from RA-report

After the action plan had been set and the RA Report published, the top management team at UNAK further refined the action plan. Each action point was assigned a priority level, the person best suited to lead the effort for each action was identified, a defined, measurable outcome was set and based on the level of complexity and priority, an expected end date assigned. The initial planning and preparations for addressing action points has been essential to keeping the effort focused and on track despite changes in the management team. With new permanent Deans who can lead the discussion within the management teams of our schools the focus will be on finishing all actions which have been identified as high importance this school year. Figure 1 illustrates the progress.

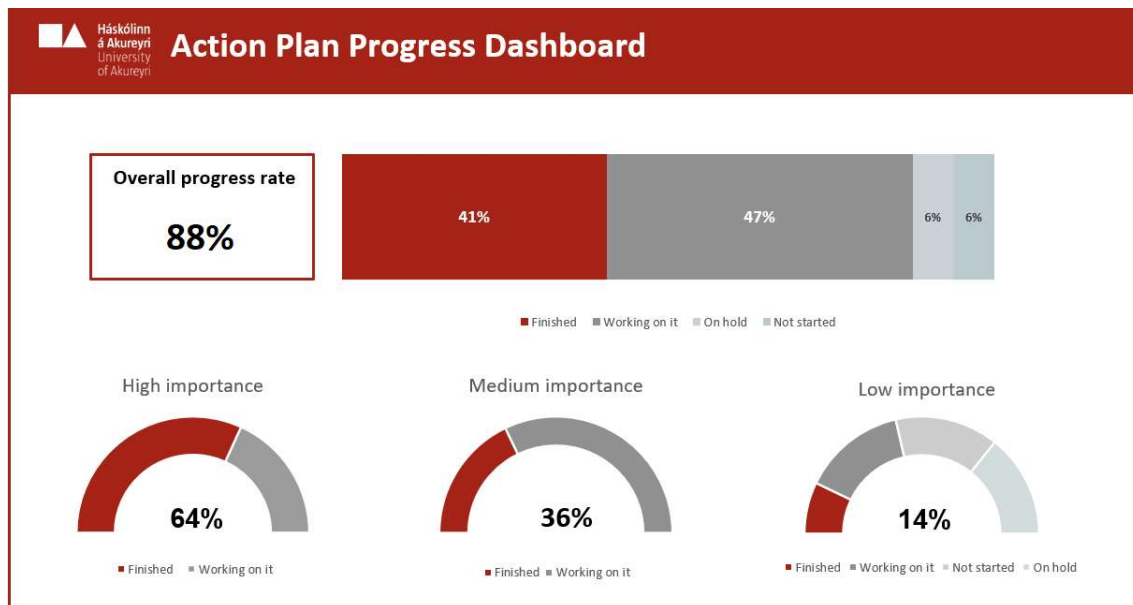


Figure 1. Action Plan Progress Dashboard with progress status by importance level of tasks indicated.

4. Police Science programme

Over 50% of the stated actions in the Police Science Education Action Plan have been completed, and 44% are in progress, with only one item still to be addressed (figure 2). It should be noted that many of the action points in progress are tasks that are and need to be in continuous development and, thus, do not have a definite or clear endpoint. An example of this is integrating academic parts of the programme and the practical

training. The programme team is continuously seeking ways to establish ties and increase collaboration between the two parts, so the students experience it in a holistic manner. Teachers from UNAK participate in the on-site session organised by the Center for Police Training and Professional Development (PTPD) and vice versa, e.g., by teaching and conducting discussion classes. This has required joint planning and organisation contributing to a sense of unity among staff and students.

This autumn, special attention has been placed on benchmarking and international cooperation. Enhancing the programme team by adding an international dimension is important when recruiting new staff, and a new staff member is coming from Europe and bringing new international connections.

Most importantly, the team has developed good relations with police scholars and officials in Scandinavia. For example, recently, a group from the police program team went on a study and information trip to Umeå in Sweden to acquaint themselves with the operations there. Umeå is considered the leader in distance learning police education in Sweden and Scandinavia. This turned out to be a very fruitful trip and possibly the beginning of closer cooperation as there is the hope that a delegation from Umeå might visit UNAK in return.

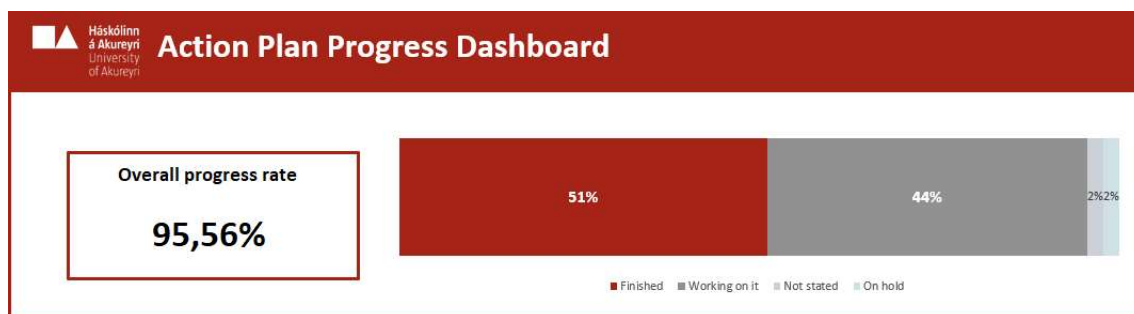


Figure 2. Action Plan Progress Dashboard showing progress status of tasks.

Specific points from the review team of the commissioned review of Police Science:

Formal agreement

The agreement between UNAK and the National Commissioner of Police regarding the arrangements for the Police Science Diploma should be urgently reviewed and renewed, in order to maintain its currency and validity.

The agreement between UNAK and the National Commissioner of Police has been reviewed and is in the process of being finalised.

Strategic Steering group and Practitioners group

Both the Strategic Steering Group, and also the proposed Practitioners Group, be convened and terms of reference formally agreed for each without further delay.

The Strategic Steering Group held its meeting last fall and agreed to its role and terms of reference. The next meeting will be held in November, and one of the agenda items for that meeting is to discuss the practitioner group and agree on and formalise their role.

Programme team meetings

Structure programme team meetings and notes to ensure actions are identified and followed through to completion, possibly with joint co-chairs.

The team has ensured that weekly Monday meetings are held where either the program director or project manager chairs the meeting. Everybody has access to draft meeting minutes or notes on Teams throughout the semester. Furthermore, anyone can add topics they want to discuss in the meetings. For clarity regarding the division of labour and responsibility, an Excel spreadsheet is used to keep track of important meeting outcomes, identifying the person responsible for follow-up on specific tasks and their deadlines.

Structure and cooperation

Prioritise the completion of work of teachers on sharing and collectively scrutinising content and learning outcomes of each Diploma course. Determine collectively how best to act on the outcomes of this activity, together with the mapping of learning outcomes to ensure alignment with the profile of an Icelandic police officer.

This was addressed in a working session, colloquially termed “speed dating” in November 2022. All teachers in the programme, both academic and practical, met and discussed the content of their respective courses. The session opened up new channels for discussion as everyone got an insight into other teacher's courses. The result is that teachers are aware of what other teachers are doing and can follow different courses via a guest-admission in Canvas. Access to other teachers' courses applies to all teachers, both practical and academic. The integration and cooperation between different courses have continued, and in June 2023, experts from the Faculty of Education at UNAK gave a seminar on how they combined different courses, focusing on on-site sessions in particular. Integration and cooperation are ongoing efforts and will be addressed again in a working meeting of the police education team in November 2023.

Synchronised delivery schedule

Synchronise the delivery schedule to ensure all learners can participate fully in both the academic and the practical domains of learning. UNAK and the PTPD staff should identify ways to ensure that students do not experience any timetable clashes which inevitably cause them to miss sessions.

This item has been addressed and a collective Excel sheet developed with deadlines and on-site sessions in UNAK and PTPD to avoid timetable clashes. Flexibility has also been introduced, e.g., in PTPD on-site sessions to make room for an academic discussion class, or in some cases, discussion classes have been moved so they do not collide with PTPD on-site sessions.

The programme team should escalate the momentum of its work to map the role profile to course content and learning outcomes, and to make these links explicit to students.

A central matrix has been developed, where everyone fills in their course and shows how they connect to a learning objective derived from the role profile of a policeman. However, this is still being developed and is not yet available for students. The issue was also raised at a practitioner meeting and preparations are being made for the continuation of work on this issue.

On-site study sessions “lota”

The programme team should evaluate the value and effectiveness of the UNAK Lota as it is currently implemented, with a view to redesigning the week-long programme in order to maximise from the learner’s perspective the benefits of in-person attendance. The Team wishes to emphasise that social and teamwork skills are exceptionally important in the police profession and therefore the rare opportunities to focus on these during Lotas at UNAK should be efficiently utilised.

Last spring, integration of all students attending first year courses in a joint project during the same on-site session was explored. Students attending different courses worked together on a joint assignment. This approach was used again during the on-site session this autumn semester, and for next spring, the aim is to finalise the setup of joint assignments so it can be used for both first- and second-year students. The police districts were invited to come to Akureyri to introduce themselves to students, and the Police special task force also visited during the on-site session. It was very successful and received good feedback from students.

Teachers involved in teaching the first- and second-year courses have already met and discussed the planned activities of the on-site session in February.

Supervisors

UNAK, in cooperation with the PTPD, should promptly progress the design and delivery of a brief education programme for supervisors, to include making:

- 1) assessment judgements of a student’s performance against the internship; and*
- 2) competency framework and role profile.*

The outline of such a course is in its final stages. Software development has been introduced to assess fieldwork and to help standardise and stabilise the work of supervisors in the field. This is developed using Pebble Pad software and by utilising the experience and expertise gathered over the years in the Faculty of Nursing at UNAK to supervise field training for nurses. The nursing faculty’s leading expert has been hired temporarily to assist the project manager in getting this operational.

Proactive oversight

UNAK and the programme team should identify ways of strengthening proactive oversight of each individual student’s experience and engagement with the Police Science programme as an integrated whole, and of each and every student’s progress through the overall programme.

Each PTPD teacher has oversight of a group of students and follows their progress during their education. Teachers from UNAK will now become part of these oversight groups, which entails, for example, one in-person meeting with each student. Each semester students will be invited to meet with the project manager and the programme Director to

talk about their experience and provide feedback on what is done well and what could be improved.