

## Faculty of Law

### SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

#### Subject-Level Review Executive Summary



HUG- OG FÉLAGSVÍSINDASVIÐ

## Introduction

This report contains an executive summary of the Subject-Level Review carried out by the Faculty of Law at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Akureyri. The review was carried out in response to the requirement to conduct subject-level reviews within the institution-wide review undertaken by the Icelandic Quality board for Higher Education, under the authority of the Icelandic Government. The report is built upon the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education (QEF), 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*<sup>1</sup> as described in full in the *Quality Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2017, QUEF 2)* and the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*.<sup>2</sup> This review closely follows Section 3 of the Handbook: *Subject-Level Review including research*. The Faculty of Law established a working group in February 2020, comprised of the Head of the Faculty (*ex officio* chair of the working group), the members of the faculty and two representatives of the student associations.

The members of the working group were:

1. Dr Antje Neuman, Assistance Professor
2. Hrannar S. Hafberg, Assistance Professor
3. Ingibjörg Ingvadóttir, Adjunct
4. Júlí Ósk Antonsdóttir, Adjunct
5. Dr Rachael Lorna Johnstone, Professor
6. Ragnheiður Elfa Þorsteinsdóttir, Assistance Professor and Head of Faculty

With the assistance of:

7. Nökkvi Alexander Rounak Jónsson, 3<sup>rd</sup> year BA student
8. Arna Garðarsdóttir, 2<sup>nd</sup> year MA student in Polar Law

## The self-evaluation process

The process for the self-evaluation has been discussed for some time and work began on a joint report of the erstwhile Faculty of Social Sciences and Law in 2019. This faculty was then dissolved into three independent faculties (Law, Psychology and Social Sciences) in February 2019, but the intention was to continue with the submission of a single, joint report. However, a decision was taken in January 2020 that the three new faculties would submit independent reports.

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<sup>1</sup>Rannís, 2017

<sup>2</sup>ENQA, 2015

This Subject-Level Review can be regarded as a follow-up to the comprehensive Subject-Level Review that was carried out in 2015. Due to the extensive work carried out at that time, the working group decided to build on that work and focus on making necessary updates with particular emphasis on the changes that have taken place since, particularly, in terms of teaching methods, flexible studies and distance learning, introduced in 2016 as well as ongoing curriculum review and revisions.

Meetings were held in autumn 2019 when the heads of the Faculty of Law, Faculty of Social Sciences and Faculty of Psychology were appointed to sit on a committee for the self-evaluation work. A decision was taken in January 2020 on separating the work to prepare individual reports for each of the faculties. Meetings were held in January, February, and March on the final outline of the report. A decision was taken to involve one representative from each of the three main study lines: BA, ML and Polar Law (PL). An outline with timeline was drafted after the meeting, sent for an approval to the Director of Quality Management and approved accordingly. A decision was taken to finalise a draft by mid-April. In March and April 2020 data, statistics, and information were collected and several meetings were held in April. On 30 April 2020, a draft report was sent to external advisors together with a list of Annexes. Student focus groups were formed for BA, ML and Polar Law.

The team's advisors were Auli Toom, PhD, Professor of Higher Education, Director of Centre for University Teaching and Learning (HYPE), Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Finland ([auli.toom@helsinki.fi](mailto:auli.toom@helsinki.fi)) and Elianne Riska, Professor emeritus, Swedish School of Social Science Subunit, University of Finland ([elianne.riska@helsinki.fi](mailto:elianne.riska@helsinki.fi)). Due to exceptional circumstances, their advice was provided first in written comments and then in an extensive online meeting. The online meeting was held between the advisors and the law faculty on 17 September 2020. An informal agenda was agreed that followed the points for discussion raised in the advisers' written comments. All six teachers with full time academic positions at the faculty took part. The two aforementioned students also joined the meeting in part and shared their perspectives on their studies. The office manager and project manager for the faculty office joined the meeting too. The faculty understands that separate meetings will be held between the advisors and senior administration. The review team offered to arrange a separate meeting with the student representatives, but the external advisors did not consider it necessary. The faculty reflected on the meeting and revised the report accordingly. A follow-up meeting was held with the two external advisors on 5 November at which the faculty explained their revisions in light of the earlier meeting and the advisors expressed their support for faculty's responses. On 7 January 2021 the report was finalised at a teachers' meeting with the student representatives of the Faculty of Law and the

final version sent to the Dean of the School. On 29 January, this Summary was finalised and submitted to the Dean of the School.

The Subject-Level Review is divided into twelve chapters: 1. Introduction with a summary of reflections and recommendations of individual chapters; 2. Previous quality reviews and follow-up; 3. Quality assurance in Faculty of Law; 4. Design and approval of programmes and revision of curriculum; 5. Student-centred learning; 6. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification; 7. Teaching staff and human resources policy, 8. Learning resources and student support; 9. Information management 10. Public information; 11. Research and innovation; 12. Conclusions.

## Faculty characteristic

The beginning of legal education at the University of Akureyri dates back to 2002 when the first staff members were hired to develop a programme at the University of Akureyri (UNAK) with the objective of offering a new and distinctive approach to legal education in Iceland. The aim was also to emphasise Iceland's place in the Arctic and in the World in general. The Department of Law at UNAK was established in 2003 within the erstwhile Faculty of Law and Social Sciences and the first students enrolled. In 2008, the University was restructured, and the Department of Law became a Faculty of Law within the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. In the year of 2016 (autumn) the Faculty of Law was again merged with the Faculty of Social Sciences. However, it regained its independence in February 2019 and has since remained an independent faculty within the School of Humanities and Social Sciences together with three other faculties. The faculty offers a BA-degree in law (BA, 180 ECTS) and a graduate study programme consisting of a two-year master's degree (ML, 120 ECTS) a master's study programme in Polar Law, an international programme run in English (LL.M 90 ECTS and MA 120 ECTS), Diploma in Polar Law at Master's Level (60 ECTS) which has developed since the first group of students finished their BA-degree in 2006. UNAK is accredited to offer doctoral studies in law but has not yet admitted any students. Since 2015, when the last self-evaluation took place, the Faculty of Law at UNAK has undergone important changes. They relate in particular to flexible and distance learning that started in 2016 when a need to rethink the structure of courses and teaching methods became necessary, extending many courses from three weeks to six or twelve weeks. It also required rethinking access to teaching material when many students would live far from campus. Today, both the BA and the ML are taught as flexible studies. The Faculty of Law at UNAK offers something unique to the Icelandic legal

profession and, indeed, to the democratic society in Iceland that very much has to do with its location, the flexible learning model and the societal role it has to play.

## Summary and main conclusions for the faculty

### Lessons learned from QEF1

The main findings of the 2015 evaluation were that there was broad student satisfaction with the law programmes on offer and the quality of teaching therein and that the faculty members were performing well. However, it also found that the low permanent staffing numbers placed a great deal of pressure on staff and suggested hiring of more academic staff and increasing cooperation with staff in other faculties. In addition, it foresaw the potential for distance education and encouraged the faculty to review the feasibility. The four major developments since 2015 are: the merger with the Faculty of Social Sciences (2016-2019); the introduction of flexible learning (2016); staffing turnover; and the establishment of the Police Science studies (2016) for which the Faculty of Law delivers a significant amount of teaching. The teachers unanimously conclude that the Faculty of Law works more efficiently and effectively as an independent faculty. Flexible learning is now rolled out in both the BA and ML programmes and has increased the student numbers significantly. There is an increase of approximately one full-time-equivalent position since 2015 to six full-time staff members, but this is offset by the increased teaching load attached to the Police Science lines and the increased work necessary to deliver quality flexible learning. Staffing levels remain critical, and the administrative burden is very high.

### Teaching and learning

Legal education at UNAK has from the beginning had a very strong focus on providing an international, comparative and theoretical approach to law within its undergraduate degree (BA). The legal profession in Iceland has historically been rather conservative, focusing on black-letter law in preference to theoretical or critical perspectives, and emphasising practical legal education. With an enhanced emphasis on subjects such as legal theory, legal history, international law and international comparative law, new international components were added to the legal academic education in Iceland. The aim is to create a BA degree in law that serves as a good basis for further education, whether in law or other related disciplines in Icelandic universities or at universities overseas as well as graduate-level employment. At the same time, the overall idea is that over the five years of legal study, students obtain

all the necessary skills to enter the Icelandic legal profession, in other words, the BA and ML together would be comparable to the traditional *Cand. jur.* examination, now *Mag. jur.*

Since the last Subject-Level Review in 2015, teaching and teaching methods have changed considerably in law at UNAK. The introduction of flexible studies in autumn 2016 in the BA studies meant not only new teaching methods but also that a restructuring of many courses was needed, particularly courses that had previously been arranged in three-week intensive blocks. Teachers in law at UNAK have since then gained valuable experience in preparing, delivering and developing teaching methods in flexible legal studies. Flexible learning is broadly described as the use of diverse and modern teaching methods but not clearly defined on the University home-page beyond specifying that students do not have to be on campus full-time.<sup>3</sup> However, the practical implementation is that such studies involve primarily studies where students do not attend campus on a daily basis and have more flexibility as to when they engage with the learning materials, within necessary constraints, such as assessment deadlines and mandatory attendance typically twice per semester. Almost all teaching material is available electronically.

The main advantage is the increased accessibility to non-traditional students and flexibility to respond to unforeseen difficulties, such as those created by the Covid-19 emergency. The quality of technical support is good but access to that support could be improved. The Polar Law programmes are primarily onsite which better suits the nature of the studies as well as the mostly international student body who thrive on the personal interaction which each other as well as with the teaching staff, although some courses can be and are taught using flexible learning methods. The faculty considers that flexible learning is a very good means of delivering legal education on an equitable basis. It requires students to have a high degree of motivation and more self-discipline and organisation than tradition on-campus teaching but the students with these characteristics will be well-equipped for their legal careers.

### Management of research

Research in law ranges from the traditional academic monograph, aimed at a highly sophisticated but ultimately small audience, to knowledge and experience derived from working on litigation. Both are important to a fully rounded law school and legal education. Notwithstanding their small numbers, the members of the Faculty of Law bring elements across the spectrum to their teaching. The faculty's Polar Law programme and related publications play a major part in the University's *Future Vision until 2023*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unak.is/is/namid/upplýsingar/sveigjanlegt-nam>

which prioritises, *inter alia*, research and learning related to the Arctic region. The faculty is also particularly active in international law, constitutional law, European law, and family law. Students are introduced to their teachers' latest research as well as being encouraged to publish their own research, particularly at master's level. The faculty exceeds, by a significant margin, the expectations for research productivity as measured by the annual research evaluation. However, this tool prioritises academic research (in the narrow sense) at the expense of professional experience such as litigation, adjudication, mediation, consultation on law reform, and professional reports. It also marginalises research conducted in the Icelandic language.

### Follow-up processes

<b>Summary of Reflections and Recommendations</b>	
<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Reflections and Recommendations</b>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The faculty is generally unsatisfied with the system for student-led course evaluation. This is under review at institutional level. When the results of this review are open to consultation, the faculty will need to consider carefully and formulate a response that safeguards both quality of teaching and staff rights to equality, integrity, and personal dignity.</li> <li>• The University should assess the purpose, utility and reliability of the student evaluation processes. It should look at means to make it more constructive and ensure the human rights of the teachers to due process, reputation, privacy, and dignity are upheld.</li> <li>• The University should also examine alternative means of assessing teaching quality, for example, peer evaluation of teaching, by, for example, subject experts, experts in pedagogy and experts in communication.</li> <li>• The University should consider systematic follow-up of students after graduation.</li> <li>• The Faculty of Law should hold staff interviews regularly and consider how to respond to issues that arise in these. For example, the Head of Faculty could present a summary of the main points raised at the faculty meeting or teachers' meeting for discussion and deliberation as to whether any actions are required.</li> <li>• More technical support is urgently needed particularly regarding 'emergency services' outside normal working hours, after 16:00 and during weekends. This is particularly evident with regard to temporary teachers that usually prepare their teaching outside their normal working hours.</li> <li>• UNAK should consider paying temporary lecturers to attend courses and training on technical aspects of flexible learning. It is important for quality assurance that temporary lecturers are qualified not only in their academic disciplines but also in the necessary teaching methods, with the support of the Centre for Teaching and Learning.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Faculty of Law should examine, as part of the curriculum review, whether flexible learning could be extended to more Polar Law courses.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A system is in place for multi-layered review of curriculum development to ensure the quality of the study programs offered at the faculty. This needs to be maintained, and updated when necessary, and the current student involvement needs to be preserved.</li> <li>• The faculty should continue to review the curricula on an annual basis as well as holding periodic reviews (five-yearly) of the whole programme to ensure contemporary relevance.</li> <li>• The University should review the potential to introduce more flexibility into published curricula to respond dynamically to faculty strengths, University priorities, and emerging issues.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have access to a broad range of support services and are generally highly satisfied with these services.</li> <li>• Students should be encouraged to use the student counselling services.</li> <li>• Students' rights and obligations are clearly stipulated in various policies and processes, both within the faculty and UNAK as a whole.</li> <li>• More support may be required for teachers and students to deliver education online.</li> <li>• In-person contact, and teaching remains important in creating a welcoming student environment, building student confidence, and helping students feel part of an academic community. The in-person induction and intensive weeks cannot be substituted with online teaching in the longer term and these should be in person when it is safe to do so.</li> <li>• As long as it is unsafe for all students to come to campus, either for intensive weeks or on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis, it is important that staff members reach out to their students and make time to deal with correspondence.</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The admission procedures are clear and well-established, but the faculty needs to be aware of the possible effects of recent changes to them and ensure that admissions criteria are fair.</li> <li>• The University should consider developing a means to gather relevant information regarding graduates in a systematic manner, in compliance with data protection law.</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University should increase the number of permanent positions in law. It is important that this is completed before the temporary position expires in summer 2021.</li> <li>• The faculty should consider reviewing and revising the Handbook for Teachers in Law and the Notes for Teachers.</li> <li>• The faculty should consider seeking visiting teachers through the Fulbright program.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University should ensure that adequate support is in place regarding the technical aspects of flexible learning for new teachers and temporary lecturers.</li> <li>• The University should consider permitting temporary lecturers to attend the staff development training, especially regarding IT resources. Temporary lecturers should be paid for their time attending such courses.</li> <li>• The University should permit temporary lecturers to borrow necessary IT hardware to prepare their teaching.</li> <li>• The University should facilitate out-of-hours IT support for flexible learning.</li> <li>• The University should review ways to reduce the administrative load on permanent staff who recruit temporary lecturers, for example, in booking travel, etc.</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student services are primarily an institution, not a faculty responsibility.</li> <li>• The faculty should continue with the introductory sessions for new students and its good cooperation with the law students' association</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data management is an institution, not a faculty responsibility.</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of public information is largely an institution rather than a faculty responsibility.</li> <li>• The faculty is responsible for ensuring that departments have relevant information, especially the marketing department.</li> <li>• The Faculty of Law should continue independent outreach through <i>Facebook</i>, <i>Háskóladagurinn</i>, etc.</li> </ul>
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Faculty of Law exceeds institutional expectations for research productivity and is the cornerstone of the University's 'Arctic' research priority.</li> <li>• The Faculty of Law should consider preparing of a written strategy that emphasises its expertise in Polar Law as well as in other areas of expertise that have not reached the same level of recognition.</li> <li>• The University should review the criteria for hiring and promotion to recognise fairly professional experience, professional publications in law outside of academia, and publications in Icelandic.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 1. Key figures.

**Table 1. Overview of present study programmes within the Faculty of Law**

Name of Study Programme	Cycle <sup>1</sup>	Degree	Credits (ECTS)
LÖG Law	1.2	BA	180
LÖM Law	2.2	ML	120
PDM Polar Law	2.1	Diploma	60
PLM Polar Law	2.2	LLM	90/120
PMA Polar Law	2.2	MA	120

<sup>1</sup> See National Qualification Framework for Higher Education No. 530/2011.

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

	Men No	FTE	Women No.	FTE	Total No.	FTE
Professors	0	0.00	1	1.00	1	1.00
Associate Professors	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Assistant Professors	1	1.00	2	2.00	3	3.00
Adjunct Lectures	0	0.00	2	2.00	2	2.00
Total	1	1.00	5	5.00	6	6.00
Sessional teachers	19	0.48	14	0.96	33	1.44

**Table 3. Total number of students, number of entrants, retention rate for first year completion rate.**

Programme	No. of students			No. of entrants	Retention rate	No. of graduates	Completion rate (semester)
	Total no.	Full time	Part time				
BA Law	70	45	25	42	25/42	11	6
ML Law	15	10	5	-	-	4	4
PDM	8	2	6	-	-	0	2
Polar Law							
PLM	8	7	1	-	-	5	3
Polar Law							
PMA	17	15	2	-	-	3	4
Polar Law							

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

	2017 <sup>2</sup>		2018 <sup>2</sup>		2019		Mean	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Faculty	539	315	836	548	165	77	513	313
School	1025	566	1375	843	1424	755	1275	721
University	2142	1156	2577	1460	3007	1615	2575	1410

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Law was part of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law August 2016-February 2019