

Accreditation Report

Social Science

Reykjavík University

Expert Committee Report

January 2008

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Expert Committee

- Dr. Christian Thune, Past Executive Director of the Danish Evaluation Institute, Denmark (chair).
- Prof. Dr. Jürgen Kohler, Universität Greifswald, Germany.
- Dr. Frank Quinault, Director of Learning and Teaching Quality, University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

- M.A. Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon, Advisor, Division of Research and Innovation, The Icelandic Centre for Research – RANNIS, Reykjavik, Iceland (Liaison Officer).

1.2 Terms of Reference

The Accreditation Committee was appointed to carry out a review of social science at five different universities in Iceland: Iceland University of Education, University of Akureyri, University of Bifröst, University of Iceland and Reykjavik University respectively. The review was carried out according to Article 3 of Higher Education Institution Act (HEI) 63/2006. Rules 1067/2006 give the following instructions to the committee:

“The committee of experts shall provide the Minister of Education, Science and Culture with a report that outlines the results of the evaluation of items a to i,¹ paragraph 3, article 2 of the Rules, based on the application and information provide by Higher Education Institutions in Iceland (HEIs) in accordance with article 2, in addition to evaluation of the following factors:

1. Academic knowledge and competence of HEI within the relevant field of study and subdivisions thereof, pertaining to the quality of teaching and research, academic facilities, dissemination of knowledge and connection to community.
2. The support structure of the HEI for; the academic community, teachers and experts in the relevant field of study and the education and training of students.
3. Special attention shall be paid to the strengths of the fields of study and the subdivisions thereof, with reference to course plans, particularly in relevance to links to undergraduate and graduate studies and towards other appropriate fields of study.

¹ Items a to i referred to above are: *a. Objectives and Roles; b. Administration and Organisation; c. Organisation of teaching and research; d. Personnel qualifications requirements; e. Admission requirements and student rights and obligations; f. Teacher and student facilities and services; g. Internal quality system; h. Description of study according to learning outcomes; i. Finances.*

4. Academic standard of the field of study and subdivision thereof, in national and international context. Regard shall be taken of i.e. national and international cooperation between HEI and other institutions.

Should the conclusions of the committee be not to recommend accreditation then it shall provide a detailed report of any failure on the part of the HEI to fulfil the regulations according to article 2 or any recommendations for reparations that the HEIs must undertake before accreditation for that particular field of study can be awarded. In receipt of such report, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture will afford the HEI a specific extension to make any amendments needed. The amendments will be evaluated by the expert committee in question, who will provide the Minister of Education, Science and Culture with a report detailing the aptness of the amendments. Final decision regarding accreditation will be announced to the HEI.”

1.3 Working Method

An English translation of the accreditation application was made available to the Accreditation Committee (hereafter “the panel”) at The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture’s extranet (<http://ytri.stjr.is>) on 10 September 2007. The application had number of appendices; all of them translated into English (see Appendix 2). These materials were not especially extensive, but they were generally well-written, in good English, and adequate for their intended purpose.

The first panel meeting was held on Thursday 27 September. On Monday 1 October the panel visited the Ofanleiti building of Reykjavik University and the whole day was spent at meetings there (see Appendix 1). The panel met the Rector, a representative from the board of directors, Deans, representatives from supporting services, a number of teachers and students, alumni and representatives from industry, as well as those mostly responsible for the application (Appendix 1). The final meeting in Iceland was held on Saturday morning 6 October, followed by a meeting with Ministry representatives where they were informed of the panel’s initial reactions to the application and the visits.

The application for accreditation had been drawn up by a group consisting of the Deans from each of three Schools whose programmes were being considered, the Dean of Research, the Executive Director of Human Resources and the Director of Academic Affairs. The panel met with this group during its visit to Reykjavik University. It was told that the preparation of the application had been a valuable exercise, but also one that had been facilitated by the fact that the university was already complying with the requirements of the Bologna Process.

Whilst still in Iceland the panel asked for some further information from the University. The University contact, Þorlákur Karlsson, was very helpful and provided the information requested quickly. It included some clarification about meetings with students, faculty and alumni and representatives from industry.

After circulating drafts by email the panel agreed on a final draft in December 2007. Chapters 2 to 10 were sent to the Reykjavik University for corrections of factual mistakes and misinterpretations on Wednesday 12 December 2007. The university replied on 27 December making some specific comments which have been taken into account and corrections have been made accordingly.

1.4 Short Evaluation of the Work Process

The expert committee found the work process very rewarding in terms of experiencing Icelandic university culture and working with the concept and goals of the present quality assurance system for higher education launched by the Ministry. The committee wishes to state its sincere appreciation of its working relationship with the Reykjavik University and the four other universities involved. All demonstrated the basic academic qualities of openness and frankness, enabling discussions during the site visits to focus not only on the strengths but also in some cases on the weaker points of their social science programmes. The universities have, in most respects, made a sincere and credible effort to produce the documentation needed to show that their programmes comply with the quality criteria defined by legislation. However, it would have been easier for the committee to review the five universities in a consistent and comparable manner had they been given more detailed guidance as to the form and content of the requisite documentation.

The expert committee has, during the whole working process, been given excellent help by Rannis staff members Eiríkur Smári Sigurðarson and Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon. These two have been instrumental not only in making practical arrangements smooth and comfortable for committee members, but also as effective interpreters of Icelandic traditions and the culture of higher education learning. During the recent demanding period of finalising and editing the reports the three

committee members have further learned to value Eiríkur's and Magnús's constructive and patient professional attitude.

2. Objectives and roles

Reykjavik University (RU) is, in many respects, a new creation. It was first established as a university in 1998, focussing on business, law and computer science. Preparation for the programmes now offered by the School of Health and Education began in the autumn of 2004. RU incorporated the former Technical University of Iceland in June 2005, which added programmes in engineering to its portfolio. Several of its Master's Programmes are less than three years old. The university has a new Rector and it is planning to move to a new campus in the near future.

RU has set itself ambitious objectives. It seeks to be “the university of choice” for both students and academic staff in Iceland. Its strategy for achieving this has six main elements: increased research; improved teaching quality, with an emphasis on innovation; internationalisation; interdisciplinarity; close ties with business and industry; and strengthened finances. Some at least of these broad objectives have already been translated into specific targets, such as the intention that RU should be fully bilingual in three years time.

Each of the three Schools that were encompassed by this accreditation exercise – Business, Law and Health & Education – has formulated its own strategic plan, based on the six principles above, for the period to 2010. The plans are used to determine budgets and will be monitored.

Staff told the panel [*Meeting with Faculty*] that they felt involved in the process of strategy formulation, through meetings and the exchange of ideas, though perhaps somewhat less so in the School of Health and Education than in the other two Schools. Strategy meetings had been a feature of the School of Business for many years and were now felt to be delivering real results. Law had agreed timelines for the achievement of certain goals, for which named individuals were responsible.

RU is already Iceland's second largest university. It is seeking to increase student numbers quite substantially but primarily through increased recruitment to its graduate programmes. The aim is not to become the biggest Icelandic university but to offer the highest quality within its fields of study.

RU is a privately operated university and a business ethos is one of its salient characteristics. A desire to enhance Iceland's commercial competitiveness has always been part of RU's mission and the Rector compared her position to that of a CEO. The university believes that its private status confers certain advantages, in terms of managerial agility and flexibility, which may also act as a spur to Iceland's state institutions. The Rector considers that RU has a good relationship with the Ministry of Education, which appears to support the university's strategic aims and to be ready to assist them.

The panel met one of the representatives of Icelandic business who sit on the University Council. He did not consider that RU's close ties to business had an adverse effect on its other Schools or that it endangered academic freedom, which, he said, the university safeguards by hiring only the best staff.

Conclusion:

Article 2 of the HEI Act charges universities with the responsibility to create and disseminate knowledge, with the aim of strengthening the infrastructure of Icelandic society and its position in an international context. The panel is satisfied that RU shares these aspirations and is helping to fulfil them.

The meetings with staff and students conveyed a sense of self-confidence and vigour that, taken together with documentary evidence of recent achievements in teaching and research, augur well for the university's future.

Recommendations:

RU may need to constrain, to some degree, the amount of freedom it allows Schools to create new research centres or institutes if it wishes all of them to achieve

international recognition. The university may wish to consider introducing systematic procedures for the initial licensing and subsequent review of such centres and institutes.

The panel also considers that what it understands to be RU's target of expanding student numbers by 2,000 – largely by increased enrolment in *graduate* programmes – is a very ambitious one.

3. Administration and Organisation

The University Council is RU's governing body and all its members other than the Rector, whom it appoints, are drawn from business and industry. They approve the annual budget and must authorise all major decisions, for which the Rector then has operational responsibility. The Rector exercises this function with the assistance of an Executive Board, whose membership includes the Dean of each School, Executive Director of Development, Dean of Research, Executive Director of Finance and Operation, and Executive Director of Human Resources and Quality.

There are five Schools: Business, Computer Science, Health & Education, Law, and Science & Engineering. Each is managed by a Dean, whose responsibilities include strategic planning, the drafting of a budget, and the appointment of teaching and other staff. The Deans are appointed by, and answerable to, the Rector.

The internal structure of the three Schools covered by this accreditation exercise varies significantly. That may reflect differences in size, the School of Business being substantially larger than Law which is itself larger than Health & Education. It is certainly conditioned by the nature of the academic provision: thus Law offers just two programmes at present, compared with 7 in Business and 5 in Health & Education. Moreover, the School of Health & Education comprises four distinct areas – public health, education, sports science, and mathematics – the last of which also involves collaboration with other Schools.

It is less clear, however, why other organisational structures have developed differently within the three Schools. Thus, for example, according to the

documentation seen by the panel, only one School has a Teaching Development Committee whereas another School appears to be unique in having established Quality Councils. There may be valid reasons for these variations, but staff agreed [*Meeting with Application Committee*] that greater homogenisation, guided by existing good practice, may be desirable.

All Schools appoint a member to serve on the University's Science Council, which is chaired by a Dean of Research and intended to support one of RU's key objectives by encouraging increased research activity.

The Deans of the individual Schools have the authority, subject to consultation with the Rector and the Executive Board, to establish research centres or institutes. Many already exist and it is expected that more will be created in the next few years.

Business has three Centres for Research, on: Innovation and Entrepreneurship; Human Resource Management; Public-Private Partnership.

Health and Education hosts the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis, is a partner in RU's Mathematics Institute and is contributing to the development of a national sports science research centre.

Law has three institutes, for: European Law, Financial Services Law; Natural Resources Law. It also hosts the European Documentation Centre on behalf of the European Commission.

The documentation made available to the panel included a table showing student applications, acceptances, drop-outs and graduations for each of the three Schools during 2006-07. The ratio of applications to acceptances was highest for the BA in Law, at approximately 2:1. Drop-out rates varied across Schools and programmes but none was especially high in comparison with figures produced by the National Audit Office.

Conclusion:

The panel is satisfied that it had been provided with all the information that is required for this section of the accreditation application, and that the manner in which RU is managed conforms to Articles 15 and 16 of the HEI Act.

Recommendations:

RU may wish to consider whether it would be advantageous to seek more uniformity in the internal organisation of its Schools. It might also be better to adopt a common house style for such documents as annual Research Reports and Learning Outcomes. Those produced by the School of Business seemed best suited to a wide readership.

4. Organisation of teaching and research

The degrees and diplomas offered by RU within the general domain of Social Sciences and for which it is seeking accreditation are:

School of Business:

BS (Bachelor of Science) Degree in Business (180 ECTS)

Diploma in Business (90 ECTS)

MBA (Master of Business Administration) Degree (90 ECTS)

MSc (Master of Science) Degree in Investment Management (90 or 120 ECTS)

MSc Degree in Accounting and Auditing (120 ECTS)

MSc Degree in Corporate Finance (90 or 120 ECTS)

MSc Degree in International Business (120 ECTS)

School of Health & Education:

BS (Bachelor of Science) Degree in Sports Science (180 ECTS)

MPH (Master of Public Health) Degree in Public Health (120 ECTS)

MEd (Master of Education) Degree in Health and Education (120 ECTS)

MEd Degree in Mathematics and Education (120 ECTS)

Diploma in Education (60 ECTS)

School of Law:

BA (Bachelor of Arts) Degree in Law (180 ECTS)

ML (Master of Law) Degree in Law (120 ECTS)

The panel noted that the nomenclature used to describe some of the above programmes was not entirely consistent in the (English) documentation, with variation between ‘BS’ and ‘BSc’ and one reference to the Bachelor’s Degree in Business *Administration*. Uniformity would be desirable.

The BS in Business is a three year programme (or four years part-time) that aims to prepare students for work in the business community or for further study, through a combination of group and independent work. There is also a two year Diploma Programme, which allows students to focus on one of three main areas. The four MSc Programmes, each lasting two years, have been tailored to meet the needs of particular groups. The two year MBA Programme is designed to provide graduates with general management training and to develop leadership skills.

The three year BA in Law seeks to supplement traditional core topics in law with new ones that have been made pertinent by the globalisation of the Icelandic economy. It also emphasises the practical application of legal theory, for instance through case studies. The two year ML Programme is the only Master’s Law Degree in Iceland that is open to graduates who have not previously studied law. However, it does not qualify them for entry to the legal profession.

The BS in Sports Science qualifies graduates to teach physical education at all levels. The two year Master of Public Health is a research-based programme that pays special attention to the health of children and adolescents. The MEd Degrees in Health and Education and in Mathematics and Education provide a teaching qualification along with specialised knowledge of the field in question. The Diploma in Education is a one year programme which qualifies graduates to teach in upper primary or secondary education.

The supporting documentation provided for this section of the accreditation application included the School of Law’s 2006 *Policy on Teaching*. The policy

contains much sensible advice to teachers about curriculum design and teaching methods. Two noteworthy features are: (1) that “there should be an effort to employ diversified [teaching] methods”; and (2) that although no general rules are prescribed for assessing students’ performance, mixed methods are recommended “in line with the Law School’s emphasis on students being able to cope with real work when they enter the labor market”. *The Regulation on Reykjavik University* likewise states that teaching methods and assessment “shall be varied”.

RU’s commentary on this section of its accreditation application also refers to the existence of distance education opportunities and notes that distance education students attend two sessions on location every semester. However, the panel was not advised as to the role, if any, that distance learning may play in the programmes that it was asked to accredit.

All the other documentary evidence for this section was concerned with research or the balance between teaching and research in staff contracts. This emphasis may reflect RU’s determination to enhance its research standing. The Application Committee told the panel that teaching, though always open to improvement, was already judged to be of a high standard, and more research was the main goal for all Schools.

Many measures are being used by RU to achieve this goal. They include: advertising new positions to attract experienced or promising researchers to the university; giving staff the freedom to pursue any research topic and to publish where they choose; rewarding achievement by earmarking time for research including sabbatical leave; providing seed funding for the creation of research centres; and making “high-impact, international, peer-reviewed publications” a condition for personal advancement. This section of the accreditation application concludes with the self-evaluation that RU is achieving its aim, citing as evidence publication output, collaboration with scholars overseas, service on research councils and similar bodies, and grants obtained.

Details of these indicators of success were supplied to the panel through the 2006 Research Reports produced by each of the three Schools. The School of Business report deserves special mention because of the way in which it has set clear targets for

publication rate, conference papers and grant income as a means of measuring progress by 2010. The report also recommends that the points system for research in the School's advancement rules be reviewed so as to give more weight to SSCI and so-called 'A' publications and not to penalise co-authorship by (not more than) two persons.

The Director of Research Services told the panel that the policy being followed by RU's Science Council is to hire the best researchers and to strive to be the best in certain fields, valuing quality above quantity.

Conclusion:

The HEI Act requires universities to organise teaching by means of courses that are evaluated through ECTS, on graduation from which students should receive a Diploma Supplement. The panel was provided with a specimen Diploma Supplement and informed that RU is so far the only Icelandic university to have been awarded a Diploma Supplement Label. It is satisfied that RU has a protocol in accordance with Paragraph 3 of Article 2 of the HEI Act.

Recommendations:

- the Schools of Business and of Health & Education, should each produce (if they have not already done so – the application says only that “some Schools” have published such policies) a teaching policy analogous to that which the panel did receive from the School of Law;
- for any future exercise of this kind, more information should be made available to enable the external reviewers to ascertain what guidance is given to students regarding the manner in which they will be assessed and what they must do to achieve a given level of performance;
- more information should also be provided concerning the place of distance learning in RU programmes.

5. Personnel qualification requirements

Seven categories of academic staff are recognised by the *Regulation on Reykjavik University*. Assistant Professors and Associate Professors must hold a Master's Degree, at least, whilst a recognised Doctorate, or equivalent, is required for a full Professorship. Appointments or promotions to any of these ranks must be made by a three-person Evaluation Committee. These regulations satisfy the requirements of the HEI Act. Three other categories of staff are outwith the promotions process: Adjunct, Lecturer, and Specialist. RU can also bestow the title of Professor of Practice on a prominent business leader who is also a noted teacher.

The Evaluation Committee bases its judgements on three areas of academic activity. Research is evaluated by reference to publications, but also to the management of research and the supervision of research students. Teaching is evaluated by considering the methods employed and how innovative they may be, by ascertaining whether faculty produce teaching materials that other faculty or universities use in their teaching, and through student feedback and peer assessment. The third area covers the candidate's impact on Business and Community Links.

One of RU's strategic aims is to increase the proportion of its teaching staff with Doctoral Degrees.

The panel was provided with tables showing the number of staff in each School (headcount and FTEs). The most striking feature of these tables was the relatively high number of part-time lecturers, especially in Business and, though to a lesser extent, in Law. RU explained that it makes extensive use of part-time staff so that students have the opportunity to interact with business people and lawyers, and also, in some areas of study, because of a lack of qualified staff in Iceland.

The panel asked RU's senior staff [*Meeting with Application Committee*] whether the opportunity to seek internal promotion might, over time, have a detrimental effect on the institution by curtailing external appointments to senior posts. This was not judged to be a problem, at least for now in the context of an expanding university. There is no fixed limit on the number or proportion of senior posts.

The panel also enquired [*Final meeting with Application Committee*] how much discretion was allowed in the determination of salaries. RU seeks to offer competitive salaries and there is no fixed limit. It was emphasised, however, that pay was not the only consideration that had made RU attractive to recent appointees.

Conclusion:

The panel is satisfied that the criteria and procedures used by RU in the appointment and promotion of academic staff satisfy Articles 15 and 16 of the HEI Act.

Recommendation:

RU's quite extensive use of part-time and visiting staff, especially in Business and in Law, has already been noted. It was clear to the panel that this often enriches the university through the introduction of outside – often international – experience. As the University is doubtless aware, it is especially important to ensure that these staff are properly inducted and integrated into the institution.

6. Admission requirements and student rights and obligations

Because RU is a private institution it is not bound by the legislation on these matters to which public universities are subject. However, it endeavours to comply with the principles underlying the legislation when framing its own rules.

The *Regulation on Reykjavik University* confirms that entry requirements are in accordance with the Universities Act. Schools have the power: to set additional requirements; to waive the need for a matriculation certificate; and to award credit for studies undertaken elsewhere.

Rules on study progress and examinations are developed by the Department of Academic Affairs and must be endorsed by the Executive Board. The panel was given a series of documents which, between them, set out the general rules for study and examinations and the rules pertaining to individual Schools and programmes. These

documents also describe how students may lodge appeals or complaints and how they are determined. The panel did not detect any inconsistencies.

RU has also developed a Code of Ethics, for the academic community as a whole. Alleged breaches of that Code are referred to a three-person Ethics Committee, appointed by the Rector after consultation with staff and students, which acts in accordance with procedures that have been approved by the University Council.

Staff [*Meeting with Faculty*] were asked what factors influenced students in choosing RU. They believed that students were attracted by the nature of the teaching offered, with plenty of group work and practical exercises, as well as by its quality. RU's competitive stance was also thought to appeal to students.

Students were asked a similar question [*Meeting with undergraduate and graduate students*]. Reputation (including word of mouth), ease of communication with academic staff, interesting and relevant teaching methods in the School of Law, and the connections between the MBA Programme and both local and international business were all mentioned. The panel noted that RU's research record did not feature among these spontaneous responses. The students confirmed that they had not been deterred by RU's tuition fees, which they were able to meet by taking out student loans.

All the students interviewed by the panel considered that RU had lived up to their expectations. Teachers were accessible and facilities judged to be excellent, including RU's learning management system, known as *MySchool*; they were not perturbed by the Library's heavy dependence on electronic resources; and any complaints were dealt with in a professional manner. When asked to identify possible improvements, several suggestions were made by the students (and can be passed on if the University wishes) but all were specific to particular programmes.

Because the accreditation documentation provided little information about the mechanisms for student representation at RU, the panel asked for amplification when it had its final meeting with the Application Committee. It wished to discover, in particular, what form of student representation there might be above the level of the

department, since this was something that the students who had been interviewed by the panel confessed they knew little about. The panel was informed that, from the summer of 2007, a student representative had begun attending meetings of the University Council. Student representatives also attend departmental meetings in the Schools of Law and Health and Education, and quality councils in the Schools of Business and Health and Education. Furthermore the Rector meets monthly with the board of the Student Union.

Conclusion:

The panel is satisfied that RU's entrance requirements for students fulfil Article 19 of the HEI Act and that the accreditation application had provided the requisite information concerning the rights and obligations of students.

7. Teacher and student facilities and services

Besides being given documentary evidence, especially about library holdings and access to computers, the panel was able to visit some of the classrooms used by students and to meet a representative group of service providers.

In its application for accreditation, RU highlighted the fact that its buildings and facilities can be accessed by students 24 hours a day all year round. The application also drew attention to the provision the university makes for the group and project work that is an important component of its teaching.

All classrooms are equipped with data projectors and computers and some also have Smart Screens. RU has developed its own learning management system, *MySchool*, which teachers are required to use and which provides both a homepage for each course and a personal timetable for every student.

Students can request assistance from the IT Service by email or, in an emergency, by telephone.

The Academic Affairs Office collaborates with the IT Service to provide both students and staff with instruction in the use of *MySchool* and it also manages the registry function, including the production of students' "study process reports".

What was, until this academic year, the student counselling service has been renamed "Student Services" to acknowledge the broader role it has now taken on. The intention is that it will serve all students and not just those in difficulty. It remains equipped, however, to provide counselling for those who need it. Students who are at risk of dropping out are offered support. Successful students are invited to help their peers by participating in a group counselling "Study Circle".

As the additional responsibilities being taken on by Student Services will include financial aid, the panel asked whether RU offers scholarships to students. They were told that the 2-3 % of students in all undergraduate programmes who achieve Dean's listing receive free tuition the following semester and that the University had just secured support for 35 scholarships from a local bank. The panel was also told that the existing Careers service is being developed further.

RU has created an International Office in support of its stated aim of becoming an international university. The office assists both students and staff who wish to come to RU from abroad or to go overseas from RU. The documentation shown to the panel included a useful *International Student Guide*.

RU operates a combined Library and Information Service (BUHR). The library holds some books and printed journals, and it manages a "study books" scheme whereby teachers can reserve material for particular courses. Students can also request inter-library loans. However, BUHR's principal resources are electronic, with access to approximately 90 databases and 20,000 publications. The Director of Library Services can submit budgetary requests to the Executive Director of Financial Services or to the RU management as a whole.

Services for staff include the provision of a laptop or desk computer, free software and, for permanent staff, the offer of a home connection to ensure constant access to the RU intranet.

Each School has its own Service Office to handle all administration at that level.

RU has recently appointed a Director of Research Services to encourage and support research at the university, and to help assess outcomes and decide how resources should be allocated. The primary goal is “to greatly increase” RU’s research income, both domestic and foreign.

The panel asked the representatives of the support services how they related to RU’s senior management. There is a specific channel through the Executive Director Human Resources and Quality, who sits on the Executive Board, besides which access to the senior management as a whole was said to be very open. The support staff felt that they had a voice in the affairs of the university.

Surveys are used to evaluate the performance of the support services, although they do not seem to occur at fixed intervals, and staff are appraised individually by management.

Utilisation figures were supplied to the panel by the Library and Information Service, thus meeting the final requirement for this part of the accreditation process.

Conclusion:

The panel is satisfied that both students and faculty at RU are well served by their support staff.

Recommendations:

It might be beneficial, nonetheless, to survey student (and perhaps faculty) opinion regarding these services at regular intervals.

Many universities have introduced some form of “personal development planning” for their students in recent years and found it to be of value. RU’s “study process reports” appear intended to fulfil a similar purpose, but there seemed to be limited awareness of them among the staff and students interviewed by the panel.

8. Internal quality system

a) *Teaching*

The courses organised by the Academic Affairs Office to instruct staff in the use of the learning management system, *MySchool*, take place at the beginning of each semester and are supplemented by others, for more experienced users, on particular applications.

New staff can obtain advice from their Dean or Head of Department and some matters are covered by a mentoring scheme.

Teaching methods are discussed at School and departmental level, for instance as part of the annual strategy meeting, and RU holds teaching quality days each academic year, in August and in January. Teachers, including those in part-time posts, are expected to attend these meetings unless special circumstances make that impossible.

Advice on good teaching was drawn together in a *Teaching Quality Handbook* issued in August 2007. This is in five sections: Preparing to Teach; Teaching Itself and Interactions with Students; Evaluating Student Performance; Teaching Evaluations by Students; Overview of the Teaching Quality Assurance System at RU. Each of these sections contains good advice that is communicated in a clear and supportive fashion.

RU has also produced a standard course evaluation questionnaire that is administered through *MySchool*. For undergraduate courses a short version is normally administered one-third of the way through, in time for possible changes to be made for that class, followed by a fuller version (also used for graduate courses) at the end of teaching. The response rate is usually c. 60%. The results are seen by the Dean/Head of Department, who will compliment their colleague if the results are good and help them to identify means of improving if they are disappointing. It is recognised that this is only one measure of teaching performance, but staff acknowledge its utility and it is taken into account during annual staff performance interviews and when deciding on promotions.

The panel discussed RU's quality assurance of teaching with two members of staff who have a special responsibility for it, the Director of Human Resources the Director of Academic Affairs.

The first of these posts is a new role at RU, whose importance is signalled by the fact that it carries membership of the Executive Board.

The panel asked whether RU offers any formal rewards to teachers for teaching innovations. There are none at present but the matter is under consideration.

It also sought more information than was available from the documentation concerning aspects of assessment. Student interviewees confirmed that two examiners are always required for oral examinations and the Application Committee provided a full, and satisfactory, account of how group projects are assessed.

The panel was advised that the School of Business had conducted a survey of former students who had graduated from its BSc Programme in 2003 and 2004 and that Law had surveyed its 2007 ML graduates shortly before they completed their studies, to gather information about their actual or intended careers.

b) Research

Each School has a Research Council composed of three research-active staff, one of whom sits on the RU Science Council. The School publishes an annual Research Report (see above) and these reports are used to determine the internal distribution of governmental research funding received by RU.

RU intends to establish a system of periodic reviews of research by expert panels at 3 or 5 year intervals.

Individual research output is monitored by the Deans through an annual performance review meeting for which the member of staff submits a self-evaluation together with concrete plans for the coming year.

Conclusion:

One of the requirements of the HEI Act is that there shall be external evaluations of teaching and research. No such evaluations were reported to the panel, which understands however that this requirement has been suspended by the Ministry. With that proviso, the panel is satisfied that RU's quality assurance arrangements meet the conditions laid down in Articles 11 and 12 of the Act.

The panel was impressed by the professional approach to quality assurance exhibited by the Directors of Human Resources and Academic Affairs and wishes to commend the *Teaching Quality Handbook* as a good first step.

Recommendations:

Areas for possible improvement are:

- further guidance for staff on assessment, including alignment with learning outcomes and the production of grade-related criteria;
- a more rigorous approach to curriculum design and course approval, with a requirement for some degree of external involvement.

9. Description of study according to learning outcomes

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has produced a National Qualification Framework for Iceland. This provides an overarching structure for Icelandic degrees, defined by 3 cycles and 5 levels and using ECTS credits, in accordance with the Bologna Process. The Framework also includes Degree Descriptors, which set out the criteria that students must meet for each of the five levels. Besides Knowledge and Understanding gained, four kinds of skill are differentiated: Practical skills; Theoretical skills; Communication skills and information literacy; Learning Skills. The HEI Act requires universities to produce learning outcomes that are compatible with the Framework for all accredited programmes.

The panel was provided with the Learning Outcomes that were published, separately, by Business, Law, and Health & Education, in August 2007. All seemed to have been well thought out and clearly expressed, in language that would be intelligible to students, and with appropriate differentiation by programme and level.

RU's commentary on these learning outcomes, prepared as part of its accreditation application, identifies three general characteristics: that the larger part of every programme is mandatory but with increasing scope for student choice as studies progress; that practical projects are strongly encouraged; and that there are opportunities for study abroad.

The panel took the opportunity afforded by a meeting with alumni and representatives from industry to ask whether, in their experience, RU students have been achieving these outcomes and whether it was possible to identify any characteristics that might distinguish RU graduates from graduates with equivalent degrees from other Icelandic universities.

With regard to formal business education, no one in this group considered that RU graduates differed significantly from those educated elsewhere, but it was felt that MBA graduates from RU were very dynamic and focussed on their work. One MBA graduate who had passed on some suggestions for improvement was pleased to report that they appeared to have been acted upon. Another interviewee recommended that the School should put more emphasis on what he regarded as the core element of business, namely, selling.

The same questions elicited a variety of responses for Law. On the one hand, an employer had found that RU graduates seemed especially well prepared, through the practical and applied elements of their undergraduate training, for the world of work; but, on the other hand, a different respondent felt that their in-depth, academic knowledge of the law might not be as extensive as it should be. Two ML graduates, who were from the first ever cohort, said they were both very satisfied with the education they had received.

The panel was also told that teaching and research in public health had taken a great step forward, in part because of the influence of a visiting professor from overseas.

Conclusion:

The panel is satisfied that all the programmes that it was asked to accredit are indeed producing Learning Outcomes that accord with the National Qualifications Framework as required by Article 5 of the HEI Act.

Recommendation

In the opinion of the panel, a clear statement of learning outcomes is only part of what is required pedagogically. It is also necessary to demonstrate the extent to which they have been achieved, and this depends upon making the linkage between intended outcomes and means of assessment equally explicit. Such links are not yet a part of any of the documentation seen by the panel, which recommends that their creation should be the next step.

10. Finances

The panel was provided with a copy of RU's audited financial statement for the year ending 31 December 2006. This disclosed a small operating loss for the year but also a small net surplus after the inclusion of interest and indexation income.

According to the Rector, about 60% of RU's income comes from the Treasury, for teaching and research, 25% from student fees and the remainder, which is increasing, from private sources. The panel was also told [*Meeting with Rector and Council Member*] that private funding is normally unconditional and that the University Council has ultimate authority over expenditure.

Conclusion:

The panel is not aware of any financial considerations that would prevent RU from satisfying Chapter VIII of the HEI Act.

11. Summary of findings and recommendations

The panel was also asked to summarise its findings by reaching a judgement in respect of each of four broad areas, as follows below.

a. Academic knowledge and competence of the HEI in the relevant field of study and subdivisions thereof, pertaining to the quality of teaching and research, academic facilities, dissemination of knowledge and connection to community.

The panel is satisfied that the staff at RU is well-qualified to deliver high quality teaching and research in the fields of Business, Health & Education and Law. The academic facilities are fit for purpose and close ties with the community, especially business and industry, are a key part of the university's mission. RU is strongly committed to raising its research profile and has taken significant initiatives towards this end.

b. The support structure of the HEI for the academic community, teachers and experts in the relevant field of study and the education and training of students.

Both staff and students are well-supported. Facilities for the latter include a new, comprehensive Student Services department and an International Office. The university will be moving to a new campus in a few years time.

c. Special attention shall be paid to the strengths of the fields of study and the subdivisions thereof, with reference to course plans, particularly in connection with links between undergraduate and graduate studies and towards other appropriate fields of study.

Neither the time available to the panel during its visit nor the documentation available to it in advance was sufficient to judge the strength of each and every programme. What can be said, however, is that no deficiencies were detected and that the university appears to be leading the way in implementing the Bologna process with its introduction of the Diploma Supplement.

d. Academic standard of the field of study and subdivisions thereof, in a national and international context. Notice shall be taken of national and international cooperation between HEI and other institutions.

RU's international outlook and the overseas experience of many of its staff mean that it is well-placed to benchmark its academic standards against those of leading universities in other countries. The panel formed the view that there is scope for greater co-operation between universities within Iceland, including RU.

Recommendation

The committee recommends the accreditation of the field of social science in the Reykjavik University.

**Signatures of the Accreditation Committee for Higher Education
Institutions in the field of Social Science in Iceland 2007**

Dr. Christian Thune

Past Executive Director of the Danish Evaluation Institute, Denmark (chair)

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Kohler

Universität Greifswald, Germany

Dr. Frank Quinault

Director of Learning and Teaching Quality, University of St. Andrews, Scotland

Appendix 1: Visit to the Reykjavik University

Monday 1 October 2007 (Christian, Jürgen, Frank and Magnús)

09:10 **Visit to the Rector's office.**

Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

The group was met by Rector Svafa Grönfeldt and Eggert Guðmundsson, representative from the board of directors and CEO of Grandi.

09:40 **Meeting with the application committee (incl. deans and research council).**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Present: Þorlákur Karlsson, Dean RU School of Business, Inga Dóra Sigfúsdóttir, Dean RU School of Health and Education, Þórður S. Gunnarsson, Dean RU School of Law, Einar Steingrímsson, Dean of Research, Ásta Bjarnadóttir, Executive Director Human Resources and Quality, Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Academic Affairs.

10:30 **Coffee break**

10:40 **Representatives from supporting services.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Present: Guðrún Tryggvadóttir, Director of Library Services, Sigríður Kristinsdóttir, International Office Project Manager, Sigríður Hulda Jónsdóttir, Director of Student Services, Jóna K. Kristinsdóttir, Senior Faculty Administrator RU School of Law, Kristján Kristjánsson, Director of Research Services, Runólfur Birgir Leifsson, Executive Director of Financial Services.

11:20 **Internal Quality Systems and Human Resources.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Present: Steinn Jóhannsson, Academic Affairs, Ásta Bjarnadóttir, Human Resources Quality.

11:40 **Visit to the main library.**

Ofanleiti 2, 2nd floor.

The group was met by Guðrún Tryggvadóttir, Director of Library Services, who walked the expert committee through the main library and explained its functions.

11:55 **Lunch**

12:40 **Guided tour around the facilities.**

Steinn Jóhannsson, Academic Affairs, Þorlákur Karlsson, Dean RU School of Business walked the expert committee around the facilities of the RU.

13:20 **Meeting with faculty.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Present: John Allegrante, Professor in RU School of Health and Education, Ásrún Mathíasdóttir, Assistant Professor in RU School of Health and Education, Álfgeir Logi Kristjánsson, Adjunct in RU School of Health and Education, Ragnhildur Helgadóttir, Professor in RU School of Law, Þórdís Ingadóttir, Associate Professor in RU School of Law, Aðalsteinn E. Jónasson, Assistant Professor in RU School of Law, Aðalsteinn Leifsson, Director of the MBA program, Assistant Professor School of Business, Auður Arna Arnardóttir, Assistant Professor in RU School of Business, Axel Hall, Assistant Professor in RU School of Business, Rögnvaldur Sæmundsson, Associate Professor in RU School of Business.

14:10 **Meeting with undergraduate and graduate students.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Present: Björn Jóhannsson, MSc student in International Business, Einar Ólafsson, BS-student in Sports Education, Finnur Beck, BA-student in Law, Guðrún Ragnarsdóttir, MPH-student, Magnús Scheving Thorsteinsson, MBA student, Sonja Bjarnadóttir, ML-student in Law, Ingólfur Kristján Guðmundsson, BSc-student in Business.

14:50 **Break**

15:10 **Meeting with alumni and representatives from industry.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Present: Haraldur Ingi Birgisson, graduate with a ML-degree, Brian Daniel Marshall, graduate with a M.Ed.-degree, Davíð Ingi Jónsson, graduate with a ML-degree, Ólöf Kristín Sívertsson, graduate with a MPH-degree, Sigrún Ragna Ólafsdóttir, graduate with a MBA-degree, Guðmundur Frímansson, Chief Financial Officer - VBS Investment bank, Gunnar Sturluson, Executive Director at Logos Law Firm, Ragnhildur Ágústsdóttir, graduate with a BSc-degree in Business.

15:40 **Student projects and theses.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Steinn Jóhannsson, Academic Affairs, brought some samples of student final theses.

16:00 **Expert committee deliberates.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

16:45 **Final discussions with application committee.**

Room 532, Ofanleiti 2, 5th floor.

Present: Þorlákur Karlsson, Dean RU School of Business, Þórður S. Gunnarsson, Dean RU School of Law, Einar Steingrímsson, Dean of Research, Ásta Bjarnadóttir, Executive Director Human Resources and Quality, Steinn Jóhannsson, Director of Academic Affairs, John Allegrante, Professor in RU School of Health and Education.

17:10 **Close**

Appendix 2: Documents Received

1. Higher Education Institution Act 63/2006 (draft translation).
2. Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions according to Article 3 of Higher Education Institution Act, No. 63/2006 (draft translation).
3. National Qualification Framework Iceland (draft translation).
4. Checklist on structure and approach on Expert Committee report and recommendations.

5. Application for Accreditation of the Social Science at the Reykjavik University.
6. Human Resource Strategy - Reykjavik University.
7. Regulation on Reykjavik University.
8. Organizational chart - Reykjavik University.
9. Organizational charts for law, business, education and public health.
10. Statistics - Reykjavik University.
11. Annual Research Report - Education and Public Health 2007.
12. Annual Research Report - Law 2006.
13. Annual Research Report - RU School of Business 2006.
14. Research Policy - School of Law - 2006-2008.
15. School of Law Policy on Teaching.
16. Faculty Information and links to CVis.
17. Faculty statistics.
18. Integrity and ethical work on assignments.
19. MBA Rules and Regulations.
20. ML-Rules Governing Master Studies School of Law.
21. Progress Rules for RU School of Business.
22. Progress Rules for the School of Law.
23. Progress Rules for the School of Public Health and Education.
24. Study and examination rules 2007.
25. Courses top 50 students' visits.
26. E-collections in business.
27. E-collections in education.
28. E-collections in law.
29. Example-diploma supplement.
30. International Student Guide.
31. Library visits.
32. Number - classrooms – info.
33. Supporting services – statistics on staff.
34. Teachers - evaluation – questions.
35. Teachers Quality Handbook – 2007.
36. Learning Outcomes in Business.
37. Learning Outcomes in Education and Public Health.
38. Learning Outcomes in Law.
39. HR English financial statements 2006.

In addition the application referred to the following websites and files:

40. The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis, ICSRA (only available in Icelandic but with an English introduction): <http://www.rannsoknir.is/>.
41. RU's Mathematics Institute (available in Icelandic and English): <http://www.math.ru.is>.
42. An interactive Course Catalog offered by The Academic Affairs Office (in Icelandic and English): <http://ru.is/?PageID=740>.