



Faculty of Business Administration Subject-Level Review Abstract With Dean's Reflection and Action Plan

Oddur Þ. Vilhelmsson

Dean of the School of Business and Science

Based on the Subject Level Review by Jón Þorvaldur Heiðarsson, Hafdís Björg Hjálmarsdóttir, Hjördís Sigursteinsdóttir, Grétar Þór Eypórsson, Hilmar Þór Hilmarsson, and Fjóla Björk Karlsdóttir

Introduction

This report comprises an abstract of the Subject-Level Review of the Faculty of Business Administration, as well as the Dean's reflections and Action Plan in response. It is intended for publication on the University of Akureyri's website.

In accordance with the Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework at the University Level in Iceland and the University of Akureyri's guidelines for the organization, as well as the schedule and process of institution-led review of faculties and interdisciplinary programmes, the Faculty of Business Administration (henceforth the faculty), School of Business and Science (the School), University of Akureyri (the University), carried out a self-evaluation during the 2019-2020 academic year, with some work extending into the 2020-2021 academic year, due to delays caused in part by the COVID-19 pandemic. The results are presented in the Subject-Level Review and are summarized herein. Jón Þorvaldur Heiðarsson was appointed editor of the Subject Level Review in September 2019. The review was carried out by faculty staff. The review steering committee consisted of:

1. Jón Þorvaldur Heiðarsson, Assistant Professor. Chair.
2. Hjördís Sigursteinsdóttir, Associate Professor and Head of Faculty (until March 2020).
3. Grétar Þór Eypórsson, Professor and Head of Faculty (from March 2020).
4. Fjóla Björk Karlsdóttir, Adjunct. Faculty representative.
5. Marianna Margeirsdóttir. Student representative.
6. Ásdís Inga Víktorsdóttir. Student representative.

The group used data collected by Guðmundur Kristján Óskarsson, Ása Guðmundardóttir and Stefán Jóhannsson from the University databases, website and internal web, student satisfaction survey results, and other sources. Marianna Markúsdóttir and Ásdís Inga Víktorsdóttir organized student focus group discussion sessions. Stefán Bjarni Gunnlaugsson and Grétar Þór Eypórsson proof-read the report.

The self-review was externally reviewed by Professor Svein Tvedt Johansen, UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Fall 2020. His feedback was used for further refinement of the Subject Level Review and was taken into consideration in developing the recommendations and Action Plan presented in this Summary Report.

Faculty Characteristics

The Faculty of Business Administration (FBA) is one of two faculties within the School of Business and Science at the University of Akureyri. On the undergraduate level, it offers a Cycle 1.2 BS study line in Business Administration. This BS study line is subdivided into three minor-level specializations: Management and Finance, Management and Marketing, and Business Administration with a minor in Fisheries Science (jointly with the Faculty of Natural Resource Sciences). At the postgraduate level, the faculty offers a Cycle 2.2 research-based MS study line in Business Administration to either 90 or 120 ECTS credits, incorporating a research project of either 30 or 60 ECTS credits. Finally, the faculty offers with the Centre for Doctoral Studies, a Cycle 3 PhD programme in Business Administration (Appendix 1, Table 1). However, no PhD students have been admitted to this newly established programme yet.

The administration of the faculty is as outlined in the Regulations for the University of Akureyri, no. 387/2009. In brief, the faculty is governed by monthly faculty meetings, but daily administration is in the hands of the Faculty Head.

The faculty comprises 12 academic staff in 10.7 full time-equivalent positions. Of these, seven are male and five are female (Table 2, Appendix 1). Two academic staff, both male, have reached or will reach retirement age within the next five years.

In terms of student numbers, the faculty is among the larger faculties of the University, with 386 enrolled undergraduate students in 2019 (Table 3, Appendix 1). Enrolments have been increasing in recent years, such that the faculty has had to impose restrictions on new undergraduate enrolments. Postgraduate studies at the Faculty have been undergoing some restructuring in recent years, in part due to budgetary restrictions, and in part the recent accreditation of the University to offer programmes at the doctoral level. A revamped MS programme in Business Administration with an expanded course catalogue is currently under development.

The research output of the faculty has been fairly steady in recent years, although a considerable increase in output in 2019 (Table 4, Appendix 1) is promising and speaks of increased emphasis on research within the Faculty.

Summary of the Subject Level Review

The Subject-Level Review presents a detailed and self-critical look at the present status of the faculty and makes numerous suggestions for improvements, backed by careful analysis of the various data gathered. The review is structured in eight chapters and five appendices, with **Chapter 1** comprising an introductory preamble. The main conclusions are listed in Box 1 and summarized below.

Chapter 2 focuses on the academic lines of study offered within FBA, including student involvement in curriculum development, policy and management of the study programmes, student satisfaction, and development of postgraduate programmes. The chapter's main findings are summarized as follows: Three B.Sc. study lines are offered at FBA (Management and Finance, Management and Marketing, and Business Administration with a minor in Fisheries Science [BAFS]). Although a novel study line (BAFS) has been recently established jointly with the Department of Fisheries Science (Faculty of Natural Resource Sciences), utilizing course modules already taught within the two Faculties, study line development is in general severely hampered by the faculty's tight budget, which also effectively prevents development of elective modules. Nevertheless, the faculty has put considerable emphasis on re-developing M.Sc. study line, which following the 2008 banking collapse had been largely defunct. As explained in the SLR, this redevelopment was made possible with budgetary assistance from the Rector's Office, but the SLR also raises some concerns about the hiring practices followed in this otherwise welcome intervention. The SLR also points out that the faculty has been accredited to offer PhD studies. However, no doctoral students have yet been admitted into the programme.

Box 1. SLR Main Conclusions

- Despite high student enrolment, budgetary constrictions hamper development of new or improved study lines.
- Re-development of the MSc study line is under way.
- Opportunities for collaborative study lines with other faculties should be explored.
- Student satisfaction and course evaluations are high, but concerns are raised regarding active student participation.
- A declining dropout rate and rising admission applications are indicators of a healthy study environment.
- The faculty is severely understaffed but finding suitably qualified Icelandic-speaking staff is seen as challenging.
- Research activity within the faculty is increasing but continued low grant proposal submission and success rates are alarming.
- Dissatisfaction with administration and management might be ameliorated by more clearly defining the roles of administrators.

Both constantly rising enrolment applications and student satisfaction survey results indicate that the faculty's study programmes are successful and popular, giving rise to optimism about future development opportunities. The success of the BAFS suggests a model on which to base further study lines with minor-level specializations from other Departments and Faculties.

Chapter 3, on teaching, learning, assessment, and quality, presents an in-depth analysis of student satisfaction surveys, course evaluations, and other relevant data, as well as discussion on teaching practices, assessment methods, etc. in the changing environment of flexible learning and distance education. The main conclusions include a comparatively high and rising student satisfaction and course evaluations. However, student class attendance and active participation are on the decline, which is a cause for concern.

Chapter 4 presents and analyses a wealth of data on students, their recruitment, progress, retention, and graduation, as well as discussions on the study environment and support services, student welfare, and more. Among the main conclusions of this chapter are that rising student admission rates and declining dropout rates are an indication of a healthy and improving study environment.

Chapter 5 is on staff and human resources. It reviews issues such as the human resource policy, faculty staffing, professional and career development support, and reception of new staff. Among main conclusions are that while the human resource policy from 2011 remains in effect, its review is imminent. Academic staffing is deemed perilously low, with only 10.7 full time-equivalent (FTE) academic staff in faculty that is host to about 500 students. The issue of finding suitably qualified Icelandic-speaking staff is flagged as a challenge. Some professional development issues are raised, in particular that staff development interviews need to be conducted more regularly.

Chapter 6 discusses outreach-related issues, such as cooperation with educational and research institutes in Iceland and abroad, private companies, and other community links. It concludes that continued collaboration with other tertiary education institutes in Iceland is important to the faculty, as is participation in international research projects. The importance of networking at domestic and international conferences is stressed.

Chapter 7 is on issues pertaining to research within the faculty. The chapter scrutinizes data from the annual research activity tally and concludes that research activity within the faculty is on the increase, whether measured in research points, number of publications, or citations. Nevertheless, concerns are raised regarding the faculty's continuing low success rate from competitive research funds. Excessive workload on academic staff is a proposed culprit.

Chapter 8 reviews issues of administration and leadership, including the faculty's policy and future vision and evaluation of administrative and leadership within and without the faculty and the School of Business and Science. Among the main conclusions are that while administration of the faculty is perceived as working properly, some dissatisfaction with administration and management is evident among the staff. A particular complaint is that the roles of administrators within the School of Business and Science should be more clearly defined.

Dean's Reflections and Action Plan

The Subject Level Review, while overall giving an encouraging view of a sound, competent and forward-thinking faculty, reveals a number of issues that staff, students and other stakeholders feel are in need of attention. Many of the issues raised can be addressed with relatively minor adjustments in focus, organization, or budget, but others require careful analysis and/or committed budgetary planning to implement.

One of the major foreseeable tasks needed to secure the robustness and longevity of the faculty is the need for new academic hires. This is pointed out and discussed in Chapter 5 in the review, but not really developed beyond pointing out that new hires are needed. A back-of-the-envelope calculation taking into account the number of ECTS credits taught at the faculty, accounting for joint courses with other Faculties and assuming an average teaching load of 12 ECTS per full-time equivalent (FTE) academic staff member yields an expected number of 20 FTE, indicating a **current deficiency of eight FTE staff members**. Currently, this excess teaching requirement is met in part by overtime teaching and in part by non-staff session teachers, a policy not tenable in the long term, although continued collaboration with partner institutes ameliorates the staffing need to some extent. Nevertheless, the staffing issue is acute, suggesting that judicious budget planning should assume **at least one to two new FTE hires per year over the next five years**. Further confounding the staffing issue is the fact that two staff members have reached or are expected to reach retirement age in the next five years, indicating that **two additional FTE academic staff new hires are required in the next five to eight years**. Identifying and prioritizing positions at the subject level is therefore a high-priority task, as is inclusion of anticipated new hires in upcoming budget plans.

The External Reviewer's report presents a generally favourable view of the faculty, stating that it has a well-developed portfolio of programs and courses well comparable to similar programs in Norway, as well as active and diverse staff. The reviewer does, however, point out some weaknesses, especially as regards research collaboration, which ought to be more actively encouraged among faculty

members. Such encouragement is included in the Action Plan presented in Appendix 2, see e.g., Action Points 3.5 and 3.7.

The Strategic Vision of the faculty, and indeed the School as a whole, needs revising, as both external and internal conditions have changed since it was last revised in 2017. The Subject-Level Review will form a very helpful and welcome input into the revision process. Indeed, an Action Plan has already been drafted based on the Review and is presented in Appendix 2. It will be a standing item on Faculty Meetings, School Board Meetings, and Strategic Planning Events in the months to come.

Appendix 1. Key Figures

Table 1. Overview of present Study Programmes within the faculty

Name of study Program	Cycle	Degree	Credits (ECTS)
Business Administration: Management and Finance	1.2	BS	180
Business Administration: Management and Marketing	1.2	BS	180
Business Administration with a minor in Fisheries Science	1.2	BS	180
Business Administration	2.2	MS	90/120
Business Administration	3	PhD	180

Table 2. Faculty members as of 1 December 2020 and sessional teachers in 2020, number (No.) and full-time equivalent (FTE).

	Male No.	FTE	Female No.	FTE	Total No.	FTE
Professors	2	2.0	1	0.5	3	2.5
Associate Professors	3	2.5	1	1.0	4	3.5
Assistant Professors	2	2.0	1	1.0	3	3.0
Adjunct Lecturers	0	0.0	2	1.7	2	1.7
Total	7	6.5	5	4.2	12	10.7
Sessional teachers	17	2.86	8	0.64	25	3.5

Table 3. Total number of students, number of entrants, retention rate for first year, and completion rate (2019).

Programme	No. of students			No. of entrants	Retention rate %*	No. of graduates	Completion rate (semesters)**
	Total no.	Full time	Part time				
Business	386	253	133	158	60	58	7
Administration (BS)							
Business	6	2	4	6	-	2	4
Administration (MS)							

*Percentage of students still enrolled 1 year after initial enrolment.

**Average number of semesters required to complete.

Table 4. Research output of faculty members, based on the Evaluation System for the Public Universities in Iceland, expressed by mean total research points (A) and mean research points from peer-reviewed publications only (B) per FTE.

	2016		2017		2018		2019		Mean	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Faculty	33.5	16.7	32.6	15.6	26.9	11.4	42.6	26.2	33.9	17.5
School	31.7	18.0	30.1	16.0	27.8	14.1	39.3	23.3	32.2	17.9
University	27.4	12.8	24.5	13.2	29.0	16.3	33.6	18.0	28.6	15.1

Appendix 2. Action Plan

1. Study Programmes and Learning Environment*

	Action	Deliverable	Deadline	Responsible party
1.1	Explore collaborative study line development opportunities with other Faculties.	Revised Strategic Vision of the faculty, with Action Plan.	2022	Faculty Meeting
1.2	Continue developing MS programme.	New course modules proposed.	2022	MS Curriculum Committee
1.3	Reasons for low perceived student engagement scrutinized.	Student survey.	2022	Head of Faculty (HoF)
1.4	Increase online interactive contact with students.	Contact hours included in syllabi.	2021	Faculty members

*This Action Plan is based on points raised in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 in the Subject Level Review.

2. Human Resources*

	Action	Deliverable	Deadline	Responsible party
2.1	Update the human resource policy.	Updated policy and vision.	2022	Dean and HoF
2.2	Identify staffing requirements at subject level	Prioritized hiring plan	2021	Faculty Meeting
2.3	Hire new academic staff.	A minimum of 5 new FTE hires based on Action 2.2.	2025	Dean
2.4	Formalize reception of new staff.	Checklist.	2021	Dean and Quality Manager (QM)
2.5	Revise structure of staff interviews.	Revised instructions.	2021	Dean and QM

*This Action Plan is based on points raised in Chapter 5 in the Subject Level Review.

3. Research Management, Cooperation, Community and Outreach*

	Action	Deliverable	Deadline	Responsible party
3.1	Provide assistance in grant proposal writing and consultation on funding opportunities.	Contract or MoU with the University's Research Centre, RHA.	2021	Dean
3.2	Obtain funding for research, including PhD studies.	A minimum of 5 proposals per year as PI to the IRF or other national/international funds.	2021	Faculty staff
3.3	Enhance financial support for sabbaticals.	Revised rules for sabbaticals.	2022	Dean and Management Board (MB)
3.4	Establish of a fund for PhD students.	Contract(s) with industry partners funding a PhD fund.	2024	Dean and HoF
3.5	Encourage research cooperation among faculty.	Joint proposals to national/international funds.	2022	HoF and faculty staff
3.6	Encourage outreach activities.	Revised rules for 'D points' and their allocation.	2023	Dean and MB
3.7	Strengthen formal collaboration with other educational institutes.	Revised contracts.	2023	Dean and HoF

*This Action Plan is based on points raised in Chapters 6 and 7 in the Subject Level Review.

4. Administration, leadership, development and quality control*

	Action	Deliverable	Deadline	Responsible party
4.1	Better define roles of managers (Dean, Head, Office Manager).	Revised job descriptions.	2021	Dean and QM
4.2	Development of quality monitoring criteria and practices for faculty research activities.	White paper on quality in research.	2022	Dean and QM
4.3	Quality monitoring of study programmes updated in light of current University rules and practices.	Revised guidelines for informing students of course evaluation results and actions	2021	HoF
4.4	Clarification of the role and responsibilities of student representatives.	Guidelines for student representatives.	2021	HoF and QM
4.5	The policy and strategic vision of the FBA should be made visible to students and other stakeholders.	Policy and vision placed on the unak.is website.	2022	Dean

*This Action Plan is based on points raised in Chapter 8 in the Subject Level Review.