

***External Review of the University of the Faroe Islands  
September 2021 – October 2022:  
Joint Letter of Response from Ministry and University to the  
International Review Team***

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

The Ministry of Children and Education and the University of the Faroe Islands thank the Review Team for a well-executed and thorough external review. In this response letter we briefly comment on the process, the main conclusions, and the specific recommendations.

**Process of the external review**

The review period lasted more than one year, mainly due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. This was demanding for all parties but has, most likely, resulted in a more thorough process. The University recognises and appreciates the framework that formed the basis for the Reflective Analysis that was submitted to the Review Team in August 2022. The internal process of producing the Reflective Analysis document involved all staff and students and is – as the Review Team also notes – probably the most important output of the external review process. The process gave all stakeholders at the university the opportunity to discuss the identity and historical roots of the university, the current state of affairs and most importantly, plans for the future. We also thank the Review Team for wide-ranging and fruitful discussions during the on-site visit in September 2022.

**Main conclusions**

The Ministry and University agree with the Review Team 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)”. Both parties also understand “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”, and we agree that “there are further steps to be taken in both Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement”. The Ministry and the University appreciate that the Review Team has proposed concrete and actionable steps as part of its recommendations.

**Recommendations**

In this section we comment on the 20 recommendations from the Review Team (named 1a-1e, 2a-2h and 3a-3g). For clarity, both the full text of each recommendation (*in italics*) and our response is provided below.

*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:*

*(1a) 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.*

Response: We agree that wider public understanding and recognition of the importance of Faroese participation in the EHEA is needed. As a first step, the Ministry and the University will strengthen their dialogue by establishing a high-level joint Bologna taskforce that will be responsible for (i) deciding on necessary political goals, both in the short and long term, and (ii) providing a plan and a timeframe for the work with ambitious milestones, supported by necessary resources and with a clear division of work between the Ministry and the University. One of the political goals for 2023 will be to increase the level of public debate on Faroese participation in EHEA; this will be done through a branding effort and a public workshop on the theme.

*(1b) 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.*

Response: Work on a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has been underway for some time. The Ministry intends to have a NQF ready by summer 2023, with implementation into national legislation in the autumn of 2023, and effective from January 1, 2024.

*(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.*

Response: We agree that there is an urgent need for a process of Programme Validation that is aligned with ESG 1.2. The work effort required to design and describe an appropriate process of Programme Validation is significant and involves both the Ministry and the University. As the resources and relevant competences on the Faroes are scarce, we may need to involve international experts – which may prolong the work somewhat. However, the ambition is to have a new process of Programme Validation ready by early 2024, so that proposals for new higher-education programmes at the University can be validated in the spring of 2024.

*(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.*

Response: Work is underway within the University to design both a process of Yearly Monitoring and a process of External Periodic Review of all existing educational programmes. A first version of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for educational programmes is developed. Five programmes, one from each Faculty, will go through a pilot of Yearly Monitoring in the spring of 2023 involving the relevant Programme Teams. As for the External Periodic Review, the University plans to design a general process in the spring of 2023. The teacher's programme (Bachelor of Education in Primary and Lower Secondary Education) will be a pilot for external periodic review in the autumn of 2023. From autumn 2024, several programmes will undergo external periodic review every year, so that each programme is periodically reviewed every 4-6 years.

*(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.*

Response: The University agrees that this is an excellent proposal. When most of the new policies and processes have been designed and evaluated by early 2024, we will make these accessible (in both Faroese and English) in a user-friendly fashion on the University website – as part of a full description of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement system at the University.

*Recommendations regarding quality enhancement of educational programmes are as follows:*

*(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 Faroe Islanders and international students.*

Response: The campus plan for the University is very high on the political agenda. An architecture competition for a new main building for the University is currently running, and a winner will be announced before summer 2023. Efforts to secure funding for the new main building, as well as the long-term campus plans from 2018, will increase in 2023 and the coming years.

*(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.*

Response: The University intends to develop these plans as part of the long-term Quality Enhancement effort. Both plans play an important role in the Periodic Review of programmes (see recommendation 1d). The timeline for developing the plans will be described in the long-term plan for the process towards EHEA (see response to recommendation 1a).

*(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.*

Response: The University agrees that more shared course offers should be available to all students at the University. These could, for example, be courses in Faroese language and culture, philosophy of science, academic writing, IT and statistics. Also, the University plans to have more English course offers – both to support internationalisation of Faroese students and as offers to incoming international students. The University plans to set up a working group with the task of proposing initiatives that increase student mobility and collaboration across faculties and programmes. Also, the Ministry is preparing Faroese participation in Erasmus+ as a third country which will further increase the need for course offers 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.*

Response: An Inclusivity Plan draft has been written and an Inclusivity Committee has been set up with members from the central administration, all five faculties as well as student representatives. The committee will commence their work in early February and initially the emphasis will be on gender equality.

*(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.*

Response: The Ministry and the University unanimously support increased outward and inward student mobility. However, this requires an administrative setup,

including necessary resources, that are not available at the Ministry or University today. The timeline for developing the area will be described in the long-term plan for the process towards EHEA (see response to recommendation 1a).

The Ministry's preparatory work to become a signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the preparations to become members of Erasmus+ will provide an additional focus on student mobility. In addition to the University, this may also involve The National Guidance Office.

*(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.*

Response: Given the demographic of the student body, as described in the Reflective Analysis document, developing Lifelong Learning Paths (and supporting Lifelong Learning) is something that the University is keen on advancing. In the first instance we will look into the possibility of offering more part time programmes as well as further developing distance and asynchronous teaching.

*(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.*

Response: Work has begun to define a regulatory framework for a Doctoral School at the University. The University expects to have a proposal ready by mid 2023.

*(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.*

Response: These are all excellent proposals that the University plans to implement in the next couple of years.

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

*(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.*

Response: Both main educational programmes are currently under review in close dialogue with the Co-operation Councils and the Quality Unit. In order to give the work a good start, the Programme Teams have spent a dedicated working week to

“deep dive” into their programmes. For the teacher’s programme the focus has been on the syllabus, course evaluations, practicum, and research-based teaching material. For the pedagogue programme the focus has been on the changing needs of society, extra intake of students, and political requests to form new tracks of the pedagogue programme. This work will continue for the rest of 2023, with possible changes to take effect for the study year 2024/25. In addition, the teacher’s programme will be a pilot for external periodic review in the autumn of 2023 (see response to recommendation 1d).

*(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.*

Response: Meetings with stakeholders, including the Ministry, are currently being held in order to map the needs of the teachers and pedagogues. The system of Continuous Professional Development is quite complicated and differs across institutions, as the opportunities depend on which authority is responsible. We are in a dialogue with the Ministry of Education to design a catalogue of courses of 5-10 ECTS that can be merged into certain programmes.

*(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.*

Response: We agree that there is a need to find solutions for part-time and flexible learning. The Faculty has obtained a hybrid IT-system for online teaching, which will give opportunity for students outside the central area to participate in teaching activities, and we intend to start using this for Continuous Professional Development. We are aware that we need more experience with online teaching before this can be offered as one of the key solutions.

*(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.*

Response: Since summer 2022, the University has enforced the policy that all course documentation is available at least 3 months before the course commences. All course descriptions are therefore 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.*

Response: As a consequence of the responses from the students on lack of feedback we have made changes at the teacher programme this autumn; this intervention has

caused considerable progress (from 53% in 2021/22 to 79% in autumn 2022 on the question “I have been given feedback on academic achievements”). This shows that the method is promising, and therefore we will also introduce a similar intervention in the pedagogue programme next year.

*(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.*

Response: There has been a bottom-up approach to research, which has not been sufficient to make the required change. At University level there is a change in attitude towards employing teaching lecturers in permanent positions. The Faculty of Education has implemented the new policy, and now we are encouraging teaching lecturers to apply for an Assistant Professor position. We are also in a dialogue with the Ministry on the possibilities to get funding for PhD projects that could be managed in a more top-down fashion.

*(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.*

Response: We agree on the necessity for improved skills in online teaching and learning; also, we are aware that the University probably has not the same level of experience with providing distance/online/asynchronous teaching compared to other universities. We have cooperation with the University of Highlands and Islands and with the University of Iceland which both have extensive experience in distance and hybrid teaching. It is necessary that our own teaching staff is upskilled in the completely different approach required to move the classroom online and therefore our plan is that some of our teaching staff will participate in courses that these universities provide and in cooperation with these we will construct a Faroese course.