



**Háskólinn
á Akureyri**
University
of Akureyri

**UNIVERSITY OF
AKUREYRI**

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**SUBJECT-LEVEL
REVIEW REPORT**

October 2019



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Introduction

This report is a summary of the Subject-level Review Report of the Faculty of Education at the University of Akureyri (UNAK), and is intended for public disclosure at the University's website.

The review was conducted in the academic year 2018–2019, in accordance with the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education, 2nd Edition* and the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. The review committee was appointed in June 2018 and consisted of the following persons:

- Finnur Friðriksson, Senior Lecturer and head of the committee
- Nanna Ýr Arnardóttir, Lecturer
- Kristín Margrét Jóhannsdóttir, Lecturer and Head of Faculty
- Helena Sjörup Eiríksdóttir, graduate student representative
- Karen Ósk Kristjánsdóttir, undergraduate student representative
- Kristín Guðrúnardóttir, undergraduate student representative

Two external experts were appointed as the committee's advisors. They were:

- Jari Lavonen, Professor, University of Helsinki
- Monica Londen, Lecturer, University of Helsinki

The experts visited the University of Akureyri on 6–7 June 2019 and held meetings with the review team, administrators of the Faculty of Education, teachers and students. Subsequently, they submitted a report to the Rector's Office at the University of Akureyri.

This subject-level review can be regarded as a follow-up of the subject-level review that was carried out in 2013. For that review, a review framework was compiled and used. This framework is believed to have been highly useful and thus the decision was made only to make some necessary updates of it for this round. The overall process of the subject-level review in 2013 was also by and large duplicated for this new round.

Data collection and processing was as follows:

- At a Faculty Meeting on 7 November 2018, teachers were divided into three colour-coded groups and the key aspects of the review were allocated to each group. The groups were given the task of retrieving data from UNAK's Student Registry, which could be used to

answer review questions, of processing those data and submitting them to the review team. The results of this work were to be handed in no later than on 28 January 2019.

- At Faculty Meetings on 6 February and 13 March 2019, teachers' focus groups were at work. The theme review questions were divided among the groups and each group was allocated 30–45 minutes to discuss questions relating to its theme. A group leader was in charge of each group and a secretary recorded the conclusions. In this way, analysis by one focus group of each theme was obtained.
- In addition to available data relating to students, three focus group interviews were carried out with one student group from each programme of study; BEd, MEd, and MA. Each group contained 4–8 students. UNAK's Survey Team, which works under the auspices of the Quality Council, conducted the interviews, recorded them and submitted a report with the results to the review team.
- A short questionnaire regarding their experience of their studies was sent via e-mail to 63 graduates from the three main programmes of study at the Faculty (BEd, MEd, MA) who now work as teachers or head teachers/principals at the three relevant school levels (preschool, compulsory school, secondary school) in Akureyri and its neighbouring municipalities. 10 replies were received.
- Additional data, regarding e.g. key statistics, was obtained from the Records Manager and relevant sections of the University Office.
- At a Faculty Meeting on 4 September 2019, the review team submitted a draft report. The teachers were divided into the colour-coded groups which had been appointed at the meeting in November and each group was asked to read its part of the report and give feedback to the review team.

The Subject-level Review Report is divided into seven main chapters, according to the key aspects identified in the review framework. The first of these chapters deals with the Faculty's academic programmes of study and assessment, the second with students, the third with staff and human resources, the fourth with cooperation with other universities and community links, the fifth with research and academic learning, the sixth with administration and leadership, and the seventh with evaluation, development work and quality control. The main results and findings within each of these aspects are presented in this summary.

1. Academic programmes of study and assessment

All systems of study at the Faculty of Education were thoroughly reviewed in the period 2014–2016. As before, three main study programmes are on offer, BEd, MEd, and MA, but the BEd programme now includes Sports Teaching as an elective field and Information Technology has been defined as a field of specialisation in the MA programme. The main objective of the review was to increase the number of study options open to students. The first students were enrolled in the new five-year teacher education programme in June 2016, and at the same time, the revised MEd and MA programmes were taken into use. This system has not been altered since then. In the period that this report covers, i.e. 2013–2018, the Faculty graduated a total of 518 students.

The Faculty has worked closely with e.g. the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, and the Icelandic National Audit Office to respond to an impending lack of teachers in the country. This work includes changes to the field-based part of the five-year teacher education programme at the Faculty and new legislation regarding the Icelandic teacher's license. From the autumn of 2019, a fully paid year of teaching practice will make up the final year of the five-year teacher education programme. Students' master's theses are now incorporated in their work in this year of practical training. This replaces the previous system, where the autumn term of the final year consists of unpaid teaching practice while the spring term is designated for the final thesis. However, as teacher trainees will compete with licensed teachers in order to get their posts for teaching practice, the older system will remain as an option for students who are unable to find posts.

Criteria from the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education have been fully incorporated into learning outcomes and course descriptions. However, more information is needed regarding the extent to which teachers work further with the criteria, i.e. how they affect their teaching methods, assessment, students' workload etc. Teachers are satisfied with the format of the annual review of the curriculum and students feel that information regarding the curriculum is easily accessible, even though some pathways are complicated, and that the information is accurate.

The teaching environment at the Faculty of Education has changed considerably since the last subject-level review in 2013. No teaching is now conducted through video conference equipment, which means that distance students no longer have the opportunity to meet and attend teaching sessions together from their respective distance education centres. Now, studies in the Faculty, as in other Faculties of the University, are organised as flexible studies. Distance students use Zoom or other computer programs to connect to teaching sessions or rely on recordings from them (the recordings are also available to local students). According to teachers, a variety of teaching methods is used in the Faculty, but there are signs that students share this view to a lesser extent than previously. A thorough survey in this regard would be highly useful. On the other hand,

students are generally pleased with the study phases, which primarily consist of group work and work on various assignments, but less happy with traditional lectures.

The exact division of assessment methods used within the Faculty is not known, but teachers claim to use a combination of methods and hardly anyone relies solely on examinations. Students generally feel that information regarding assessment is clear in course descriptions and that the assessment is fair. Students also feel that the assessment is formative in the sense that they received detailed feedback on their assignments.

Teachers express serious doubts about the current system of flexible studies and feel that it has had a negative effect on the quality of their courses and the pleasure they get from teaching. They also feel that the development of flexible studies has been driven mainly by technical issues and that now pedagogical issues need to be attended to. Study phases work well, however, in their opinion, and using such a system for all studies is an option that should be looked into. Students express similar concerns, in particular local students who feel somewhat neglected in the current system, and there are signs that students' satisfaction with the quality of their study programme is decreasing.

No formal documentation exists on student involvement and interest in their studies, but teachers feel that this is characterised by a lack of time due to the fact that most students work alongside their studies. These issues have already been addressed to some extent by the Faculty, and thus the number of study phases per term in the BEd programme was increased from one to two, with the aim of bringing distance students more often to Akureyri to involve them more directly in their studies. However, further action is probably required, especially with regard to the doubts about the system of flexible studies.

The Faculty is yet to be given permission to offer doctoral studies. No formal actions have been taken to ensure that this permission is granted following the next evaluation, but the issue is continually discussed in the Faculty and teachers have identified a number of steps that need to be taken. The Faculty administration must ensure that these steps are taken.

2. Students

Admission procedures at the University are clear and well-established. Potential new students apply electronically on UNAK's webpage. The Student Registry handles all applications from applicants to undergraduate studies who have a secondary school exam. Applications to undergraduate studies that require exemption, and applications to postgraduate programmes are, on the other hand, assessed by the Heads of Department, with the assistance of the Office Manager of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. This assessment is based on the entrance criteria established by the Faculty and further information and documentation is requested if needed.

Students have access to a broad range of support services, such as a student counselling office and a mentoring project, and are generally highly satisfied with the services they provide. They also appreciate the general study environment at the University. Students' rights and obligations are clearly stipulated in various policies and processes, both within the Faculty and UNAK as a whole. However, their opportunities to influence the organisation of individual courses may have to be formalised and ways should be found to involve student representatives more in the work of standing committees.

In recent years, the return rate of local undergraduate students to the second year of the BEd programme has been 64%–68% and that of distance students 50%–55%. This is slightly lower than the corresponding figures for the University as a whole, and it is also a clear decrease from the return ratio of the years 2000–2010, which was 68%–88%. This needs to be addressed, e.g. by strengthening the formal structures that are in place to prevent dropout and increasing the use of student-friendly teaching methods. Between 2012 and 2018, an average of 68% of the students who completed their BEd degree went on to enrol in the MEd programme. This figure needs to be raised. However, 78%–94% of the students who enrolled for the MEd programme also graduated from it, and this is deemed to be satisfactory.

In general, graduates from the Faculty feel that their studies prepare them well for their professional career. This applies in particular to the practical part of the studies, i.e. field work and teacher training, while the main complaint is that their studies were in parts too theoretical, without the necessary connection to “the floor”.

3. Staff and human resources

The Faculty of Education has a staff of 23 permanent teachers, in 19.46 full-time equivalents. There are three Professors, eight Associate Professors, nine Assistant Professors, two Adjunct Professors and one Project Manager for Field-based Learning. All members of staff have completed master's degrees or equivalent qualifications and 11 hold doctorates. 20 of the staff members have undergone a formal qualifications assessment in accordance with the Act on Public Universities No. 85/2008. Faculty teaching staff have a varied educational background, and many have completed programmes of study at foreign universities which enhances diversity and lends strength to the Faculty despite its small size. In addition, nearly all teaching staff have teaching experience at the school levels covered by the teacher education programmes.

There are clear signs that the Faculty is insufficiently staffed with regard to its operation. The 19.46 full-time positions yield 15,179 hours of teaching duties but in 2017–2018 the total number of hours taught at the Faculty was 24,820. From this, it can be seen that the operation of the Faculty exceeds what can be covered by its permanent staff, and temporary teachers cannot be expected to fill this big a gap. Furthermore, this amount of teaching affects other areas of the Faculty's operation and when teachers have to take on too much teaching, their research suffers, not least as

some administrative work is unavoidably added to the teaching. The Faculty of Education is responsible for its study programmes and their quality and needs to formulate suggestions on how this problem can best be solved.

Various opportunities for professional development exist, such as research semesters, professional development days and courses on e.g. new teaching software and the relevant teaching methodologies, given by the Centre of Teaching and Learning. However, a clearer structure is needed in this regard, and possibly a system should be taken up where each individual teacher formulates a professional development plan which is then followed up by administrators. Similarly, the procedures regarding both staff interviews and the reception of new staff need to be improved for them to have the intended effect.

Teachers are satisfied with the services provided by the University Library and the Office of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences but feel that Ugla, the university information system, is too cumbersome and that the Centre of Teaching and Learning has become too focused on technology for its own sake.

4. Cooperation with other universities and community links

The Faculty of Education is involved in diverse cooperation with other universities with regard to research projects and publication. Here, the ties are the closest with the School of Education at the University of Iceland and the cooperation includes research projects of various kinds, the joint publication of the Icelandic Journal of Education and examination of master's theses. There is also considerable research cooperation with foreign universities, in particular in Scandinavia. However, staff exchange with other universities is infrequent.

The academic staff of the Faculty actively participates in strategy formation and development of the Icelandic education system. This brings the teaching into close contact with the practical location and influences its development as well as influencing courses designed by the teachers concerned. Many staff members also keep close ties with the community and actively engage with the field, not least through the Faculty's close collaboration with the Centre of School Development.

Cooperative ventures of the kinds outlined above are necessary to the Faculty and add to the diversity of its operation. It is important to strengthen and develop this cooperation, not least in connection with universities abroad, which would lend further strength to the Faculty and help to enhance its research activities. However, this cooperation needs to be strengthened at Faculty level as well as within UNAK in general. For this purpose, a framework, including improved funding, needs to be created around participation in national and international cooperation projects as well as around participation in developmental projects in schools, which is currently not counted in the research accreditation system for teachers' advancement.

5. Research and academic learning

The latest research strategy of the Faculty of Education was published as a part of the Faculty's general policy formation for 2013–2018, meaning that the research strategy recently expired. In the latest research strategy, it is stipulated that the Faculty should have a Project Manager for Research who collaborates with a project management team, which has the role of “promoting active research activity and a rich research environment at the Faculty of Education”. Unfortunately, no formal recruitment was done, but a project management team was founded and hosted various events. Currently, there is no project management team nor a Project Manager for Research at the Faculty, since the administrators decided to postpone the election of a new research project management team as the project management team of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences is currently under revision.

University teachers are expected to devote 40% of their working time to research. The accepted norm is that lecturers and senior lecturers fulfil their annual research obligations by earning seven research credits and Professors ten credits. The research credits in the period 2013–2017 ranged from 428.5 credits in 2013 to 481.6 credits in 2017. The most effective way to increase research potential is the use of research semesters. During the period 2013–2018, nine research semesters were granted to six employees of the Faculty of Education.

There are examples of both research activity based on personal initiative as well as in cooperation with others inside and outside of the Faculty. Cooperation has increased, both inside UNAK as well as between institutions. Also, the staff is more often contacted by persons outside UNAK with collaboration in mind, which indicates that staff from the Faculty is highly valued as collaborators. There are some examples of students' participation in research projects, but this could be more prevalent. To open up more opportunities for students, teachers could e.g. host a website to gather ideas for students that they can monitor.

It should be pointed out that although research credits are the sole recognised criterion of research activity in the academic community, there are also clear indications that the academic staff of the Faculty of Education take the initiative in giving lectures to school staff and the public, arranging special courses, writing articles in general publications and supporting school development projects. Furthermore, the academic staff of the Faculty also carry out a large number of service research tasks, relating, for example, to the monitoring and assessment of schools, to counselling on school and educational matters in various parts of Iceland, and to surveys in cooperation with the Centre of School Development. However, research of this kind usually generates few, if any, research credits.

6. Administration and leadership

The latest strategy of UNAK entered into force in the spring of 2018 and expires in 2023. Concurrently, a workshop was held to shape its strategy on studies, teaching and research and this strategy was approved in December 2017. The next step is to work on an action plan to follow up on the strategy. This work is closely related to the work of the “transformation team”, which was formed in spring 2018, and works on reconstructing the School and its Faculties, a working process that the Faculty of Education has actively participated in. Concerning administration at the Faculty, the Faculty Meeting has the highest authority in the Faculty of Education. The Faculty Meeting chooses a Head of Faculty, two Heads of Departments, one for the five-year teacher education programme and one for the research based master’s programme, both positions for a period of two years at a time.

As is mentioned in the last subject-level review, the operation of the Faculty has been characterised by changes, and it will continue to be so. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences was founded in 2008 when the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Social Sciences were merged. In 2019, it was decided that the Faculties of the School will be four: Faculty of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Psychology, as well as the Centre of School Development.

The latest strategy of the Faculty of Education expired at the end of year 2011 and it has not been renewed since then. The Faculty’s strategy and research strategy need to be revised and put into operation and made more visible for the staff. The Faculty should also consider formulating a policy concerning education and teaching within it.

7. Evaluation, development work and quality control

A clear system is in place for monitoring the quality of the study programmes offered at the Faculty. Firstly, there is an annual revision of the curriculum. Secondly, all taught courses are assessed by students during each semester. Thirdly, the Head of Faculty conducts staff interviews with academic staff members regarding the following aspects of their work: teaching, research and administration. In addition, information is regularly channelled to the Faculty at School Council Meetings and to all staff members at Faculty Meetings and School Assemblies, depending on the nature of each case.

Teachers at the Faculty strive towards making the study programmes as good and student-centred as possible. The change in the content of study phases in the teacher education programme (BEd) is a good example of cooperation between teachers and students; the students suggested a better use of the phases, moving away from lectures to greater use of group work and work on various

assignments. Based on interviews with students, students feel like they have a voice, and that complaints result in improvements.

Various procedures are applied that can support the evaluation of the Faculty, development and quality control. This includes yearly numbers regarding the registration of students by study programmes and their study progression – status overview on progression compared to former years. Furthermore, since 2014, interviews and mentoring of new distance students has been conducted. Another example is attitude surveys for attending students and former students.