

**EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF THE FAROE ISLANDS  
SEPTEMBER 2021 – OCTOBER 2022**

**REPORT OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL REVIEW TEAM**

DECEMBER 2022

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**ERT** – External Review Team

**EHEA** – European Higher Education Area

**ESG** – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

**QA** – Quality Assurance

**QE** – Quality Enhancement

**RA** – Reflective Analysis (the document containing the outcome of the process of reflective analysis conducted by the University and submitted to the External Review Team to inform the Team’s review of the University)

## INTRODUCTION

This Report is the final outcome of an independent Review of the University of the Faroe Islands commissioned by the Faroese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture in 2021, and conducted across two visits, in October 2021 and September 2022. To ensure periodic review of the University is a statutory responsibility of the Ministry. This review has been conducted by a team of external, international experts commissioned by the Ministry, according to an agreed brief (see the brief, which is Appendix One in the separate document containing all appendices to this report).

Readers are strongly advised to review the report of the process of ‘reflective analysis’ which the University community conducted during the period under scrutiny (see Appendix Two). This document contains the collective reflection of the University upon its own progress and challenges, and is presented according to guidelines and headings specified by the Review Team prior to the main review visit in September 2022.

It is the view of the Review Team that the Reflective Analysis (henceforth RA) document – in its process of construction and in its outcomes – is the most important part of the Review Process, because of its wide ownership across the University community and the document’s prior recognition of many of the issues outlined in our own Report. The RA provided an internally authored ‘agenda’ for the remainder of this collaborative Review.

Throughout the Report, for ease of understanding of the relevance that our recommendations have for the aspirations of the Ministry and University to become part of the European Higher Education Area and the ‘Bologna Process’, we refer readers to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (henceforth the ESG).

For the avoidance of doubt, readers should be aware that the Review Team was not asked to provide resource statements for its Recommendations – thus, if the Recommendations included here are to be actioned, there will, of necessity, need to be a consideration of both cost and benefit.

This Report has been drafted by the Chair of the Review Team assisted by all of the Review Team members. In a spirit of collaboration and ‘enhancement’, it has further benefitted from the comments of staff from the Ministry and the Rector and staff of the University.

Professor (Emeritus) Malcolm Foley, Chair and Leader of the Review Team.

Professor Edit Bugge, Reviewer  
Dr Maria Elena D’Amelio, Reviewer  
Ms Karla Neslíð, Student Reviewer.  
Rector Miquel Nicolau, Reviewer  
Dr Andreas Rasch-Christensen, Reviewer

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Review Team recognises the substantial effort on the part of the University community towards the conduct of a review using the methodology we chose and agreed. The process, as designed, is labour intensive and impacted upon students and staff across the University, all of whom had many other equally important imperatives to meet. Even in 'normal' times, this would have been a heroic effort. That much of it was achieved during some of the most difficult periods of Covid-19 is a huge credit to everyone at the University. The Review Team, furthermore, is grateful that high quality, collectively derived and owned documents were produced to deadline and in a cheerful spirit.

Equally important is the open spirit in which those selected to be involved directly in meeting the Review Team undertook their tasks. Almost everyone selected duly attended and participated actively in our discussions – during the preliminary (October 2021) and main (September 2022) visits. It was reassuring that both staff and students universally expressed pride in their University, in its current trajectory and in their colleagues or tutors.

Many staff worked hard to ensure that our visits were highly useful, that the (relatively) short time we had in the Faroes was maximised, and that our understandings were secured. We thank them for that, and we apologise for what may at times, to some, have seemed surprising questions!

Colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture ensured that we could conduct the Review in the way intended by the Team. Those colleagues were highly responsive and helpful in finding solutions when challenges presented themselves and in providing insightful advice to the Chair of the Review Team. We also thank the Ministry for its hospitality throughout both visits.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Review Team has found that the University of the Faroe Islands is working well. Significant developments over the last three plus years mean that the University is playing its full part in progressing towards the long-standing objective of the Faroe Islands to enter the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and become formally part of the 'Bologna Process'.

In the continuing pursuit of this objective, Review Team members stressed the importance of the Ministry's and Government's actions in the approaching years (about which we have specific recommendations to follow below). This includes the importance of demonstrating a continuing and appropriate separation between the Ministry and the University, in keeping with the spirit of the Magna Charta Universitatum, of which the University in 2020 became a signatory.

While the University is firmly on the right path, there are further steps to be taken in both Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement, which we highlight in our main narrative, and about which we also make specific recommendations. We are confident that all of these steps were known to the University prior to our visits and that many of them are already in progress or about to be initiated. We urge all of those with a stake in the success of the University to continue to focus purposively upon these matters.

The Faculty of Education, on which the Review Team was asked to have a particular focus, has also been making very good progress in recent years, in terms of leadership and in terms of engagement with the wider University's culture and practices. The curricula of main Faculty of Education programmes (for teachers and pedagogues) are fundamentally sound, and their practicum parts are consistent with those offered across the Nordic region and more widely. We recommend that the further development of these programmes will best be supported by their being the first in the University to be subject to the new Periodic Review arrangements proposed in our recommendations for the University as a whole.

We believe that the Faculty has an important role to play, not only in the education of teachers and pedagogues, but also in delivering continuous professional development to existing, already qualified teachers and pedagogues at all levels and at all stages in their careers.

A complete list of all of the recommendations proposed by the Review Team follows on the next pages.

## FULL LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Recommendations regarding quality assurance of educational programmes, and the path toward full Faroese membership of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Bologna process, are as follows:

- a. The University and the Ministry should take early action to further deepen their relationship through a sustained campaign designed to **normalise EHEA/European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) behaviours and language among all stakeholders** as well as with the wider Faroese public, via the media. Everyone involved should understand what is at stake and how the objective is to be achieved.
- b. The Ministry should take the lead in promptly producing an appropriate **National Qualifications Framework** as a key element for both entering the EHEA and to support contemporary flexible and lifelong learning. We urge all of those involved to accelerate this work, possibly drawing upon frameworks and expertise already available across Europe.
- c. Within the University, and in close dialogue with the Ministry, a process of **Programme Validation** that is fully documented using agreed templates and procedures should be developed (ESG 1.2). A reasonable expectation could be a common, new Programme Validation document expressing the societal need, the academic arguments, the pedagogic intent, and the resource implications of any newly proposed Programme. It should also clearly state the intended learning outcomes for students and the pathways that graduates can expect to follow upon completion – including international pathways. Additional resources to support Programme Validation should be discussed between the University and the Ministry.
- d. Also, within the University, a system of **Periodic Review** of existing programmes should be developed (ESG 1.9). It is reasonable to expect all Programme Teams to be reflecting continuously upon their overall ‘product’. At the level of the individual course, staff teams will be making ongoing adjustments to student learning, based upon student feedback, current academic developments in the specific field, pedagogic developments, and resources available (ESG 1.3). Additional resources to support Periodic Review should be discussed between the University and the Ministry.
- e. A comprehensive document which could be called a **Regulatory Framework** should be developed by the University (ESG 1.1 & 1.8). We would like to see a single document which consolidates all forms of regulation in one place where it can be accessible, understood and used by students and staff.

### 2. Recommendations regarding quality enhancement of educational programmes are as follows:

- a. Efforts to secure a single, **purpose-designed learning and ‘life’ campus** in Tórshavn should be redoubled by all the stakeholders. This should be a campus designed around the student experience, accessibility, and academic excellence with an eye to the attraction of both Faroe Islanders and international students.

- b. The University should develop a **Learning and Teaching Development Plan** and a **Research and Enterprise Development Plan** which are consistent with the institution's mission, strategy, and values (ESG 1.3). We recommend that these Plans are management-led, but at the same time collaboratively developed through the governance mechanisms of the University, so as to be collectively owned and actioned.
- c. We suggest consideration towards some further offering to secure **Faroese distinctiveness and evident contribution to Faroese society**, also recognising the language ecology of the University. Common modules studied by students across the institution could help ensure that distinctiveness, particularly, but not only, in the area of Faroese language and culture. We believe that this kind of approach to distinctiveness is welcomed within the EHEA framework. Also, the university should decide when, where and why teaching will be conducted in English.
- d. An **Inclusivity Plan** (to include Gender Equality) should be produced by the University. The Plan should cover both students and staff. We consider that this Plan will be essential when the University goes forward into its EHEA objective but also that it would further demonstrate to the entire community that the University takes a leadership role in social change in the Faroes.
- e. The University should further support **outward and inward student mobility and the 'international offer'**. It would be a significant advantage for the University to provide a more visible, named person and/or role dedicated to this, to whom all students could gravitate for encouragement, and support. Linked to this, but also for the sake of local students, more viable and accessible **student accommodation** should be provided by the relevant agencies.
- f. A **Lifelong Learning Plan** should be developed by the University and supported by the Ministry. Evident and easily accessible flexible learning paths should be developed.
- g. The University should further progress with its work towards the development of a **Doctoral School**. This offers opportunities to further support the already clearly articulated idea of a 'single' University, that extends beyond Faculty boundaries.
- h. Further measures should be taken to encourage and enable **cross Faculty interactions** for students and staff, and progress should be made towards a common **university calendar**. In addition, the University should develop and implement a transparent **workload allocation model** for teaching and research staff across the institution. Finally, the University should further strengthen **public information** available to Faroese society, which makes transparent University decisions and performance.

### 3. Recommendations specifically concerning quality assurance and quality enhancement at the Faculty of Education are as follows:

- a. The main educational programmes delivered by the Faculty are fundamentally sound, and their practicum parts, are in their main respects consistent with those offered across the Nordic region and more widely. We recommend that the further development of the programmes will best be supported by their being the **first in the University to be subject to the new Periodic Review arrangements**



proposed in our earlier recommendations – a process which should be the *de facto* 'deep dive' into the curricula.

- b. The Faculty should be supported by the relevant stakeholders to **become a leading contributor to a process of Continuous Professional Development** for all existing teachers and pedagogues in the Faroes, possibly, but not only, through master's level provision. The recently created Co-operation Councils for the teacher and pedagogue educations can be expected to play a strong part in this important initiative.
- c. Given the great current need for education professionals in the Faroes, consideration needs to be given by key stakeholders to government financial support to students and to the current programme structures to **enable wider access to education of pedagogues, especially, but also teachers**, through part-time and flexible learning.
- d. In the short-term, there should be a continuing focus on ensuring that appropriate **course documentation is always available** to all students in good time.
- e. Weaknesses identified in the Reflective Analysis documents regarding **feedback to students** within the Faculty should be addressed urgently, and should also be a matter for formalisation in the programme review process that we recommend above.
- f. The **strengthening of research** in the Faculty is welcome. It is important that there should be a focus upon how a generation of researchers and research-driven teachers can be developed and supported, which will generate and transmit knowledge over time.
- g. The excellent **course in pedagogy for higher education** should be the basis for a more extended offer for teaching staff, perhaps initially focusing on online learning, and perhaps later leading to the award of a master's level diploma. The University and the Ministry should collaborate to ensure the resourcing required.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

This Review of the University of the Faroe Islands (hereafter, the University) was conducted during the major international crisis that was Covid-19. Accordingly, the process was adjusted continuously to ensure the personal safety of all concerned. This brought challenges in bringing the Review Team (hereafter, the Team) together in 'real' space and also significant issues for the University Team when drawing together the Reflective Analysis documents. These challenges are not to be underestimated by readers.

The Team understands that there is a responsibility upon the Ministry to ensure that a periodic Review of the University takes place. The Law is silent upon the format of any Review process, the regularity of any Review and what, if any, requirements are laid upon the stakeholders to implement the outcomes. In practice, the previous (and to date the only) Review took place some eight to nine years ago (in 2013-14). We are strongly of the view that the period lapsed since the previous review was too long. *We believe that the Ministry should consider specifying a timescale of around three to four years between Reviews and, also do more to stipulate the format and content of these.*

The Team has been supplied with the Report of the previous Review. What is much less clear is how that Review document was received by Government and, crucially, how any recommendations were operationalised by the University and the Ministry in its immediate aftermath. But progress in relation to the recommendations – and especially those relevant to quality assurance and enhancement – is clearly evident in the last three years.

Nevertheless, a Review was required by the Ministry in 2021-2022, set within the context of the stated policies in the Coalition Agreement and the Strategy of the University as it has developed and been implemented in the last three years. It was evident that the format of this Review needed to satisfy the expectations of the Ministry that there should be a 'deep dive' into the performance of the University. It was also obvious that it should be conducted in the context of the known requirements of the EHEA/Bologna Process. Finally, upon the direction of the Ministry, it was agreed that there should be a special focus on the Faculty of Education as a substantial 'case study' of the wider review, for reasons that are elaborated later in this Report. The overall approach of the Review has, then, been designed and conducted accordingly.

Whilst this Report and its recommendations will to a degree become the focus for discussion of the progression of the University, the Team takes the view that the single, most significant part of the process was the development and delivery of the University's own Reflective Analysis (RA) – which we have found to be very much collectively owned across the whole University community. The format for the RA was designed to ensure that it engaged the entire University community in reflecting upon its current progress, successes and challenges, thus leading to a collectively 'owned' set of documents giving a 'snapshot' of University life, student experiences and organisational performance. It was, and is, vital that the University community (i.e., both staff and students) 'recognises itself' in these documents, if the work of the Review Team is to have validity and reliability. Accordingly, it is very important that our Report should be read in conjunction with the document "University of the Faroe Islands, Reflective Analysis, 2022: A document prepared to inform the work of

the International Team conducting the External Review of our University” and its supplementary Case Studies (five in total) (see Appendix 2).

It is important for readers of this report to understand that the Process of Review has been designed by the Team to focus upon **Enhancement** as the basis for ongoing and future development. **Neither this Review Process, nor this Review Report, is intended as an audit of the University, leading to a score or a universal judgement represented on some abstract scale.** All Universities worldwide can be considered to be on a journey, usually characterised as continuous improvement. None are perfect and all are striving to adapt to global and local trends, whether these be demographic, pedagogic, economic, cultural, political or technological. The University of the Faroe Islands is no different. It possesses features that can be considered either challenges or opportunities, depending upon how these are harnessed in strategic decisions, how resourcing and investment is targeted and prioritised, how research and learning profiles emerge, or how geography and culture impact upon operations.

From the outset, it was recognised by all involved that the Review should be conducted in the English language. At the very least, the appointment of a Team of independent, international experts required that a common language should be used. Equally, it was acknowledged that this could present challenges for both the Team (because many of the key governmental and University documents were in Faroese) and for staff and other stakeholders for whom English may not be part of their strongest skill set, or for whom complex documents and discussions conducted in what may be their third language represented a challenge. However, all of those developing the remit and process knew that a move towards full engagement with the EHEA/Bologna Process necessitated documentation and discussion in English, and that this had to be a primary consideration, despite obvious concerns about Anglicisation. Accordingly, those who had responsibility for the Review took steps to mitigate these issues by:

- Having key documents, such as the University Law, Executive Orders, previous Reviews, current Strategic Plans, etc., translated professionally into English
- Ensuring that the RA and its outcomes would be translated, at least in summary, into Faroese
- During the first visit, a meeting of all staff in the Faculty of Education was conducted in Danish (where necessary, Team members translated into Faroese) to ensure that the specific focus upon this Faculty was fully understood
- During meetings with staff and students in the second visit, the Chair of the Team offered participants who found it more convenient to express their views that way to have an opportunity to write their comments in Faroese to Team members who spoke the language. (In the event, one person took the opportunity to write their comments in Faroese, whilst some others gave feedback in Faroese immediately after meetings).

So, the Review has been conducted in English, with translation as necessary (e.g., the University Law, Executive Orders) or requested. The Ministry may wish to consider whether a longer process may be required in the future to ensure early translations of key documents.

In mid-2021, the Ministry appointed four internationally based academic experts to conduct the Review and invited them to Tórshavn to experience the environment, culture and

academic practices of the University, to witness Faroese society and to formalise their working relationships. These four were supplemented by a Student Reviewer who had experience of studying at the University of the Faroe Islands and also in Denmark. All of these five members were invited to Torshavn in October 2021 to begin the work of the Review and to set the tone among University staff for preparation of an internal, collectively owned RA. We felt that it was important to explain the process to staff and students so that they understood how they could shape the RA and how they could contribute further to our evaluations.

In the event, one of the four academic experts decided that they were unable to participate in the process for personal reasons and withdrew. Thus, an initial Review Team of four members (three academics and the student) met in Torshavn for the first visit.

Subsequent to that visit, the Chair of the Team consulted with the Ministry about finding a replacement for the absent member. The Chair considered that further strengthening of the skills base of the Team in the area of recent exposure to the tasks and directions needed in joining the EHEA/Bologna Process would be a distinct advantage. This was intended to be consistent with the stated aims of Government to take the nation officially into the EHEA/Bologna Process, thereby securing internationalisation of the sole University in the Islands. Two, further independent, international experts with this profile were identified, with the further advantage that both were working in single University micro-nations in Europe.

Thus, a Team was finalised which encompassed experience of leading University Evaluations in the UK (especially Scotland where evaluations are grounded in a philosophy of Enhancement), the requisite EHEA experiences, immersion in the culture and practices of Universities in Nordic nations and significant expertise in areas of teacher and pedagogue education. Moreover, it included a student who had experienced the entirety of an undergraduate programme, and had participated actively in student life, at the University of the Faroe Islands, and who had the advantage of being able to compare that with their current experience at a university in Denmark. One member of the Team was chosen for their specific expertise in the area of educating pedagogues and schoolteachers, but others also had experience of working with Faculties of Education within their own professional careers. Finally, it is important to add that one of the Reviewers was a 'native' Faroese speaker and another, who is a linguist, also spoke and understood Faroese and had strong, personal connections to the Islands. These last points are important because of the special role of the University as a 'caretaker' and developer of the Faroese language.

Reconciling that vital role with the stated intention to become 'internationalised' was recognised from the start by the Review Team and forms an important theme running through the Report that follows. It should be stated that the Team does not consider these challenges to be at all irreconcilable or mutually exclusive, and in fact the EHEA/Bologna Process specifically encourages their compatibility and integration.

The RA was developed within the University through the course of late 2021 and into mid-2022. Its process of development is described within that document (Appendix One, see the final part of Section 1 of the RA). The RA was delivered to the Team on schedule, on 12th August 2022. Thereafter, Team members had – prior to the visit in week beginning 12<sup>th</sup>

September – the opportunity to present questions of clarification and comprehension to the University. These were consolidated by the Chair into one document on 26<sup>th</sup> August and sent to the University (Appendix Three). The questions were duly and timeously answered on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022 (Appendix Four). With all of that in place, it was clear that the visit could go ahead.

The final Review Team, which received the RA and visited the University in September 2022 was constituted as follows:

- Professor (Emeritus) Malcolm Foley, (currently Chair of the Quality Committee of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and previously Pro Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching at the University of the West of Scotland). *Chair and Leader of the Review Team.*
- Ms Karla Neslíð (former Board Member of the Student Council at the University of the Faroe Islands [RTL] and of the Faroese National Union of Students [MFS] and currently studying at the University of Copenhagen). *Student Reviewer.*
- Professor Edit Bugge, Department of Language, Literature, Mathematics and Interpreting, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. *Reviewer.*
- Dr Maria Elena D’Amelio, University of San Marino (currently leading San Marino’s entry and consolidation within the European Higher Education Area/EHEA Process). *Reviewer.*
- Rector Miquel Nicolau University of Andorra and President of the Network of Universities of Small Countries and Territories. *Reviewer.*
- Dr Andreas Rasch-Christensen (ARO, VIA University College, Denmark (responsible for managing and operating research and development within the pedagogical and social work education and professions at that institution). *Reviewer.*

That Team met almost 100 staff and students at the University during the week beginning 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022, to discuss the RA and its provenance, to verify the collective ownership of its contents and to reach a set of recommendations intended to inform the relevant Minister of the current performance of the University and its position on the journey towards entry to the EHEA/Bologna. We trust that our findings presented below will also be useful to the Board of the University and to the University’s Leadership Team.

This Review Team agreed that a central consideration in conducting our work was our view that the University should be a key player in the continuous transformation of Faroese society – e.g., gender issues, inclusion, democratic values – and economy, but also should continue to be focused on its own transformation by supporting the design of new teaching, assessment methodologies and flexible learning paths that can be applied to all programmes. Our consideration of these matters is influenced by the need to incorporate the four purposes of Higher Education according to the Council of Europe:

- Prepare young people for employment
- Grow active citizens in democratic societies
- Ensure the personal development of populations
- Ensure the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CONDUCT OF THE REVIEW

During the first half of 2021, staff at the Ministry consulted with the Chair of the Review Team (hereafter the Chair) upon the content, direction and process of the Review. From the outset, it was apparent that a specific focus upon the Faculty of Education would be required by the Ministry, alongside an overall consideration of the whole University. After consultations led by the Ministry and including the Chair of the Review Team, the Rector and the University Director, the following areas of focus were agreed, as quoted below:

### ***“University Level***

- 1. Review of the laws/parliamentary acts, executive orders and regulations concerning the University of the Faroe Islands. Do we have what is required to underpin the operation of the University, particularly in accordance with the ESG, in place (both at university and faculty level)? If not, what is needed by way of changes/additions?*
- 2. Review of the internal quality processes at the University and recommendations for their further development towards ensuring a culture of continuous quality enhancement across all faculties and educational programmes, and in relation to the wider student experience. Where are we at, where should we be aiming to be in 3-5 years, and how should we be getting there?*

### ***The Faculty of Education***

- 3. The Faculty of Education plays a vital role in educating students who will become teachers and pedagogues to serve the needs of the Faroese education system. How well is the Faculty operating to fulfil this role? And how might that operation be improved and strengthened, both in terms of the overall leadership and management of the Faculty, and also in terms of the design and delivery of the main programmes – in teacher and pedagogue education – including the work-based learning (practicum) parts? How would the strengthening of the Faculty and of the design and delivery of the main programmes link to the development proposed at University level? The Ministry recognizes that this level of scrutiny of the Faculty of Education in the context of an institutional-level review focused on quality assurance and enhancement is challenging, but it asks the review team to focus on the key aspects of assurance and enhancement at Faculty level, recognizing that some follow-up work by another team looking in particular at issues of curriculum might well be required.”*

The final commissioning letter is provided at Appendix One.

As advised by the Chair, the Ministry recognised that the indicated level of scrutiny of the Faculty of Education, in the context of an institutional-level review focused on quality assurance and enhancement, would be challenging, but it asked the Review Team to focus on the key aspects of assurance and enhancement at the Faculty level. The Ministry acknowledged that there might need to be further, deeper consideration of matters such as curriculum, depending upon the results of this Review and considering the limitations apparent in a relatively short timescale for the availability of the expert Reviewers.

The result of these discussions was that it was agreed that the Faculty of Education would be integrated into the main Review process in the form of a significant Appendix to the RA,

being the first Case Study (of four-five which were requested), and that the Faculty would occupy a significant part of the Review Team's time on the Faroes. **In this way, the Faculty could be reviewed in the context of the whole University** and could serve, to some extent, as an exemplar for the recent developments in Quality Assurance (henceforth QA) and Quality Enhancement (henceforth QE). This was not to suggest that the Reviewers would (or did) confine themselves to this Faculty as the basis for analysis and evaluation. In practice, the main Review Visit was based primarily in the Faculty of Education's building, but with staff and students from the other parts of the University attending all of our sessions there, as appropriate. The Review Team gave specific attention to its remit for the Faculty during one and one quarter of the four days available to it on the Faroes and considered the University as a whole (including the Faculty of Education) for the rest of the time.

Upon receipt of the RA and the answers to questions of clarification and comprehension the Chair designed a schedule of work to be conducted by the Team whilst present in the Faroes. The format of the meetings and discussions are shown in Appendix Five.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE AND GOOD PROGRESS

The Review Team encountered numerous examples of good practice, and evidence of good progress towards the EHEA/Bologna objective in the course of the review process, and undoubtedly there will be more good practice and progress which is going on which was not specifically drawn to our attention. Amongst all that was good that we encountered, we would particularly like to highlight the following:

1. The ongoing work which has been done in recent years in terms of **organisational development**, as described in both the main RA document, and also in Case Study 2: Developing the Organisation (Appendix 2). This includes the creation of the Quality Unit and the Research and Enterprise Unit, each under a Pro Rector, and a wider strengthening and reorganisation of the main University administration, under the University Director, leading to greater institutional integration and cohesion. The strengthening of the central student administration – in Student Affairs – has proved particularly important in generating the kind of data which is essential to support the pursuit of the EHEA/Bologna objective (progression and retention, student survey, graduate destinations, etc). The Quality Unit has simultaneously led and supported significant and demonstrable progress in securing a shared approach to quality in learning and teaching, and has a clear perspective and well-developed plans to make further important progress in the short- to medium-term. In verbal feedback to the Rector, Director and Chair of the Board at the end of the main review visit, the Team highlighted and commended this progress and encouraged the University to continue with this progress with all haste.
2. The **My Contribution and Professional Development Conversation** process as itemised in Case Study 3 in the RA (Appendix 2) demonstrates a strategic corporate commitment to investing in the most important and most expensive resource that a University possesses – its staff. It is significant that this process was developed collectively, based on extensive consultation, which makes it all the more important because of its shared ownership, which was evident both in the Case Study itself and also in the discussions we had with staff. We expect that this process will, over time, present significant opportunities to make progress in relation to some of the matters that we discuss later, including the matter of diversity at the senior levels of the University.
3. The University has a special responsibility for preserving and developing the Faroese language. The material in Case Study 4 of the RA (Appendix Two) on **Language and Language Policy** is a strong demonstration of the ways in which it takes seriously its responsibility, and also of the ways in which the distinctiveness of the Faroese language and identity can remain central to the University's Strategy as both a domestically focused and an internationally oriented institution. We have comments to make in the main text about the role of, and opportunities for, Faroese language as a part of the distinctiveness of the University.
4. Case Study Five in the RA (Appendix Two) outlines the very important work that is being done to consolidate and strengthen the central role and contribution of the University to the wider research effort in the Islands, particularly when there is a wide range of other institutes and agencies with research interests and government funding, but which are not within the immediate purview of University management



or leadership. **PURE.fo** is an example of the University playing a leading role in the professionalisation of research information management in the Faroe Islands, and in supporting sharing of effort and outcomes across the University and beyond the University. This is especially welcome in a nation that is small compared to its neighbours and competitors. PURE.fo has the added benefit of enabling everyone to have sight of where research expertise is available and located, where effort and resources are being focused, and also where there might be gaps and/or opportunities. This will lead to more visibility of Faroese research contribution, and also, it is to be hoped, greater collaborative research efforts within, and beyond, the Faroes.

5. The **Masters Level (10 ECTS) course for staff in University Pedagogy ('Setursnámsfroði')**, which is referenced extensively in the main RA document, (Appendix 2), and is delivered by the Faculty of Education, is a very good demonstration of the possibilities arising from having the relevant expertise located within the University, and of the integrative opportunities that expertise can present. Those involved with the course (staff and staff/students) were universally complimentary about the course and its benefits. Later in this Report, we encourage the University and the Faculty to continue to see this course as an important opportunity in academic professional development, learning innovation and staff integration, for both teaching and research.
6. **Student engagement.** It has been apparent from the start of this Review process that students have become highly engaged with the progress of their University. This is evidenced in their readiness to meet us during both of our visits and their active contributions to the Reflective Analysis and to our ongoing discussions. We wish to commend the student engagement fostered in the University and the active contributions made by the student body itself.
7. The **collective process of preparing the Reflective Analysis** involving the entire University community is an indication of both good practice and good progress. We have mentioned the difficult times in which this document was produced. It is evident in the document itself, which details the collective process undertaken across the University, that there is a high degree of 'ownership' of the contents of the document and understanding of its implications, consequences and opportunities.

# 1. UNIVERSITY/MINISTRY INTERFACE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

## University/Ministry Interface

**The autonomy of universities** is a core principle of the EHEA, as is stated in all of the communiqués of the EHEA Ministerial Conferences. Underlining the importance of this is the number of pronouncements made on this subject – Berlin (2003); Bergen (2005); London (2007); Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009); Budapest-Vienna (2010); Yerevan (2015); Paris (2018); Rome (2020).

Whilst we are fully aware of the arrangements currently in place to ensure the autonomy of the University of the Faroe Islands, and also of the University having become a signatory to the Magna Charta Universitatum in 2020, we would be remiss not to remind all of those concerned to strive to ensure that autonomy is maintained and seen to be maintained. We did not see any evidence of a lack of autonomy, but our experience tells us that this is a matter that should be kept under constant review on all sides, rather than be assumed to be in place, if the EHEA/Bologna objective is to be confidently achieved.

It is important for us to state, from the start of this Section, that the Team believes, unanimously, that the University is firmly on the right path towards the EHEA/Bologna objective (as specified in the brief – see Appendix 1). It is clear that significant progress has been made in the last three years. However, Team members stressed the importance of the Ministry's and Government's actions in the coming years. Nations, not Universities, become part of the EHEA Process. Having a single University in the Faroe Islands can make it seem as if the issue 'belongs' within that institution. It is essential that Government understands its role in giving leadership, direction and resource to the main objective. Whilst the commissioning of this Review is an obvious step in that direction, it is vital that it is not seen as the definitive action needing to be taken or felt that that recommendations to the Ministry, and for action by the University, are themselves sufficient to secure a successful application.

We observed much positive and constructive interaction between the Ministry and the University, but each party should, while continuing to observe the importance of University independence from government, embrace their responsibilities for progress with even more, and closer, working relationships dedicated to the EHEA/Bologna objective, and ensure that all involved, students, staff, civil servants and politicians are 'on board' and moving in the same direction. All of these stakeholders will need to learn what one Reviewer called the 'EHEA language' – the forms of expression and practices that will be needed to communicate effectively with application to the Process.

A key aspect of this is that the Faroe Islands needs a **National Qualifications Framework** which is compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA.<sup>1</sup> We are aware

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<sup>1</sup> The above-mentioned Paris Communiqué of 2018 – Appendix III – 'Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the EHEA' (revised 2018) states that "Ministers committed themselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA."

that the Ministry has been conducting work towards producing such a framework and we urge all of those involved to accelerate this work, possibly drawing upon frameworks and expertise already available across Europe.

**So, in terms of University/Ministry interface, the Team recommends:**

**1a.** That the University and the Ministry take early action to further deepen their relationship through a campaign designed to **normalise EHEA/ESG behaviours and language among all stakeholders** as well as with the wider Faroese public via the media. Everyone involved should understand what is at stake and how the objective is to be achieved.

**1b.** That the Ministry should take the lead in promptly producing an appropriate **National Qualifications Framework** as a key element for both entering the EHEA and to support contemporary flexible and lifelong learning. We urge all of those involved to accelerate this work, possibly drawing upon frameworks and expertise already available across Europe.

We wish to reiterate that this important collaborative effort towards EHEA status should not unduly impact on the strong connections between the University and local Faroese society, especially in the dissemination of knowledge through the media and via strong internships in Faroese agencies and businesses.

### **Quality Assurance outcomes of the fieldwork in September 2022**

During the first part of our visit in September 2022, the Team concentrated upon the ways in which Quality Assurance processes worked at the University. This was designed to ensure that we could express confidence in the academic standards of the University. If the Team could not have this confidence, then it is obvious that the remainder of the Review exercise would be compromised, simply because we could not be sure that the Awards of the University could be validated or defended externally. Failure to demonstrate robust and transferable academic standards would, of course, have necessitated an immediate consultation with the Ministry upon whether there was any value in continuing with the Review as planned until standards could be fully restored.

We should say now that we have the confidence required but, as in any process, there are improvements that could be made. The University is urged to maintain the momentum achieved in the last three years in order to be prepared for the membership of the EHEA.

Significant effort and progress have been made on the standardisation of Quality Assurance procedures and practices (ESG 1.1) since the last Review, specifically in the last three years. Maintenance of academic standards via a known and fully compliant set of documents, papers, procedures and practices is the most visible part of any QA system in a University. However, what underlies such 'ideals' is a set of values and behaviours that support the system, and which are driven by a mind-set of continuous improvement. This part of the ideal is always less visible and is only likely to be apparent to external reviewers through discussion and critical evaluations of staff practices and student experiences. Equally modern governance requires that the practices used, the decisions taken, and their provenance, are

recorded and can proceed via an internal hierarchy of committees which can, theoretically, reach the highest academic authority in the institution. In practice, that authority cedes responsibility to sources closer to the student but needs to assure itself of standards, usually via compliance with properly agreed and universally applied systems. Decisions are, then, visible through a committee system of collective decision making and it is seldom likely, but always possible, that there can be intervention if there is non-compliance or if there is a breach of University's Regulations or protocols.

External examination of student performance (ESG 1.1 & 1.4) and staff assessment (ESG 1.5) of this are, of course, an essential component of any bid to enter the EHEA process. Portability of qualifications and certifications is a central component of such a system (ESG 1.4). Therefore, transparency and visibility of processes (ESG 1.8) which can be subject to wider scrutiny is a non-negotiable element of the strategic direction of the University.

**Through the evidence of the RA and also through the responses given to our Team members' questions of comprehension subsequent to the RA, we have confidence that there is a robust system (ESG 1.1), that it is supported by comprehensive documentation, and this is now widely observed throughout the University and (as a result of the staff and students' discussion sessions) is 'owned' and welcomed by the University community.** Prior to the introduction of the new arrangements, staff in each Faculty pursued their own approaches. However, these were not always visible beyond the immediate areas in which they were located. The revised, University-wide processes introduced in the last three years have added considerable value, in terms of a clear and general system, and in terms of visibility, cross Faculty comparability and transparency to scrutiny. Staff and students appear to welcome these and indicate that they feel more confident in their practices as a result. **Thus, we can have confidence that, at this specific moment of evaluation, academic standards are satisfactorily maintained and can be seen to be maintained.**

Less clear is how these standards emerge at the onset of a new Programme (ESG 1.2) in the University, or at periodic stages in a Programme's delivery to students (ESG 1.9). Whilst we do not doubt (and we heard evidence) that realistic procedures for both of these elements of Programme Management are in place, there is not, as yet (as the RA demonstrates) a robust, standardised, University wide and governance-led process. We are fully aware that, via the Quality Unit, there is intention to proceed along these lines, but we wish to urge the University to accelerate progress in this direction. Whilst not wishing to be overly prescriptive, our suggested formats below give an expanded detail of what might be expected to be seen within systems of Programme Validation and Programme Periodic Review. Specifically, and for the avoidance of doubt, we recommend the following (summary of the recommendations follows at the end of this section).

**Firstly, we recommend a process of Programme Validation that is fully documented using agreed templates and procedures (ESG 1.2).** A reasonable expectation could be a common, new Programme Validation document expressing the societal need, the academic arguments, the pedagogic intent and the resource implications of any newly proposed Programme. It should also clearly state the intended outcomes for students and the pathways that graduates can expect to follow upon completion – including international pathways. It is strongly recommended that, where there is not the direct responsibility of an external

professional body (e.g., Nursing), there should be industry involvement in the discussion of learning outcomes which are most likely to result in graduates being 'work-ready'. That document should be in the ownership of a Faculty-level programme development team, which should defend its proposals to a short-life committee formed for this purpose (a Validation Board). The Validation Board membership should comprise internal (non-expert) academic representation from another Faculty which is not proposed to be involved in the delivery of the programme (to secure cross-University confidence in standards and pedagogy), external academic representation in the field of study being proposed (to accredit relevance and equivalence), a member with specific expertise in securing diversity, a student representative, and industry or professional body representation. It should be chaired by a senior figure from another Faculty – possibly an Assistant Dean. The recommended outcomes of this Board should be shared with the Development Team for action and with the appropriate governance route towards higher authority for recording or challenge. Thereafter the final Programme documents can be prepared, can enter the University catalogue and can be marketed to prospective students.

Some, or all, of the above is present in new Programme development processes currently, but it is not, as yet, fully systemised, standardised and widely observed across the University. Movement towards EHEA/Bologna recognition would require such a University-led system to be in place and it is likely that all Programmes – current and new – will have to undergo this process in advance of the application for membership of the EHEA.

**Secondly, we recommend a system of Periodic Review of existing programmes (ESG 1.9).** It is reasonable to expect all Programme Teams to be reflecting continuously upon their overall 'product'. At the level of the individual course, staff teams will be making ongoing adjustments to student learning, based upon student feedback, current academic developments in the specific field, pedagogic developments and resources available (ESG 1.3). There is evidence to suggest that this takes place across the University and these adjustments can best be described as 'minor' adjustments within the approved outcomes of courses. However, at the Programme level there is not, as yet (as indicated in the RA), a system to periodically (probably every 3-4 years but more often if a necessity arises) review existing programmes within a process endorsed and owned by the University. Not all Programmes can, or should, continue in perpetuity and, if they do, they are unlikely to cover a curriculum first approved many years ago. A process for formal, collective reflection upon performance, relevance and resources is needed which gives the security of governance and a strong indication of a modern, professional University systematically embracing continuous improvement and academic change.

It is our view that such a process is needed, and we are aware that there are plans to introduce one as part of the drive towards EHEA membership. Our recommendation is that this process should be a 'fast-track' version of the Validation process above, encompassing some of the same elements but based upon arguments for the continuation of the Programme with, or without, more fundamental changes which better reflect student needs and preferred outcomes. Elements of graduate employability, student evaluations, industry needs, emerging learning technologies, assessment practices, and student retention and progression are all elements to be considered (but this is not an exhaustive list – for example, consideration of the cultural value [in Danish '*dannelse*'] should be under consideration,

given the established role of the University in Faroese culture and society) (ESG 1.7). If significant changes are proposed, plans for ensuring adjustments to the ongoing learning of current students need to be presented and approved. Crucially, the process needs to lead into the governance structures of the University and, after approvals, to the revision of formal course documentation.

**Thirdly, we recommend that the University should have a comprehensive document which could be titled as its Regulatory Framework.** We understand that the current absence of such a document is in part because regulation comes, frequently, in the form of Executive Orders from Government, and that this is a common approach in Nordic countries (and, possibly, elsewhere). As other Nordic countries are within the EHEA Framework, we do not see this as a fatal problem, but we would like to see a single document which consolidates all forms of regulation in one place where it can be accessible, understood and used by students and staff (ESG 1.8). It is our view that this document needs to ensure that what is required by, and has the force of, law is separated from anything which is desirable at University level, but which does not carry that weight. The document would require annual review and update.

With the further strengthening of QA that we are recommending (and is generally in accordance with what is indicated in the RA documents), we feel confident that the University will be able to demonstrate that it meets the requirements of the EHEA objective in this respect.

**However, it would be dangerous to underestimate the size of the tasks that we are recommending,** especially as they would require to be developed and debated across the University prior to their introduction. Moreover, the resource implications of developing what we recommend via, say, the current Quality Unit, and then, maintaining it with an administrative team in support, should be considered carefully by the University before embarking upon any actions. There will also be resource demands for Programme Teams and Faculties – but, as all seem to assert that they are carrying out continuous quality assurance (albeit until recently often within local arrangements), then that effort only needs to be re-directed towards compliance with, and servicing of, a centralised and University-led system of transparent QA. Finally, here, there will be a need for staff development (ESG 1.5), possibly within the My Contribution and Professional Development conversation (Case Study 3 in the RA), to ensure consistent and early application of the revised system recommended.

Investment in the recommended changes to, and acceleration of, QA procedures have benefits in themselves. They secure standards, help create a unified University community and coherent student experience whilst giving all involved the confidence that certification is consistent with wider international standards. These QA actions are laudable and desirable developments which we know that the University is already embracing and developing as part of a well-based trajectory of improvement that we fully welcome.

### **Summary of recommendations for Quality Assurance.**

**1c.** Within the University, and in close dialogue with the Ministry, a process of **Programme Validation** that is fully documented using agreed templates and procedures should be developed (ESG 1.2). A reasonable expectation could be a common, new

Programme Validation document expressing the societal need, the academic arguments, the pedagogic intent, and the resource implications of any newly proposed Programme. It should also clearly state the intended learning outcomes for students and the pathways that graduates can expect to follow upon completion – including international pathways. Additional resources to support Programme Validation should be discussed between the University and the Ministry.

**1d.** Also, within the University, a system of **Periodic Review** of existing programmes should be developed (ESG 1.9). It is reasonable to expect all Programme Teams to be reflecting continuously upon their overall ‘product’. At the level of the individual course, staff teams will be making ongoing adjustments to student learning, based upon student feedback, current academic developments in the specific field, pedagogic developments, and resources available (ESG 1.3). Additional resources to support Periodic Review should be discussed between the University and the Ministry.

**1e.** A comprehensive document which could be called a **Regulatory Framework** should be developed by the University (ESG 1.1 & 1.8). We would like to see a single document which consolidates all forms of regulation in one place where it can be accessible, understood and used by students and staff.

Confident QA systems also have the benefit of enabling meaningful Quality Enhancement and providing a solid basis for the discussion, debate, investment in, and adoption of, innovation and the introduction of contemporary learning that recognises student needs and industry expectations of ‘work-readiness’. That is not to say that enhancements are not currently being operationalised in places across the University – clearly that is happening already and increasingly – but a more fully-developed framework in which these can be approved, recorded and shared would be a strong contribution towards the modern, professional University that is being built, as well as creating a single University identity beyond the narrow confines of Faculty.

So, we now turn to consideration of QE as the area in which we spent the later part of our visit in September 2022.

## 2. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

The development of Quality Enhancement (QE) in a University demands that a wide range of issues need to be considered that extend beyond the immediate learning experiences of students – vital though these are. The EHEA Process lays considerable emphasis upon Universities being student-centred in their structures, cultures, learning environments, in their focus on lifelong learning, staff development, also in their promotion of a European dimension in their practices, and in their research focus and preoccupations (ESG 1.3).

Thus, an ‘ideal’ situation would be a University with a carefully designed student experience which is understood and comparable to all others in the EHEA, with a system of credits that removes barriers to mobility and portability of qualifications (usually achievable through curriculum design), and also a culture of co-operation in QA consistent with others within the EHEA/Bologna Process. Moreover, the ‘ideal’ would be a University which is sufficiently outward facing to enable staff and students to recognise the attractiveness of international dimensions of Higher Education.

### Quality Enhancement outcomes of the fieldwork in September 2022

After consideration of the RA and conducting the fieldwork outlined in Appendix Five, the Review Team identified the following areas where the University should consider actions in accordance with the EHEA Process in the medium term. In reading these, it should be understood that this narrative takes a broad view of ways in which specific actions can contribute to improved QE and to achieving the EHEA objective. From the evidence presented in the RA, it is obvious that actions have been taken, or are currently being taken, to secure many of the things that we recommend below. However, there is an argument to be made that, whilst presented here as individual actions, these are mutually dependant and will more adequately secure excellent QE when they are progressed together. These areas for further intensity, acceleration and further action are as follows.

**Currently, the University operates from a number of buildings spread across Tórshavn.** In most cases, each building (or part of a building) is the home of a single Faculty or a single Administrative function. It is understood that there is an aspiration on the part of the University, its Board and the Ministry that **a single campus** (ESG 1.6 / ESG 1.3) is the most desirable way forward. It is less clear when that aspiration might be delivered – depending, as it does, upon government investment, the availability of land and a suitable architectural solution designed to meet the expectations of a twenty-first century university experience in a maximally accessible campus.

A single campus would not, in itself, secure the EHEA objective. However, the current weaknesses inherent in the use of buildings, not all of which were designed for any University use, far less one in the twenty-first century, mitigates against achievement of some of the aspirations set out above. Specifically, it brings hazards to student experience, student ‘life’, academic staff coherence, the teaching/research interface, teaching and research collaboration, the embedding of QA systems in student learning and staff practice, the visibility of Faculty and senior management and the corporate identity of a single institution sharing similar aspirations, objectives and practices.



**Thus, we strongly recommend that efforts to secure a single, purpose-designed learning and 'life' campus in Torshavn are redoubled by all of the stakeholders involved.** This should be a campus designed around the student experience, accessibility and academic excellence with an eye to the attraction of both Faroe Islanders and international students. Currently, there is too little to encourage student 'dwell-time' in each of the University buildings. Students appear to attend for their classes and then return home. Student 'life' is, therefore, confined to one's own classmates – possibly extending to others within the same Faculty. Very few students to whom we spoke (other than those on the Student Council) had encountered students from other Faculties. Many identified less with the University than with their own Faculties as their 'homes'. We recognise that steps have been taken to reduce this effect, but it seems clear that further progress requires a single University site and identity. This would have the further benefit of enabling non-Faroese students to integrate better with the whole institution in what is, after all, a relatively small student body. **Thus, we recommend urgent actions that move towards a single campus University in Torshavn, with major benefits for students, staff and the local community.**

Nevertheless, it is accepted that, even if a new, single campus were to be commissioned immediately, it would be some time before the University could migrate in totality to these new premises. Thus, the Team recommends that for this, and other reasons set out below, **the University develops a Learning and Teaching Development Plan and a Research and Enterprise Development Plan (ESG 1.3)** which are consistent with its strategy, direction and values. We recommend that these Plans are management-led but collectively grown through the governance mechanisms, resulting in collectively owned and actioned Plans which should be reviewed every 3-4 years using Performance Indicators. These Plans would serve to consolidate existing achievements and set the course for further resourcing, action and delivery of these two main functions of a University. To have these collectively owned, understood and delivered would also serve the intention, set out below, to have a strong, single University identity and purpose, as has been the evident direction of travel since 2019 and is apparent in the *Strategic Plan, 2020-2024*.

In asking to meet several groups of staff (Appendix Five), we asked for due **considerations of inclusivity** to be incorporated in the choices of those who would attend (ESG 1.6). We have every reason to believe that this request was actioned in the selections by management. However, some groups were effectively self-selected (the senior management; the professoriate) and these raised issues of the representativeness of women in these groups. In each of these cases, only one woman was a member. The Review Team takes the view that strategies to ensure inclusion (on grounds of gender, but also more generally, on grounds of, for example, disability, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief) need to be present in order to ensure a twenty-first century University environment which is seen to be addressing issues of inclusivity. Further, a growing group in the Faroe Islands is the number of non-Scandinavian immigrants settling permanently, as evidenced by the challenges told to us by a student of nursing. It is likely that specific policies to address the learning needs, previous qualifications and linguistic challenges of this group will need to be adopted in the University is also to achieve appropriate inclusion of this population.

*For the avoidance of doubt, there is absolutely no suggestion that evidence of discrimination was found during the Review and the Review Team was assured that active steps are being taken by the Management Team, including such initiatives as My Contribution (Case Study 3 in the Appendix One), in part, to address these concerns of inclusivity over the medium/long term.*

Whilst **gender diversity** was relatively easy to identify by observing those present at the discussions, other aspects of inclusivity were far less obvious to the Review Team. Thus, it has not been possible to identify how many students or staff with disabilities were part of the process (one member of staff declared their disability to a Team member and discussed their difficulties with accessibility). Equally, age and sexual orientation were also 'invisible' to the Review Team. So, it is not possible for us to be sure that we can adequately represent the experiences and successes/concerns of these populations. We welcome the fact that the University in its current Strategic Plan states that: "In all that we do, we will be committed to equality of opportunity, to inclusivity and to supporting the well-being of our students and staff in an environment in which all can thrive and flourish".

Building on this, it is our view that the University should develop a more explicit and accountable plan to ensure that any possible concerns about inclusivity can be addressed and managed, in accordance with national laws. Thus, we recommend that **the University gives consideration to developing and collectively agreeing an Inclusivity Plan (to include Gender Equality)** within a process in which the whole University community, and especially those representing groups prioritised for inclusion, are actively involved in the inception, delivery and audit of the Plan (ESG 1.7). The Plan should cover both students and staff. We consider that this Plan will be essential when the University goes forward to achieve its EHEA objective, but also that it would demonstrate to the entire community that the University takes a leadership role in social change in the Faroes.

*We specifically draw attention to, and cite, the Rome Communiqué (2020), Annex II – Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA, "Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education".*

**International Development through the promotion of student and staff mobility** is a key element of the EHEA objective (ESG 1.4 / ESG 1.6). We met a number of students who had benefitted from the opportunities available to study abroad as part of their programmes of study at the University. We also met some students who had indicated a desire to study abroad but, for a number of reasons had not pursued, or not been able to achieve their aim. It was evident that, for a student, it could be a matter of approaching the correct member of staff when in pursuit of an overseas opportunity. Some students suggested that it was 'up to them' to provide the energy and commitment to advance any international study opportunity, sometimes by having to find transcription evidence of their achievements and further documentary evidence of the contents of their curriculum to any potential host university abroad. This University is not alone in having such challenges, but an internationally focused university would have some more investment in services to facilitate this process. We acknowledge that there is some learning benefit in students taking an active

role in their future study, wherever that might be, but we are concerned to be told that there was confusion upon the location of single University repository of knowledge (other than in Student Affairs, i.e., not in their Faculties), or source of information and expertise, to assist them in advancing their aspirations to study abroad as part of their programmes. A website (in Faroese and English), or sub-site of the University website, could be a way forward in achieving this. Of course, achievement of the EHEA objective would streamline this process but, to get to that point, it would be a significant advantage for the University to provide a more visible, named person and/or role dedicated to its achievement and to whom all students could gravitate for encouragement, enablement and support. Further clarification of named individuals at Faculty level could also be an advantage. Such a role, possibly deriving from investment in the current International Office, could also be a touch point for students from overseas who have chosen to study in the Faroes, albeit with the inevitable challenges of language. Furthermore, this 'office' should **ensure that a clear 'international offer' is known to students, staff and collaborators**. In the case of staff mobility, interaction and liaison with Human Resources would be necessary, as would endorsement at Faculty.

Promotion of further recruitment of students domiciled beyond the Faroes could be grown significantly with the initiatives itemised above. However, the Faroese language, important as it is in the context of the University's mission, provides a barrier to study at HE level for 'international' students. Other nations with similar issues work around this challenge by teaching some courses in English – which has largely become the language of international Higher Education in recent years and is likely to remain so for some time to come. It seems likely that this matter requires a debate and resolution within the University, and we urge that to happen soon, so that what is to become the international offer within an EHEA/ESG context is clear and can be the subject of investment and preparation in advance of joining.

We saw far fewer students from overseas who are currently studying in the Faroes. Home-based students suggested that there were difficulties for such students to secure adequate student accommodation in and around Tórshavn. Indeed, the small amount of **dedicated and suitable living accommodation for ALL students** was raised several times. In pursuit of the EHEA objective (ESG 1.6), as well as in support of a local student population not domiciled in Tórshavn, the University, Municipality of Tórshavn and Government (or private sector) investment may need to consider how suitable accommodation can be released or enabled which will ensure that students can conduct their studies in an environment conducive to furthering, and enhancing, their learning. We understand that a suitable site had (previously and off campus) been identified but has not, as yet, been able to be released from its current use. We encourage all involved to redouble their efforts to find suitable premises.

**Lifelong learning** and its enablement are key tenets of the EHEA. Flexible learning paths are an important route to achieving this objective (ESG 1.3 & 1.6). Whilst there have been some recent part-time developments at master's level (e.g., the MSc in Leadership and Management; the programme in Faroese as an additional language, as indicated in the RA), it is apparent from the RA and from our discussions with students and staff that flexibility is at this stage not an integral aspect of the system at the University. The RA sets out a pathway towards better addressing this issue at institutional level but there is a necessity for the Ministry to consider how this can be achieved financially – currently, only full-time students receive financial support. **The University is encouraged to develop an explicit Plan for Lifelong**

**Learning which is consistent with the expectations of its EHEA Objective**, but which could have the added benefit of enhancing student experiences and learning. The Paris Communiqué of 2018 states that, “Lifelong learning is increasingly important in our societies and economies as well as to our citizens’ wellbeing”.

Students did not recognise the concept of **flexible learning paths**, assuming, as might be expected, that their study routes were inflexible and set by their tutors and local programme governance. We are unsure of whether this situation is a lack of knowledge of possibilities on the part of students or whether these possibilities simply do not exist. Our investigations tended to suggest that it is the latter, compounded by the former. By **introducing flexibility in learning paths**, (ESG 1.3 / ESG 1.6), the University is urged to continue alerting the Ministry to the financial implications for part-time students. For example, in a student population which often does not proceed immediately from school to University, there can be personal and familial obligations which form part of the lived experience of studying. Such students are not always able to proceed at the full-time pace envisaged in Programme documentation, even with the additional leeway which is available (we understand that students have leeway to be up to one year behind ‘on time’ completion and still be ‘on schedule’ and receiving financial support). Equally, the same imperatives may apply to the speed with which students with disabilities can progress. Moreover, some students may commence learning on a specific Programme and decide that it is no longer meeting their expectations or aspirations or life-circumstances. These students need to have the opportunity to build upon their existing credits, where that is feasible and allowing for general level credits and specific subject-level credits to underpin their future studies, rather than having to re-start on other named awards of the University (ESG 1.3).

The Paris Communiqué (2018) observes that, “Study programmes that provide diverse learning methods and flexible learning can foster social mobility and continuous professional development whilst enabling learners to access and complete higher education at any stage of their lives.”

As mentioned in the previous section, we are aware that the Ministry has conducted work towards achieving a credited **National Qualifications Framework** in the Faroes, and we have urged all concerned to accelerate this work and complete it. A further benefit of such a Framework is that it should help to address the issues identified above regarding lifelong and flexible learning.

Lastly, in this connection, potential or existing students may have **experiential learning** that is, currently, unable to be codified within a named award – examples of this could be in a wide range of areas from childcare to business. To encourage all of those learners, and more besides (such as so-called ‘adult learners’), an open and skills level mind-set would need to be adopted which does not only value named, usually professional, learning outcomes.

During our Review, we found relatively little **cross Faculty interaction** at the point where students encounter the University. This is not surprising, as the Faculties were effectively semi-autonomous until recently. Consequently, there has been little opportunity for students to pursue academic study in a Faculty other than their own. The possibility of extending one’s academic reach as a student provides opportunity for enhancement of learning and

engagement with fellow students and staff (ESG 1.3). Of course, that could more easily be achieved if there was a common University calendar of term and assessment dates, but we suspect that that is not the only obstacle – crowded curriculum, multiple University sites, staff workloads and Faculty control over resources may all have impacts upon this possibility.

When asked about cross Faculty interactions and co-operation, staff were able to give a few examples, such as the Master's in Leadership and Management cited above and some doctoral supervisions. The best and most notable exception – **the PG (10 ECTS) HE Pedagogy course hosted by the Faculty of Education** (of which we shall have more to say in the section devoted to the Faculty), which drew tutors and participants from across the University – is a strong example of effective co-operation and interaction. Without exception, those who had been involved considered this to be very welcome and very productive professionally, as well as fostering research and collaborative topics which were leading to positive outcomes. Both as professional development and as community building this initiative on the part of the University is welcomed by the Review Team and we urge the University to continue with it.

It also important to mention **the unifying potential of a single, common University calendar** – incorporating term dates, assessment periods, vacation periods, etc. (ESG 1.3). We recognise that this will be challenging because of, for example, the imperatives of work-based learning in some professional subjects such as Nursing or Education, and the reconciliation of those both with each other and with the rest of the University's programmes. Nevertheless, some students raised concerns about clarity and predictability of the current arrangements – particularly, but not only, those with care and other such responsibilities. A common calendar could also enable transparency and consistency of ECTS resource allocation to Faculties

Building the concept of a single University does not end with the establishment of a unitary campus but also requires there to be a clear statement of what the institution stands for. Common modules studied by students could help ensure that distinctiveness, particularly, but not only, in the area of the Faroese language and culture. We believe that this kind of approach to distinctiveness is welcomed within the EHEA framework.

As the University has a responsibility to promote and curate the Faroese language, it seems to us reasonable that **the Faculty of Faroese Language and Literature could offer a 'non-expert course' (with credit) to all students**, including those who have not chosen that subject area. When this idea was put to a group of staff, colleagues from many areas suggested a number of other possible cross-Faculty subject terrains. It is known that students in some other Nordic countries have compulsory, cross disciplinary courses which are required for all students (e.g., Philosophy of Science in Norway). Courses in Ethics also have a great deal of common currency in knowledge-led environments, such as universities. Further, a common course in academic writing in Faroese was another potential opportunity which saw some traction among those interviewed – with high potential for cross Faculty co-operation/collaboration in its development and delivery.

The University of the Faroe Islands springs out of what is now the Faculty for Faroese language and Literature. Similarly, the Faculty of Education has its roots in the teacher's college, with a key responsibility for the historical and continued transmission, maintenance and development of Faroese language. The study of and responsibility for Faroese language

lies at the very root of the University as an institution, and the University is vital for the continued development of Faroese and the implementation of Faroese language norms, as well as their elaboration. Beyond these two Faculties, the University as a whole is vital for the development of Faroese scientific and technical terminology, for Faroese academic writing in all disciplines and the development of a language to sustain all parts of Faroese society. It is the impression of the Review Team, based on the talks with staff in particular, that there is a shared sense of responsibility for Faroese language and society across the university. Efforts to further develop modern linguistic infrastructure and language technology will add to the university's ability to fulfil these duties in line with the changing needs of a modern society.

To help achieve internationalization, other Nordic universities have introduced parallel language policies, in which the universities aim to achieve language practices in research and education that promote both a national/local language and a global academic working language (in practice English). The University of the Faroe Islands lies within a language community that has a long-standing tradition for bilingualism between Faroese and Danish. This general, high-competence bilingualism has also been a given at the University, for both staff and students. As an extension of this Faroese/Danish bilingualism, receptive competence of other Scandinavian languages has also been taken for granted.

For a more diverse student and staff population (in terms of diversity of country of origin), this language ecology of the University poses a challenge. Students and staff told us that for international students and potential students who were non-Scandinavian immigrants to the Faroe Islands, the expectation of being able to read academic literature in three or four languages is a barrier to education. Such potentially excluded populations mentioned by students to the Review Team include assistants working in kindergartens, who are competent in Faroese as a second language, but not in Danish. A solution to include such students, could be to reduce the number of languages used in those university courses where such a reduction is achievable and appropriate. A reduction of this manner does however require resources for the development of course literature and teaching material in Faroese.

The Review Team wishes to support actively the creation and development of the **Language Technology Centre** as cited in the RA. Language policy is much more likely to succeed in this kind of environment. On this matter, it should be clear in all documentation what language is used in the delivery of each course and/or programme.

Many staff raised the issue of **workloads** with us. The issue of staff workloads may be, we concede, incidental to a section upon QE (ESG 1.5). Of course, this is an issue which could be expected to arise in almost any European university since 2009, especially where squeezed government funding forms a large part of their budgets. Having said that, some of the workload tariffs quoted to us by staff and management appeared, on the face of it, to be very generous compared to our own experiences. No doubt, there will be some issues around local definitions of what is to attract a tariff, but we were especially surprised by the generosity of some allowances, most especially for research activity (50 per cent) where there does not appear to have consistently been a performance element attached – though we acknowledge that the My Contribution process has been introduced in part to address such issues. Our position is that conditions appear to be good overall and in relative terms but that does not undermine our point about *perceived inequalities* between groups.

Perceived inequalities in workload on the part of staff were a persistent theme in discussions with groups at various levels in the University. More worryingly, and as an issue in securing enhanced quality, students repeated these concerns in all of the sessions we had with them. Students did not specifically name the sources for this ‘information’, but it seems very likely that they had heard it from staff – either explicitly or implicitly (in their apparent unavailability to engage informally with students on their concerns or feedback). It is solely a matter for the University and its community themselves to decide upon what constitutes an appropriate workload for staff. However, we wished to share our concern that these perceptions, whether real or imagined, are impacting upon students’ experiences and that can only be detrimental to a positive QE environment. Other than the allocation of some remissions for specific tasks (such as research activity), we could find no evidence of a developed and standardised Workload Model applied across the University. A system which permits a more transparent allocation of ECTS has further benefits for rationalising workloads would be highly desirable.

**Public information (ESG 1.8) and transparency** are key principles for quality and also operate as a feedback tool. This is important, not only to inform government and public institutions about quality procedures and results, but also to society as a whole. In this regard, we suggest that a part of the University website page is developed, dedicated to quality and transparency – it would, for example, publish significant data about the University (number of students, gender, age, progression rates, employability of graduates, number of staff, etc.). It should detail quality procedures in a manner easily understood by the lay reader and also survey results (e.g., staff and student surveys), outcomes of the QA procedures recommended above and actions taken as a result. Furthermore, there would be a distinct advantage, in EHEA terms, of this information containing details of the University’s governance and public records of minutes, deliberations and decisions taken, including those which demonstrate autonomy.

We had the opportunity to meet with most members of the Professoriate and, also, with some staff who were research active. We also met a small number of doctoral students in the student groups. Some staff are, of course, also studying for their doctoral qualifications. In a small University, a **Doctoral School** which brings together all of those with ‘third cycle’ aspirations to share their experiences, concerns and successes is a welcome move (ESG 1.3, 1.5 & 1.6). We are aware that such a proposal is already well advanced, and we welcome that, whilst encouraging its early adoption. Once again, this offers opportunities to create a ‘single’ University idea that extends beyond narrow Faculty boundaries and is built upon the common needs and foci of a specific group of students (e.g., in methodology and in specific research method techniques).

### **Summary of recommendations for Quality Enhancement**

Although we have made a number of suggestions and observations above, we want to specify areas of recommendation which the stakeholders should either intensify or take early action upon as investments in the progress of the University and strategic national and University objectives. These are:

**2a.** Efforts to secure a single, **purpose-designed learning and 'life' campus** in Tórshavn should be redoubled by all the stakeholders. This should be a campus designed around the student experience, accessibility, and academic excellence with an eye to the attraction of both Faroese Islanders and international students.

**2b.** The University should develop a **Learning and Teaching Development Plan** and a **Research and Enterprise Development Plan** which are consistent with the institution's mission, strategy, and values (ESG 1.3). We recommend that these Plans are management-led, but at the same time collaboratively developed through the governance mechanisms of the University, so as to be collectively owned and actioned.

**2c.** We suggest consideration towards some further offering to secure **Faroese distinctiveness and evident contribution to Faroese society**, also recognising the language ecology of the University. Common modules studied by students across the institution could help ensure that distinctiveness, particularly, but not only, in the area of Faroese language and culture. We believe that this kind of approach to distinctiveness is welcomed within the EHEA framework. Also, the university should decide when, where and why teaching will be conducted in English.

**2d.** An **Inclusivity Plan** (to include Gender Equality) should be produced by the University. The Plan should cover both students and staff. We consider that this Plan will be essential when the University goes forward into its EHEA objective but also that it would further demonstrate to the entire community that the University takes a leadership role in social change in the Faroes.

**2e.** The University should further support **outward and inward student mobility and the 'international offer'**. It would be a significant advantage for the University to provide a more visible, named person and/or role dedicated to this, to whom all students could gravitate for encouragement, and support. Linked to this, but also for the sake of local students, more viable and accessible **student accommodation** should be provided by the relevant agencies.

**2f.** A **Lifelong Learning Plan** should be developed by the University and supported by the Ministry. Evident and easily accessible flexible learning paths should be developed.

**2g.** The University should further progress with its work towards the development of a **Doctoral School**. This offers opportunities to further support the already clearly articulated idea of a 'single' University, that extends beyond Faculty boundaries.

**2h.** Further measures should be taken to encourage and enable **cross Faculty interactions** for students and staff, and progress should be made towards a common **university calendar**. In addition, the University should develop and implement a transparent **workload allocation model** for teaching and research staff across the institution. Finally, the University should further strengthen **public information** available to Faroese society, which makes transparent University decisions and performance.



### 3. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

A key part of the brief provided by the Ministry to the Review Team was that within the broad remit of “supporting the progress and development of the University on the basis of its current trajectory”, and in particular supporting “the strengthening of quality assurance processes ... in accordance with the Bologna Process and the ESG”, the review should, in addition “have a particular focus on the operation of the Faculty of Education and on supporting the development and delivery of the main programmes – in teacher and pedagogue training – within that Faculty.” Ultimately, the precise terms of the brief in this connection were as follows:

*“The Faculty of Education plays a vital role in educating students who will become teachers and pedagogues to serve the needs of the Faroese education system.*

- *How well is the Faculty operating to fulfil this role?*
- *How might that operation be improved and strengthened, both in terms of the overall leadership and management of the Faculty, and also in terms of the design and delivery of the main programmes – in teacher and pedagogue education – including the work-based learning (practicum) parts?*
- *How would the strengthening of the Faculty and of the design and delivery of the main programmes link to the development proposed at University level?*

*The Ministry recognizes that this level of scrutiny of the Faculty of Education in the context of an institutional-level review focused on quality assurance and enhancement is challenging, but it asks the review team to focus on the key aspects of assurance and enhancement at Faculty level, recognizing that some follow-up work by another team looking in particular at issues of curriculum might well be required.”*

In due course, and as already mentioned earlier in our report, it was further agreed that this part of the brief would be fulfilled by:

- Requiring that the University provide a substantial case study of the Faculty of Education as part of the set of Reflective Analysis documents to be submitted to the Review Team prior to the main review visit in September 2022;
- The Review Team setting aside a substantial part of the overall, main review and of their subsequent deliberations to focus in detail on the Faculty of Education.

An overarching consideration in conducting our work regarding the Faculty has been our view that it should become a key player in the continuous transformation of Faroese society – e.g., gender issues, inclusion, democratic values – but also in the transformation of the whole University by supporting the design of new teaching, assessment methodologies and flexible learning paths that can be applied to all programmes. We see this as key role and as a benefit of the Faculty having been incorporated into the University community in 2008. As in the main part of the Review Report, our considerations are influenced by the need to incorporate the four purposes of higher education according to the Council of Europe:

- Prepare young people for employment
- Grow active citizens in democratic societies
- Ensure the personal development of populations
- Ensure the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

The Brief indicates that a further consideration of the curricula in the Faculty of Education would require an additional exercise, beyond this Review. Whilst we also recommend that, we argue that that exercise should be conducted using the recommended QA procedures set out in our recommendations earlier. Nevertheless, we argue that the four purposes above should be given active consideration during that process.

We should add that we support the University's desire to implement a Master of Education programme to ensure continued development of teaching competences – having first specified (and justified) the competences that all contemporary teachers will need to acquire and that will ensure that the Faroe Islands aspires to having a teacher education programme that is among the best in the Nordic countries. Moreover, a programme of continuing professional development in teaching and pedagogy in the Faroes is consistent with that master's aspiration.

We are pleased to report that a substantial case study of the Faculty was provided in good time (Appendix One, Case Study 1). As outlined earlier in this report, during the main review visit, the Team was based in the Faculty of Education at Frælsið and conducted all of its meetings with staff and students there. A substantial part of the total visit time was spent looking specifically at the Faculty (while also considering the Faculty within the overall consideration of the University as a whole during the rest of the time). Based on all of this, the Team is confident that it can give well-founded and well-considered answers to the questions posed, and we now proceed in what follows to address those questions.

### **How well is the Faculty operating to fulfil its vital role in educating students to become teachers and pedagogues to serve the needs of the Faroese education system?**

In all of our engagement with the review process, it was made clear to us that there have been very significant challenges facing the Faculty of Education since – and indeed even prior to – the merger of the previous College of Teacher Education into the University in 2008. This, indeed, is reflected in the very fact that the Faculty was 'singled out' for special attention as part of the Brief we received.

Through the Review Process, it became apparent to us that there were very good reasons for the merger, and indeed the government of the Faroe Islands can be seen to have been far-sighted in its decision to institute such a merger. Incorporating what were previously 'colleges of teacher education' into universities and university-like institutions has become increasingly common internationally in recent decades. Reasons for such mergers include the need to raise the level of the curricula delivered by such colleges by strengthening the academic and research underpinning for their delivery, as well as ensuring their exposure to the type of quality assurance and enhancement systems typically developed by university-type institutions. Further reasons also include the achievement of economies of scale in

leadership, facilities, administration, and so on, as well as the potential benefits of being part of the wider academic community and dialogue which larger institutions can provide. Our view is that this, specific merger reinforces evidence elsewhere that merger can work best if research collaboration exists.

In the Faroese case, all of these reasons seem to have been relevant, to varying degrees, but it is clear to us that there was, about 20 years, ago a perception, arising from PISA performances, that the raising of the delivery of teacher and pedagogue educations to the Bachelor's level could ensure that students would emerge from their programmes of education better prepared to meet the needs of Faroese society and the Faroese educational system. Moreover, it seems clear that there was a perception that the challenges being registered by PISA somehow also reflected underlying challenges in the organisation and operation of the College of Teacher Education, which it was believed – or perhaps hoped – the University leadership would over a period of time be able to address.

Research suggests that teachers and their qualifications are one of the most significant factors affecting student learning, wellbeing and building (e.g., John Hattie *Visible Learning* 2009, or Hanushek. *Education production functions* 2020, s. 161-170 i: Bradley, S.C. & Green, C. (Eds.) in *The Economics of Education – a comprehensive overview*. 2. ed. London: Academic Press). So, it is argued that, from this perspective the education of teachers has a strong impact on the learning of their students. However, we would also counsel that PISA is one, widely used and recognized approach, but it is not the only way to measure the impacts of teacher education upon school students. We should add that, when PISA performance is mapped against ways in which different countries organize their teacher education systems, there is no discernible correlation between those delivered at a university level, and higher PISA scores. Thus, a key question is not whether a merger itself would lead to higher scores, but how a teacher and pedagogue education founded upon a stronger research base (as is to be expected from a university environment) and the link between theory and practice can be best achieved.

While there may have been very good reasons in principle for the merger, it is apparent to us that the merger in practice was not smooth and that there were protracted challenges of various kinds continuing for over a decade, with some, both within the Faculty and outside of the University, who maintained that the whole merger had been a bad idea and should be reversed. This is, we believe, well-summarized in the Preface to the Case Study 1 of the RA (i.e., the Case Study of the Faculty of Education) provided to us (se Appendix 2). Through the medium of this Review, it would be very difficult for us to achieve sufficient understanding of the complex and difficult history involved to question what is reported there (and has been confirmed in our discussions with the Ministry and others). Thus, we have accepted this version of events as the basis for our thinking and reporting. However, we should add that, in our conversations with staff, we asked whether they recognized their Faculty in the Case Study descriptions. Recently appointed staff did not recognize the past conflicts in their daily practice. We take this to be an indication that the Faculty has moved forward in the recent period.

However, what is very clear to us is that, in more recent years, the University leadership as part of its wider strategy of modernizing and professionalizing the University, has worked

with the Faculty leadership to map a way out of the very difficult circumstances which previously prevailed. Crucially, there was a sustained intervention in 2020 with specialist external support, which helped to establish a new basis for the Faculty to move forward.

For us, an important aspect of this process has been that the Faculty has taken ownership and responsibility for its challenges and decided to deal with them together in a new kind of way, as evidenced in the Case Study. Another important aspect has been the creation of a Faculty Leadership Team, with two Deputy Deans, who are also the leaders of the main programmes, and a Faculty Research Leader. All three of these roles support the Dean, who previously was directly responsible for the management of all of the Faculty's staff – an unworkable and unsustainable span of control. More generally, the wider strengthening and reorganization of the University's leadership and administration (of which the creation of the Faculty Leadership Team was part) has brought the Faculty into a far closer relationship with the rest of the University and has provided greater support for the Faculty's operation. *We would counsel that the University should keep under consideration the creation of new leadership levels and the volume of work these individuals are required to manage to ensure that maximum benefits are achieved but with the minimum loss in terms of alternative resource uses.*

We welcome the creation under the most recent Executive Orders of the **new Co-operation Councils** for the main professional educations at the University – including the teacher and pedagogue programmes. These, we understand, are intended to build mutual understanding and co-operation among all the main interested parties in the Faroes in relation to these programmes, and it is apparent to us that the Council focused on the teacher education has a particularly important role to play in ensuring that people and organisations move forward together constructively to support the development and delivery of that programme.

Nevertheless, addressing the performances of school students as a function of the curriculum on bachelor's programmes in the University as cited above, is only one intervention that can be made in the process of improvement. The good will that has arisen through the Co-operation Councils should provide a basis upon which to **consider how existing teachers and pedagogues already within the system maintain the contemporary-ness of their professional practices** – i.e., how do existing pedagogues and teachers remain in 'good standing' within their professions? Commonly, that is achieved elsewhere through **programmes of continuous professional development**, often mediated by an independent body overseeing standards, and of which teachers and pedagogues are members. If the route of validating the 'good standing' of all in the professions, whether recent graduates or those with qualifications dating back many years, is a route that the stakeholders in school education wish to take, then an obvious location for the delivery of contemporary and updating courses for those currently '**in-service**' would be a Faculty of Education within a University.

Based on all of this, it seems clear to us that **significant progress has been made in the recent years in confronting the long-standing challenges presented by the merger** of 2008. We strongly urge that there should be a clear focus on, and the support of all relevant parties for, continuing and accelerating that progress. It is also clear to us from our investigations that the University leadership, the Faculty leadership and also the staff of the Faculty, are committed to that continuing progress – and there are many specific ways in which they have

described to us, in writing and verbally, how they see that happening in the future. They should act purposively on these statements of intent.

None of this is to imply that there was no progress at the Faculty in the period between 2008 and 2019, and staff in particular described key aspects of what has been progress in improving the main education programmes delivered. It is, rather, to say that some of the fundamental issues and challenges which were inherited through the merger process have most clearly started to be addressed in the most recent years.

For the avoidance of doubt, **we can see no meaningful argument for what was described in the RA Case Study as a ‘de-merger’**. We understand such a thing has not at any time been on the agenda of the Faroese government, and nor do we believe it should be. It is to the credit of those preparing and owning the Case Study that they have not hidden or denied the obviously painful process of reaching the current situation. Moreover, no student or member of staff contended to us that the decision to merge the former School into the University should be revisited. Most recognized the opportunities of the current arrangements, and a recurring theme was the urgency of finding ways to even better harness the strengths that the Faculty brings to the University and vice versa.

Not the least of the important strengths the Faculty brings to the University is the highly popular **Course in HE Pedagogy** delivered to teaching staff across the University, and not the least of the important strengths the University brings to the Faculty is the central support and direction provided to build the kind of quality assurance and enhancement processes – and culture – which have been a central aspect of the wider review process here being reported. We believe that **direct interventions in the professional skills of teachers at all levels is precisely what we would expect from a contemporary Faculty of Education** within a University environment. Once again, we urge the University and the Faculty to continue to **embed this form of continuous professional development into the work of the Faculty** and the expectations that they have of teaching staff throughout the institution – most likely through the My Contribution initiative (ESG 1.5).

With regard to the content and delivery of the main programmes delivered by the Faculty, we can say the following. Based on the extensive documentation we received – both the RA documents and also associated documentation, including documentation about the main Faculty of Education programmes and their delivery – and also the discussions we had with staff and students, **we are confident that the teacher programme and the pedagogue programme are both fundamentally sound and comparable to equivalent programmes delivered in other Nordic countries and elsewhere**. The ratio of underlying theory and guided teaching practice appears to be broadly consistent with comparable Nordic societies. No member of the review team felt any reason to express reservations about quality or standards – which were found to be appropriate. Of course, that does not mean that everything is perfect – that is highly unlikely ever to be the case – and there are many aspects in which the programmes can be strengthened and improved, subject, in part, to resourcing. Many of these aspects are indeed identified in the RA documents we received, and the Review Team found – and reported to the University and Faculty Leadership as part of its verbal debriefings during the Review Visit – that both the issues identified and the manner in which they are to be addressed by the Faculty and the University are also generally

appropriate. We will say more about this as we turn now to address the second and third questions from the brief, which it seems sensible to deal with together (for reasons that should become apparent).

*So, here and now, we will answer the question posed to us concisely by saying this: The Faculty of Education is delivering programmes which are fundamentally sound in terms of quality and standards and are comparable to international equivalents. The Faculty is now operating on a significantly more secure basis than was the case in the relatively recent past and considerable progress is continuing to be made. We strongly urge that there should be a clear focus on, and the support of all relevant parties for, continuing and accelerating that progress in the period between now and the next institutional review.*

We now turn specially to address the other main questions we were posed in our brief for the review process, as follows:

**How might the operation of the Faculty be improved and strengthened, both in terms of the overall leadership and management of the Faculty, and also in terms of the design and delivery of the main programmes – in teacher and pedagogue education – including the work-based learning (practicum) parts?**

**How would the strengthening of the Faculty and of the design and delivery of the main programmes link to the development proposed at University level?**

During both our first and second visit to the Faroe Islands, we were informed of the great current need for qualified pedagogues in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The current need for pedagogues in Faroese day care institutions gives opportunities to **investigate how financial and structural frames can be changed to allow part-time programmes and flexible learning paths for pedagogues**. We also heard echoes of an uneven status between ECEC pedagogue education vs. schoolteacher education in the Faroese society, in which school (and teacher education) is unfortunately still assigned a higher value than ECEC (and ECEC pedagogue education). There is good reason to be attentive to such tendencies, both for the continued progress of the Faculty and to ensure an educational system that provides the best possible conditions for Faroese children's' development and learning.

We have mentioned above some of the important ways in which it was made apparent to us that the operation of the Faculty already has been improved and strengthened in recent years. Our comments above relate primarily to the 2020 intervention to support the Faculty to collectively take ownership of key, long-standing challenges, the strengthening of the Faculty leadership, and the wider professionalisation and modernisation of the University and how it has impacted on the Faculty. However, it is apparent to us that there has also been improvement and strengthening in terms of the design and delivery of the main programmes (ESG 1.2), with the programme leaders playing a key role in this regard. Again, this is all outlined in the RA documents.

**The continuing and further improvement and strengthening of the design and delivery of the main programmes, including the work-based learning (practicum) parts, seems to us likely to**

best be brought about by ensuring that the Faculty engages fully and consistently with all aspects of the University's quality assurance and enhancement systems and processes (ESG 1.1) which have been a key focus of the overarching review we have been conducting, and about which we have made detailed and specific recommendations in this Review. Indeed, such engagement should, if conducted fulsomely, also yield insights and suggestions relevant to the wider operation of the Faculty, and indeed of the University itself. All of the taught programmes of this Faculty will benefit from the continuous improvement envisaged in the current QA and QE arrangements, as well as the recommendations we make earlier in the Report on these matters. It is a reasonable expectation that programmes will be subject to annual review and periodic, further inspection using external experts (ESG 1.9). This will ensure that the most current and innovative approaches to pedagogy and teacher education are regularly incorporated into the curriculum and the learning approaches (ESG 1.3). It will also enable students to have a formal voice, through feedback, in the development of their subject areas. Of course, this applies to the whole University but has specific resonance in this Faculty as it embraces these processes.

The specific recommendations we have provided regarding the overarching processes of quality assurance and enhancement at the University indicate that all programmes, as well as being subject to ongoing enhancement on a continuous basis, should also be subject to periodic review and re-validation (ESG 1.9). Such revalidation typically involves substantial reflection and extensive documentation, and evaluative discussion with a panel of internal and external experts who consider issues of relevance and purpose, inputs and outcomes (ESG 1.4), currency and resourcing (ESG 1.6), pedagogy and mode of delivery, and so on. We have recommended that the University moves promptly to instigate a regular cycle of re-validation for all of its existing programmes, as well as a more consistently appropriate validation (also along the lines of the above) for all new programmes.

In answering the questions posed to us, we have considered:

- The importance of the main Faculty of Education programmes to the University and to the Faroe Islands;
- The issues and challenges which the Faculty has faced over the years;
- The challenges which we as a review team inevitably face in conducting a 'deep dive' into the content and delivery of the review process as part of the wider review process during our limited time in the Faroe Islands.

Given the points above, it seems sensible that we **recommend that the main Faculty of Education programmes be the first – or at least among the first – to go through the re-validation process and that they do so before the end of 2024.** This will, by design, be a process which brings together the relevant internal and external stakeholders and experts to review and to renew the programmes. We would expect that to be done in a spirit of collegiality, openness and constructive collaboration to achieve the best outcomes. While that process will largely involve Faroese voices, it will also be vital that international expertise is included at this stage.

Whilst ensuring the academic currency of the programmes, another key benefit of such a process is that it will help to ensure that there is continuing ownership of, and commitment to, the programmes amongst the University staff.

We are pleased to report that students of the Faculty very ready and willing to share their experiences of it with us candidly. A key concern arising from our interviews with these students was that for some, on occasions, the formal course and programme documentation appears to have been unavailable to them in good time (ESG 1.8). This was also clearly highlighted to us in the RA documents we received. This matter was of general concern to us, but we do recognize that adoption of the current and recommended approaches to QA and QE in the University is, to a large extent, already addressing this issue constructively. However, there is also a specific concern that derives from the structure of the student population – many aspiring to become pedagogues or teachers have distances to travel and/or have care responsibilities. It is simply unacceptable that they might not know exactly what learning outcomes are expected of them, how their learning is structured, what the timings and weights of assessments are or what options, whether at home or abroad, are open to them (ESG 1.8; ESG 1.3). Again, **adoption of the standard procedures outlined for the whole University should respond positively to this** problem, but the Faculty also needs to ensure that this is communicated timeously, and in a manner conducive to student comprehension.

Students also raised concern about the **quality and timings of feedback** from their assessments. This should be a matter for immediate attention by the Faculty. Some students had had feedback on formative assessments, while others claimed that they did not. The very nature of formative assessment suggests that rapid, user-friendly feedback is necessary – probably in the form of ‘feed-forward’, so that students can adjust their personal learning strategies in time for summative assessment. In turn, the student commentary upon feedback for summative assessments (usually, but not only exams) was variable. Whilst we do not wish to specify exactly how such feedback is given, we contend that it should be available and informative to all. Where programme structures include a reasonable expectation of underpinning knowledge from level to level, it is vital that students understand how and why they have performed at the level they have (ESG 1.3) – and equally important that they are helped to understand why such feedback is important and how they can best use it to build upon their knowledge at the next level. We welcome, moreover, the emphasis placed on ‘building a feedback culture’ at the University in the collaboration between the University leadership and the Student Council.

We also **welcome the emerging focus on strengthening research in the Faculty** and ensuring that there is more research underpinning for the main programmes in terms of research that is actually conducted in Faroese schools and day cares. There has been investment in research, but, as is clearly recognised in the RA documents, it has not delivered as much as it might have, and **there needs to be some creative perspective of all the relevant stakeholders on how a generation of researchers and research-driven teachers are developed (ESG 1.5) who will create a basis for the continuation of the work in the future (a culture of research that gets transmitted to new arrivals)**. We suggest that, if there are widely held concerns about the attainment of schoolchildren, the Ministry invites proposals for research and provides resources to conduct the most relevant of these proposals. We consider this to be a



central part of what could have been expected when merging a College into a University environment. **Our advice is that healthy research environments take considerable time and resources to achieve and that is a matter for the Ministry and the University to consider in future plans for this Faculty.** We would also counsel that the risk of focusing solely upon research runs the risk of losing the strong connection between Faculty and the society it serves. Thus, we conclude that future plans should give serious consideration to ensuring that both important outcomes are served simultaneously in a manner conducive to the situation in the Faroes.

Finally, we turn to the **practicum element of the curriculum**, as directed by the brief. Our investigations, and experiences elsewhere, indicate to us that **the ratios of 'theory' based University tuition to internships within the schools and day-care (the practicum) are not dissimilar to other European environments.** Those who would wish for more time to be spent upon internships need to demonstrate that, currently, the amount of student time spent upon these is insufficient for defensible reasons (i.e., what is 'broken'), how any further practicum time would be resourced and quality assessed via classroom supervision (which we understand to be a significant resource and expense), and how practice supervisors themselves are to be validated. No doubt the CPD approach to in-service practitioners could assist with this.

### **Summary of recommendations for the Faculty of Education**

All of the Recommendations made in the earlier part of this Report in respect of Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement apply equally to the Faculty of Education.

We consider that significant strides have been taken in recent years to ensure the success of the merger and that these should be reinforced further. Any suggestion of de-merger is unwelcome and retrograde. Furthermore, we recommend:

**3a.** The main educational programmes delivered by the Faculty are fundamentally sound, and their practicum parts, are in their main respects consistent with those offered across the Nordic region and more widely. We recommend that the further development of the programmes will best be supported by their being the **first in the University to be subject to the new Periodic Review arrangements** proposed in our earlier recommendations – a process which should be the *de facto* 'deep dive' into the curricula.

**3b.** The Faculty should be supported by the relevant stakeholders to **become a leading contributor to a process of Continuous Professional Development** for all existing teachers and pedagogues in the Faroes, possibly, but not only, through master's level provision. The recently created Co-operation Councils for the teacher and pedagogue educations can be expected to play a strong part in this important initiative.

**3c.** Given the great current need for education professionals in the Faroes, consideration needs to be given by key stakeholders to government financial support to students and to the current programme structures to **enable wider access to education of pedagogues, especially, but also teachers**, through part-time and flexible learning.

**3d.** In the short-term, there should be a continuing focus on ensuring that appropriate **course documentation is always available** to all students in good time.

**3e.** Weaknesses identified in the Reflective Analysis documents regarding **feedback to students** within the Faculty should be addressed urgently, and should also be a matter for formalisation in the programme review process that we recommend above.

**3f.** The **strengthening of research** in the Faculty is welcome. It is important that there should be a focus upon how a generation of researchers and research-driven teachers can be developed and supported, which will generate and transmit knowledge over time.

**3g.** The excellent **course in pedagogy for higher education** should be the basis for a more extended offer for teaching staff, perhaps initially focusing on online learning, and perhaps later leading to the award of a master's level diploma. The University and the Ministry should collaborate to ensure the resourcing required.

**An Executive Summary of this Report, together with a full list of Recommendations, is provided on pages 5-8 above.**

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