

2016

# UNAK's INSTITUTION-WIDE REVIEW

## Follow-up Report



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á Akureyri  
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## Preface

This is the University of Akureyri's (UNAK's) year-on report as is required according to section 72 in the Quality Enhancement Handbook for Iceland. It is written to report on actions taken following the recommendations made in the [Institution-wide Review](#) published on Rannís website in June 2014. Further it is intended to give the status of the forty enhancement issues UNAK identified in preparation for the Institution-wide Review listed in UNAK's Reflective Analysis.

The enhancement issues are in good progress and have been on the agenda of UNAK's Quality Council (QC) meetings. The issues were initially identified as the responsibility of the respective managers who have seats in the Council which at the meetings were required to give a status report there of their progress. As would be expected some of the issues were relatively easy to address as others require more time and even a change in rules and regulations and work processes.

A number of staff and students have already been and will continue to be active participants in the quality enhancement process that is ongoing since the writing of the Reflective Analysis and not to a lesser extent the writing of the Subject-level Review Reports of UNAK's faculties. It is the view of UNAK's management team that working within the current Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) and with the Quality Board (QB) for Higher Education in Iceland has contributed to a heightened awareness of quality enhancement amongst both students and staff at UNAK. Further it has helped to create the essential quality culture which is motivating ongoing quality improvements within UNAK as well as having had a significant impact on the structure of the Quality Council itself as well as the Management Board (MB).

This year-on report is organised in three main sections. In the first one UNAK's reactions to issues raised by the external experts in the Institutional-wide Review Report of June 2014 have been categorized into broad themes. The second section lists UNAK's reactions to the issues raised by the external experts in the same order as they are put forward in the Institutional-wide Review Report. The third and last section is the status of the forty enhancement issues UNAK identified in its Reflective Analysis. Their progress has been monitored by the QC as they have been on the agenda of nearly all its meeting this past school year.

## Reactions to issues raised by the Review Committee categorized in broad themes

When the issues raised by the external experts are categorised they mainly fall into the following categories;

- Central significant governing and strategic bodies
- Support for teachers, distance learning and standardisation of learning resources (Moodle)
- Difficulties of communication and sharing across school and/or faculty boundaries
- Students' course evaluations
- Use of survey data in UNAK
- Integration of international students into the life and work of UNAK and the local community
- Human resource management issues

For clarification the issues from the bulleted list above are written in bold in the paragraphs below describing their current status.

The fact that the rector is Chair of the University Council (UC), the QC and the MB is one of the issues of the **central significant governing and strategic bodies** raised by the Review Committee. Changes have been made at UNAK so the Rector and the Deans of Schools do not sit on the QC which will be chaired by the Director of Quality Management. Three teachers, one from each school, all members of UNAK's Bologna Team, will take the Deans' place. This change in the QC's membership should also address the issue of involving current academic staff members directly in the QC and the quality processes. The role of the QC will be advisory to the MB and the UC who have the mandate to make final decisions but under the guidance of the QC to ensure that UNAK is in compliance with the QEF. This change also strenghtens the indpendence of the QC which now operates independently to make sure that quality processes are adhered to at all stages. To secure good information flow between the QC and the MB the Director of Quality Management and chair of the QC sits on the MB as a non-voting member but with full rights to participate in discussion and put forward suggestions. The non-voting status is to ensure that the Director of Quality Management does not have to vote on issues presented by the QC to the MB.

As for the Rector being the Head of the UC, that is set by the law on public universities in Iceland and is not within the authority of the UC to change.

**Support for teachers, distance learning and standardisation of learning resources (Moodle)** has been adressed by establishing a Centre of Teaching and Learning with 4,5 FTE members of staff. Strategies of how to create a learning community and support teachers and students engaged in distance and flexible learning have already been endorsed and plans to update hardware and software for teaching and learning approved.

**Difficulties of communication and sharing across school and/or faculty boundaries** is mentioned three times in the Institution-wide Review. The issue has been discussed but it is difficult to quantify cooperation between faculties in a meaningful way. UNAK has been increasing cooperation cross schools and faculties as meetings, workshops, seminars et cet. are to a greater extent being offered across the University. There is also a strong tradition for offering students to take courses across faculties and schools. For

example all first year undergraduate students are required to take the same two courses, one in practical academic skills and the other in research methods and statistics. Further we estimate that the establishment of the Centre of Teaching and Learning will bring with it more occasions for staff to take part in events planned across schools and other units.

UNAK has applied to the Ministry to be accredited to offer doctoral studies and in the application it is stated that all graduate studies at UNAK will be administered by the same body further ensuring cooperation across schools and faculties.

This issue of “more effective vertical and horizontal links” will be kept in mind especially when planning UNAK’s next student and staff surveys.

Deminished participation in **students’ course evaluations** is a concern at UNAK and the Review Committee identified variations in the follow-up process between schools and faculties. Therefore all three schools have reviewed their follow-up processes and published them in writing on Ugla. Further a Team on Students’ Course Evaluations has been appointed with the mandate to examine the current practice at UNAK and make recommendations for change in order to increase participation and assure follow-up within the schools.

On the issue of the **use of survey data** UNAK is commended in the Institution-wide Review on its efforts to gather data on the students’ experience and use it for quality enhancement. This is however followed with a recommendation that the survey results and their follow-up could be more widely disseminated among students, schools and faculties and to a greater extent used to support policy making and monitoring functions of the QC and UC. This recommendation from the Review Committee will be kept in mind during the work on a renewed strategy for UNAK for the years 2018-2022 commencing soon. It should however be noted here that reports on survey results dated back to 1997 are published in Ugla and it is also evident from the reports that the Subject-level Review committees and the staff and students participating in the reviews have used this information extensively.

**Student retention rates** are monitored regularly at UNAK. The issue has at least partially been addressed by the appointment of a Student Retention Team which has for the past school year implemented a project of academic advising as a trial. Students have taken an active part in this project and it will be discussed at an up-coming meeting in the Quality Council what our measureable goals will be. This program has already been extended and will continue in the next academic year.

A number of recommendations from the Review Committee are on **human resource management issues**. UNAK’s management acknowledges this and is currently looking for a solution to hire a Human Resource Manager but due to budgetary constraints that has not been possible yet. Other feasible plans are now being investigated.

## Reactions a year on to issues raised by the Review Committee in UNAK's Institutional-wide Review Report

### 1.4. Organization and government - p. 9

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** Changes have been made at UNAK with regard to Rector and the Deans of Schools having a seat on the QC as explained in the overview section above. The issue of the Rector being the head of the UC is set by the law on public universities in Iceland. The senior management, including the UC, is in agreement that this should be changed but recognizes that this change must happen through changes in the law under the leadership of the Minister of Education.

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** The University has been increasing cooperation cross schools and faculties as meetings, workshops, seminars et cet. are to a greater extent being offered across UNAK. Also there is a strong tradition for offering students to take courses across faculties and schools. For example all first year undergraduate students are required to take the same two courses, one in practical academic skills and the other in research methods and statistics. Further we estimate that the establishment of the Centre of Teaching and Learning will bring with it more occasions for staff to take part in events planned across schools and other units.

UNAK has applied to the Ministry to be accredited to offer doctoral studies. It is stated in the application that all graduate studies at UNAK will be administered by the same body further ensuring cooperation across schools and faculties.

This issue of "more effective vertical and horizontal links" will be kept in mind when planning UNAK's next student and staff surveys.

### 1.6 Response to previous reviews/accreditation exercises – p. 12

"Some of the recommendations in these reports imply a need for additional funding, e.g. be administered by 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. "

**UNAK's reaction:** UNAK has responded to this recommendation by appointing a teachers' advisor, establishing a Centre of Teaching and Learning with a staff of 4,5

FTE and a newly defined plan to realize UNAK's strategy for flexible teaching and learning with support and advice to teachers. UNAK was able to obtain funds from the government for upgrading software and hardware. The amounts of 20 million ISK and 40 million ISK were allocated for 2015 and 2016, respectively, as one off contributions.

### **1.8. Evaluation – p. 13**

“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.”

**UNAK's reaction:** See above about the Centre of Teaching and Learning. Further a note should be taken of the academic background of the Director of the Centre.

See:

The Director of the Centre of Teaching and Learning, has a broad academic background, Master's degree in Sociology, post graduate diploma in Teaching and an undergraduate degree in Social Anthropology all from the University of Iceland. In addition she has a PhD and a Master's degree in Educational Psychology along with a certificate in Online Distance Learning from the University of Minnesota. In her studies she focused on developing teaching methods in online courses, specifically statistics courses. Her broad academic background is valuable in providing professional support to faculty in their development of teaching in the form of expert feedback and consultation and supporting educational opportunities for faculty with emphasis on information technology and pedagogy. The Director's experience in using mixed methods in pedagogical research is also an added support for faculty pursuing research opportunities as part of their teaching development in cooperation with the Centre of Teaching and Learning.

### **P. 14**

“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.”

**UNAK's reaction:** See above the comment on plans for the QC. The senior management under the leadership of the Rector is looking at other opportunities to further distribute authority within the institution, including a common graduate school and better direction for distance learning processes and pedagogy.

### **2.3 The Quality Council and its relationship with other groups – p. 16**

“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.”

**UNAK's reaction:** More work needs to be done but the QC should be more visible now as its minutes are published through our information management system (UGLA). In addition, before every meeting of the Council an invitation is sent to the members of the Council if they have items for the agenda.

Further the change in the QC's membership should address this issue by involving current academic staff members directly in the QC and the quality process. The role of the Council will be advisory to the MB and the UC who have the mandate to make final decisions in academic matters but under the guidance of the QC.

#### **P. 16-17**

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** Notice is taken of the point made. As a reaction to that and also as this is one of UNAK's forty enhancement issues students' course evaluations and their follow-up have been discussed repeatedly at the QC's meetings this past year. This has resulted in an appointment of a formal Team on Students' Course Evaluations comprising of academic and support staff and students. The team's assignment is discussing the current situation in UNAK, doing research on best practice at other and foreign universities and making recommendations to the QC during the next school year of ways to make improvements. All schools have recently written and agreed upon similar procedures for follow up and published them in UGLA.

"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). "

**UNAK's reaction:** These issues of concern will be discussed in details at UNAK as the before mentioned changes in the membership and role of the QC will be formalised. This matter is of utmost importance and the changes are aimed to making the QC more independent from the senior management as to be able to give better direction for both individual schools as well as the administration of the institution.

#### **P. 18**

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** This recommendation has been taken into consideration when planning the new role of the QC. In addition the quality review and the 40-point action plan will be used as a guideline in the next cycle for strategic planning of UNAK for the period of 2018 - 2023.

#### **2.4 Course monitoring, validation and review – p. 18**

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** This advice will be taken under consideration by the Team on Students Course Evaluations. See also what is stated above on the schools' procedures for students' course evaluations follow up.

#### **P. 19**

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** This advice will be taken under consideration by the Team on Students Course Evaluations. Also the establishment of the Centre of Teaching and Learning has provided resources not previously available at UNAK so now

underperforming teachers can be helped and given advice on how to enhance their teaching.

However, to be able to fully capitalize on the changes with the Centre of Teaching and Learning the University must be able to reduce workload on academic staff members, increase the number of support staff and adjust employee contracts to meet with these goals. All of this requires additional funding.

## **2.8. ICT platforms – p. 22**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** A University-wide strategy has been approved and is in progress following a resolution from the QC and is being implemented by the Centre of Teaching and Learning.

## **2.9. Distance delivery – p. 23**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** In progress as stated above by the appointment of a teachers’ advisor and the establishment of the Centre of Teaching and Learning. New software and equipment installed in autumn of 2015 is also aimed at resolving this issue.

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** As stated above UNAK has responded to this recommendation by appointing a teachers’ advisor, establishing a Centre of Teaching and Learning, agreeing on a newly defined plan to realize UNAK’s strategy for flexible teaching and learning with support and advice to teachers.

## **2.10 Student survey data – p. 24**

“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.”

**UNAK's reaction:** Comments above touch the issue of students' course evaluations and how that is being addressed. As to other surveys the QC and Survey Team are currently discussing strategies for ensuring that data and information is used and how that can best be monitored.

### **2.11 Staff support, appraisal and development – p. 25**

“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.”

**UNAK's reaction:** UNAK management acknowledges this and is currently looking for a solution to hire a Human Resource Manager but due to budgetary constraints that has not been possible yet. Other feasible plans are now being investigated. The staff handbook on Uglá is now completed as such handbooks can be given that they tend to develop and change over time as the University changes.

“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).”

**UNAK's reaction:** UNAK's management acknowledges this issue and is trying to address it at least partially through salary contract negotiations with the academic staffs' union by increasing the teaching load of teachers underperforming in research. However law on state employees and centralized contracts between the state and the union make this issue difficult to tackle. As an example the state makes the centralised contracts with the Union of Teachers at the University of Akureyri without consulting the University of Akureyri. Specific institution contracts between the Universtiy and the union are on good terms but are unfunded by the government.

### **P. 26**

“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.”

**UNAK's reaction:** See above on the teachers' advisor and the Centre of Teaching and Learning.

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** See response above in this document.

## **2.12 Accuracy and Quality of Public Information – p. 27**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** As stated above this is in progress following a resolution from the QC.

## **3 THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE - 3.1 Overview – p. 28-9**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** Reports on survey results are published in Ugla and key performance indicators in Ugla and UNAK’s web. Also it is evident from the reports that the Subject-level Review Committees and the staff and students participating in the reviews have used this information extensively.

This advice from the Review Committee will be kept in mind during the work on a renewed strategy for UNAK for the years 2018-2023 commencing soon.

### **3.2. Recruitment – p. 29**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** A plan for the maintenance of the web has been approved by the Management Board, a new Web Council formed and a new Webmaster hired.

### **P. 29-30**

“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.

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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** This issue has been discussed with the Ministry with a request for funding to investigate why this is the fact and what action can be taken. One idea is to make changes in the offering of study programmes and see if offering studies in technical subjects would increase the male ratio among students at UNAK. Also to see if it is possible to formulate a strategic plan to make the female dominant study programmes appealing to both genders.

### 3.4. International students – p. 31

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** This challenge of integration of foreign and Icelandic students will continue and as a university we are aware that we need to work on this issue. Since 2011 we have asked our incoming exchange students at UNAK to fill out an anonymous survey to get some feedback in order to improve the quality of our international office and services provided (academic and non- academic). The ratio of exchange students that do fill out the survey is not high compared to the total number of exchange students, e.g. last autumn semester 2014 the replies were only 9 from a pool of 34 students. Regarding the overall expectation of the exchange students towards the university and the Student Union the students are very positive.

Since 2012 the International Office of the University of Akureyri has tried to organize a buddy system that should ensure a smooth integration to the Icelandic way of student life at UNAK (<http://english.unak.is/students/incoming-exchange-students/buddy-system-facebook>). The aim is to assign an Icelandic buddy to an accepted exchange student. Recruitment of Icelandic buddies has however not been that successful. The main reason for this is yet again that many of our Icelandic students are more mature than the students coming for exchange and so they have families and obligations to attend to after school and do not think that they relate to the younger exchange students coming to UNAK. It has also been difficult for the Student Union to get people involved. The connection of Icelandic students and foreign exchange students works also both ways so when groups of exchange students arrive on campus together it can be a challenge for Icelandic students to engage in conversation with them.

The International Office at UNAK will continue with the buddy system as a gateway for Icelandic students to approach the foreign exchange students. UNAK would also need to encourage the teachers teaching mixed groups of exchange students and

Icelandic students to make them work together in groups. The International office has also recently started a small collaboration with the Junior College in Akureyri that involves the exchange students coming for visits to language lessons and assist the students with their language studies.

Further on this note UNAK is currently cooperating with Western Kentucky University in USA and students from both universities have been taking summer courses at UNAK. This is in addition to other courses that have been offered in cooperation with Universities in UK, Germany and Scandinavia. These are excellent examples of international student and staff cooperation and it seems that UNAK has a greater opportunity to work with foreign institutions on the basis of summer courses.

### **3.5 Student retention and progression and implications for teaching and learning strategies – p. 31**

“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%.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** Student retention is being at least partially addressed by the appointment of a Student Retention Team which has for the past school year implemented a project of academic advising as a trial. Students have taken an active part in this project and it will be discussed at an up-coming meeting in the QC what our measurable goals will be. This program has already been extended once and will be up for review by UNAK’s QC and MB later this semester.

#### **P. 32-33**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** As stated above this is in progress following a resolution from the QC and through the work of the Teachers’ Advisor and the Centre of Teaching and Learning.

#### **P. 33-34**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** All schools are currently engaged in writing their teaching and learning strategies which will address this. See also the statements above on the work of the Teachers’ Advisor and the Centre of Teaching and Learning.

### **3.7 The learning environment and student support services – p. 35-36**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** A supervisor has been hired for the laboratories and following that it has been reported that the problems are less pressing or even solved.

The equipment in the Occupational Therapy laboratory have been renewed as required since the Review Team’s visit.

### **P. 36**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** See statements above on this issue.

### **3.8 Support for postgraduate students – p. 37**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** The QC has been reassured that all handbooks have been updated. Further if the plans UNAK has to administer all graduate studies by one body following an accreditation to offer doctoral studies the realisation of this recommendation will be easier.

## P. 38

"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"."

**UNAK's reaction:** We will investigate this but one managing body for all graduate studies would address this partly at least.

## 3.9 Linkages between teaching and research – p. 39

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** We are aware of this tension and will take this into consideration in our ongoing strategic planning. These two factors should not be mutually exclusive but rather they should be complimentary where cooperation within faculties and across schools would support different types of activities.

"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."

**UNAK's reaction:** UNAK's schools are discussing this issue and writing their research strategies now as the whole University is making plans to be more active in applying for research grants. Also if UNAK will be accredited to offer doctoral studies it is believed that the essential relationship between teaching and research will benefit in the years to come.

## 3.11 The student voice – p. 41-42

"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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** See statements above on this issue and the formal appointment of the Team on Students’ Course Evaluations. As for the students concerns relating to lack of anonymity it shall be noted that they are totally unfounded but the fact that they exist is a concern. The issue has therefore already been addressed by sending an e-mail to students explaining UNAK’s procedures and how they support anonymity.

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** This is a challenge we are aware of and through UNAK’s strategy on open and flexible learning we aim to form a closer community (online) for students than before and make the difference between distance and on-campus students less evident.

#### **P. 42-43**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** A few years ago UNAK took the initiative to plan a training day for students on committees and boards. Following that the Students’ Union wanted to arrange the event and did so a few times. It is important to offer this training so the matter will be discussed with the Student Union’s Management Board.

The issue of two student representatives has been discussed with the Students’ Union and is being implemented in cooperation with them.

### **3.12 The student learning experience: summary evaluation – p. 44**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** See our statements on this issue above.

### **4.2 The strategic approach to managing enhancement – p. 45**

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** We do recognise this issue and have discussed it and partially addressed it as can be seen in a number of our reaction points above. As an example of action taken is the schools approach to the students’ course evaluation follow up where they all use a similar approach. A resolution has also been made that all schools will use Moodle, an action taken at management level.

Also the Rector has created a new venue, the upper managements’ working days off campus. He has held them four times and the positive result is already showing. There the management team discusses current issues in direct linkage to UNAK’s strategic plans and mission, with the vision in mind. The working days are solely focused on planning and strategic discussions leaving everyday management for the regular meetings.

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** We acknowledge this and will discuss course of action in the Survey Team and the QC. See also comments above on the internal publication of survey reports on Uglá.

## P. 46

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** In process, see comment above on the hiring of a Human Resource Manager.

## 4.3 Using external benchmarking to support enhancement – p. 47

“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.”

**UNAK’s reaction:** A note is made of this and it will be discussed further within UNAK in connection with learning outcomes for the study programmes. In addition the new UC aims to implement performance indicators for benchmarking for key variables in order to measure the universities progress towards better quality and service to its students, research and community outreach.

## UNAK's forty enhancement issues

Forty enhancement issues were identified during the writing of UNAK's Reflection Analysis Report in preparation for the Institution-wide Review. They were all listed in the Reflective Analysis and published in the Institution-wide Review Report. The QC has followed their progress closely this past school year and 21 of them have the status of completed at the writing of this year-on report. Work on the remaining 19 will continue and it is anticipated that they will all have the status of completed by the end of school year 2015-2016.

### 2.1.2. The Quality Council

1. Improve the visibility of the QC, e.g. by sending abstracts of its minutes by e-mail to students and staff.

**Status:** Completed

### 2.1.2. The Quality Council

2. Make it more visible who sit on the main councils by adding photos to their names on the QC's webpage.

**Status:** Completed

3. Encourage all representatives in the QC to suggest items for the council's agenda.

**Status:** Completed

### 2.2.1. Course evaluations at the end of semesters

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.

**Status:** Team on Students' Course Evaluations has been appointed with the mandate to examine the current practice at UNAK and make recommendations for change in order to increase participation and assure follow-up within the schools

### 2.2.4. Programme review processes at institutional level

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.

**Status:** A draft proposal on the development of new programmes following the recommendations of the 2015 edition of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) has been discussed at the QC and at the schools' level and will be submitted to the UC at its next meeting. Based on that a similar document will be written for review processes for current programmes.

### 2.3. Use of learning outcomes

6. Continue the work of the Bologna Team and involve the new teachers' consultant in its 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.

**Status:** Completed

### 2.3. Use of learning outcomes

7. Appoint students' representative in UNAK's Bologna Team.

**Status:** In process at UNAK's Student Union.

#### 2.4.1. Assessment practices

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.

**Status:** The QC has discussed a report on assessment issues and what needs to be enhanced or changed and following a working group has been appointed to suggest changes to UNAK's Regulations on Course Assessment.

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.

**Status:** The schools are all writing teaching strategies which will include their assessment philosophies. As for a system for monitoring and reviewing assessment practices that is addressed in the report on assessment issues (see point 8) and will be taken into account when changes will be made to UNAK's Regulations on Course Assessment

10. Clarify the role of the Examinations Manager with regard to online examinations.

**Status:** See status on point 8

#### 2.4.2. Evaluations of assessment processes

11. Encourage teachers to be more formative in their assessment marking and give better and clearer feedback on assignments.

**Status:** Completed

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 QC possible follow-up action on late returns for the schools.

**Status:** Completed

13. Implement an easy to use process for assessment clarification for distance learners.

**Status:** Completed

### 2.5. Uses of externals and other benchmarks

14. Define what is considered acceptable performance with regard to UNAK's key indicators and make that visible to staff and students.

**Status:** In process

15. Benchmark with other similar foreign and domestic universities and preferably under the guidance of an expert for example from CBS.

**Status:** In process

### 2.6.2. Staff induction

16. Finish writing job descriptions for all UNAK staff and post on the intranet.

**Status:** For the most part completed

17. Review the process for receiving new staff and implement it again.

**Status:** This is a task for a Human Resource Manager which UNAK's management is currently searching for a solution to hire but due to budgetary constraints that has not been possible yet

### 2.5. Uses of externals and other benchmarks

18. Finish the staff handbook on the intranet in 2014.

**Status:** Completed

### 2.6.3. Staff appraisal

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.

**Status:** In process

20. The QC will formally appoint a Professional Development Team responsible for planning an agenda of professional development events for the coming academic year.

**Status:** In process

21. Continue implementing staff development interviews and review the methodology and forms currently used.

**Status:** This is a task for a Human Resource Manager which UNAK's management is currently searching for a solution to hire but due to budgetary constraints that has not been possible yet.

### 2.7. Management of student admissions

22. Prioritise the task of making UGLA a reliable tool for the admissions process.

**Status:** In process

### 2.8. Accuracy of public information

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.

**Status:** Completed

24. Design and implement templates for UNAK's courses in Moodle.

**Status:** Completed

### **3.2. Student retention rate and progression**

25. Address the retention issue especially amongst the distance learners.

**Status:** Completed

Monitor the recent changes made in FBA's distance learning programme.

**Status:** Completed

26. Implement a programme to improve retention.

**Status:** Completed

#### **3.5.1. UNAK's facilities**

27. Monitor the trial of providing facilities for group studies.

**Status:** Completed

#### **3.5.2. Facilities for clinical training and labs**

28. Reorganise the lab classes in Borgir as an action to meet the increased numbers of distance learners.

**Status:** Completed

29. Renew the equipment of the occupational therapy lab.

**Status:** Completed

30. Solve the SPSS issue.

**Status:** Completed

### **3.7. Support for research students**

31. Gather information on the participation of students in teachers' research projects and grants.

**Status:** Completed

32. Update all handbooks for master's programmes.

**Status:** Completed

### **3.8. Research/teaching linkages**

33. Hold a meeting at UNAK for staff and students to discuss current practice of integrating teaching and research and identify new possibilities.

**Status:** In process

### **3.9. The student voice, representation and feedback**

34. Strengthen the students' voice within UNAK where possible by appointing at least two students' representatives in councils and committees.

**Status:** Work in progress with UNAK's Student Union

35. Reward students for their participation in UNAK's councils and committees by making a note of that in their graduation certificates.

**Status:** Completed

### **4.1. Approach to collation and dissemination of good practice**

36. Collect information on the extent to which survey results are analysed, presented and used as a basis for action and follow-up.

**Status:** In process

37. Write a professional development plan with representatives of staff and present it to the QC for discussion and approval.

**Status:** This will be a task for the Professional Development Team after that has been appointed

38. Encourage and enable UNAK's staff to take part in quality enhancement and quality assurance events.

**Status:** Completed

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

39. Write measurable and better defined goals for UNAK's action plans in future.

**Status:** In process

40. Renew the human resource strategy and ensure its follow-up.

**Status:** This is a task for a Human Resource Manager which UNAK's management is currently searching for a solution to hire but due to budgetary constraints that has not been possible yet