

**UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**  
***EUA EVALUATION REPORT***

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	paragraphs	pages
<b>FOREWORD</b>	1 - 3	4 - 5
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	4 - 6	6 - 8
<b>THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW</b>		
<b>1. Higher Education in Iceland</b>	7	9 - 10
<b>2. The profile of the University of Iceland (UoI)</b>	8	11 - 12
<b>3. Main findings from the review</b>		
3.1 The University and the State	9	13
3.2 The impact of private universities	10	13
3.3 The University and Society	11	14
3.4 Issues concerning students and their studies	12	14
3.5 Issues concerning teaching staff	13	15
3.6 Issues concerning research	14	16
3.7 Issues concerning internationalisation	15	17
3.8 Issues concerning equal rights	16	18
3.9 Issues concerning restructuring at faculty level	17	18
3.10 Issues concerning organisation and central organisation	18	19
3.11 The decision-making and governance system	19	19
3.12 Efficiency and effectiveness of University management	20	20
3.13 Issues concerning financing	21	20

<b>4. Strategic management and quality assurance at the UoI</b>		
4.1 Strategic management at the UoI	22	22
4.2 Quality assurance procedures at the UoI	23	23
<b>5. The capacity for change</b>	24 - 25	25 - 26
<b>6. Recommendations</b>	26	27 - 29
<b>ENVOI</b>	27	30

## **FOREWORD**

### **§ 1**

#### ***The concept of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme***

Following two successful conferences on the theme of *quality and evaluation*, the Permanent Committee of the CRE (Association of European Universities), which became EUA, the European University Association in 2001, decided in 1993 to offer its then 500 member universities the possibility to be reviewed, so that their strengths and weaknesses in the area of quality management might be assessed.

Through this Programme, the EUA wishes to offer an external diagnosis provided by experienced university leaders coming from different higher education systems in Europe. This diagnosis should explain the quality nodes and the main actors in the university's daily decision-making processes. It should be a tool for institutional leadership preparing for change. The EUA does not wish to provide the university with a blueprint for its development; rather the review process is a consultative one or, in Martin Trow's terminology, an "*external supportive review*"<sup>1</sup>.

By reviewing institutions in different countries, the EUA hopes to disseminate examples of good practice, validate common concepts of strategic thinking, and elaborate shared references of quality that will help member universities to re-orient strategic development while strengthening a quality structure in Europe. The review aims at helping the universities derive the following benefits:

- An increased awareness, across the university, for the need to develop an internal quality culture.
- An increased capacity for setting and implementing strategic goals.
- An effective complement to national quality assurance procedures through the use of peers and an improvement-orientated approach.

The methodological instrument of the Programme focuses on the universities' capacity to change, including their strategic planning and internal quality monitoring, and examine if all the preconditions are assembled to make each and every institution more adaptable and responsive to the changing higher education environment at local, national, European and international level.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Trow: "Academic Reviews and the Culture of Excellence", Studies of Higher Education and Research, 1994/2.

## **§ 2**

### ***Eleven years of the Institutional Evaluation Programme of EUA***

In 1994 the universities of Göteborg, Porto and Utrecht commissioned the then CRE to develop the methodology for the quality review programme and to test it in their institutions. This *pilot phase* of the International Institutional Quality Review was completed in January 1995. Central to the process is a set of *guidelines*, developed by Professor Frans van Vught, then Director of the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at Twente University, and Don Westerheijden, also of CHEPS. In 1995-96 a second *experimental* review round took place with the participation of ten universities located in western, central and eastern Europe. The experiences of the first two years led to minor adaptations in the programme, and the 1996-97 round was the first one in the «*full-grown*» ***CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme***, with 13 participating universities participating. With an average number of 10 to 15 universities involved in the Programme every year, the total number of universities that have participated in the Programme until now (academic year 2004-05 included) is **120**, five of which are located in three Latin American countries and one in South Africa. The remaining **115** Universities are distributed among **32** European countries; **22** of which have already undergone follow-up evaluations.

## **§ 3**

### ***Institutional review of the University of Iceland***

In June 2004 the ***University of Iceland*** (UoI) requested the EUA to organise an institutional quality review of the University. The request was made by the Rector of the University, Prof. Páll Skúlason. The faculties of the University and many of its staff and students supported the review with their active participation.

The Steering Committee of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme appointed as members of the review team for the UoI the following:

- Professor Tove Bull, former Rector of the University of Tromsø, Norway, as chair
- Professor Maxwell Irvine, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
- Professor Jean Brihault, former President of the University of Rennes 2, France
- Professor Dionyssis Kladis, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece, as secretary

The preliminary visit and the main review visit to the UoI took place in March and May 2005, respectively. The team would like to thank the University, its staff and its students for the openness and warm welcome it experienced during the visits.

## INTRODUCTION

### § 4

#### *Outline of the two visits*

In keeping with the framework of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme, the institutional review of the UoI consisted in several phases. First, the review team received a 50-page ***Self-Evaluation Report (SER)*** with some informative appendices. The SER provides a good illustration of the current situation of the University and its development over the last few years. The SER was accompanied by a number of background documents that helped the team approach and understand the overall situation of higher education in Iceland. The SER was produced by a self-evaluation steering committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Hörður Filippusson, Dean of the Faculty of Science. Mr. Magnús Diðrik Baldursson, Head of Quality Administration, was the liaison person of the University with the EUA review team and the coordinator of the overall self-evaluation process. During the second visit, Mr. Halldór Jónsson, Director of the Office of Research, replaced Mr. Baldursson who left for a two-month sabbatical.

Upon receiving the SER, the review team made a ***preliminary visit*** to the UoI on 7-9 March 2005 to get acquainted with the University and to help clarify any issues arising from the SER. The ***main visit*** of the review team took place on 10-13 May 2005. During the two visits, the EUA review team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of the University with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders, namely:

- With members of the staff and with students from 6 faculties (Engineering, Economics and Business Administration, Humanities, Nursing, Law and Science) out of the total 11 faculties of the University
- With the deans of most of the faculties
- With the chairs of the standing committees of the Council and with the central university policy-making staff
- With outside partners, including governmental authorities and representatives of the business community and other stakeholders
- With representatives of the Icelandic National Audit Office
- With two of the research institutes of the University
- With central office staff members
- With the central student delegation in the University

There were also intense and in-depth discussions with the then Rector Prof. Páll Skúlason, as well as with the self-evaluation steering committee. During the main visit, these discussions were carried out with both Prof. Páll Skúlason and the current Rector Prof. Kristín Ingólfssdóttir, who was elected one week after the preliminary visit of the review team, and who succeeded Prof. Skúlason on July 1st 2005.

The review team had therefore the opportunity to meet the broad spectrum of actors at UoI, both at the central level and at the level of the various faculties. At the same time, the review

team had the opportunity to identify the views of the political authorities and of the external stakeholders on the role of the University and their relations with it.

All these meetings and discussions were efficiently organised under the leadership of Mr. Magnús Diðrik Baldursson (and also of Mr. Halldór Jónsson, who took over this role before the main visit).

On the last day of the main review visit, the chair person of the review team, Professor Tove Bull, presented the team's *oral report* to an audience consisting of the then Rector, the elected Rector, the rectoral team, the self-evaluation steering committee, the deans of faculties, the chairs of the standing committees of the Council and students' representatives. The oral report was the basis of the following *review report*, which has resulted from all written information, interviews with various UoI members and outside partners and the review team's observations during the two visits.

## **§ 5**

### ***Outline of the review***

The review team wishes to express its deep thanks to the then Rector of the UoI, Prof. Páll Skúlason, and his team, especially to Mr. Magnús Diðrik Baldursson and Mr. Halldór Jónsson, for the efficient preparation and organisation of the two visits which provided the review team with effective working conditions in which to fulfil its duties. The help that the review team received, in terms of both the exhaustive and clear information and the precise organisation of all meetings and interviews, was invaluable. The review team is also very grateful for the hospitality of the UoI. It was indeed a pleasure to work in the friendly atmosphere extended by all the people involved.

During the meetings, the review team had the opportunity to interview many leading members of the University, professors, researchers, members of the administrative staff and students. They were all very open and actively participated in lively discussions with the review team, presenting their views about the quality management structures and ethos within the UoI, the mission and the vision of the University and its dynamics for change and improvement, its present situation (including constraints and opportunities) and its future prospects.

As mentioned already, the self-evaluation process was steered by the self-evaluation steering committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Hörður Filippusson, dean of the Faculty of Science, and was co-ordinated by Mr. Magnús Diðrik Baldursson. The review team has the impression that the self-evaluation process was more or less restricted to the members of the self-evaluation steering committee. As mentioned in the SER, many other people at the University, including deans of other faculties (i.e., apart from those deans participating in the steering committee), read the SER and gave many useful comments to the members of the steering committee. However, there was not a wide debate within the University with regards the SER. This was reflected in the interviews of the review team where many discussants had not a clear idea as regards either the content of the SER or the overall institutional evaluation process. According to the self-evaluation steering committee, the lack of publicity should be attributed to the fact that there was not enough time in order to publicise the SER within the

University community. However, the intention of the then Rector and the newly-elected Rector is to establish a wide debate within the University community that will include both the SER and the Review Report of the EUA review team.

Furthermore, the review team appreciated the work done in the Self-Evaluation Report and considered it as informative, adequately documented and a relatively complete report. The SER represents a very honest and critical analysis of the situation of the UoI. The lack of an explicit SWOT analysis was perhaps the only weakness of the SER, though there is an implicit analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The review team asked for additional information at the end of the first visit, concerning mainly statistical data and organisational issues. The University provided the requested additional information in a timely manner.

Apart from the SER, the review team was further supplied with several significant documents, which helped to gain a clearer understanding of the situation in the UoI and in the wider context of higher education in Iceland. These consisted in the various Acts concerning either the University of Iceland or the system of higher education in Iceland, as well as documents concerning various audits and evaluations undergone by the University of Iceland (including the one performed by the Icelandic National Audit Office).

## **§ 6** ***Outline of the Report***

The EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme is not concerned with the assessment of the quality of teaching and research activities; rather, it is concerned with the assessment and the improvement of the existing mechanisms and processes for strategic management and quality assurance and, in that context, with the assessment and the improvement of the capacity of the universities to adapt to the rapidly developing higher education environment in Europe and in the world.

In this context, the review team's task is to scrutinise the mechanisms existing in the University for quality assurance and its capacities for strategic change. This report, therefore, emphasises the current strengths and weaknesses in respect of the capacity for change and expresses a number of recommendations that may be taken into account in the future development of the UoI. Of course, this Report should be read in conjunction with the SER of the UoI and with the corresponding additional information that were provided to the review team. Furthermore, the comments are based on two intense but rather short visits: One two-day preliminary visit and one three-day main review visit. The review team also collected a significant amount of information on the Icelandic higher education system, but it is not possible for the analysis to go into all such details. The comments and recommendations, therefore, will be confined mostly to major issues of concern to the structures and procedures within the University. The recommendations, together with the corresponding reasoning and analysis, appear underlined in the text of the Report. A summary of recommendations is presented in paragraph 26.



## THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

### 1. Higher Education in Iceland

#### § 7

The higher education system in Iceland dates back to the foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911. While the University of Iceland remains the principal higher education institution in the country, in the last three decades new institutions with a more specialised focus have emerged (either with a public or private status), increasing the diversity of the higher education environment.

An outline of the higher education landscape in Iceland is given in the following table:

Higher Education Institutions	Year of establishment (at university level)	Ministry responsible	Status	FTE students 2003	Award of PhDs
1. University of Iceland (Reykjavik)	1911	Education	Public	5256	Yes
2. University of Akureyri (Akureyri)	1987	Education	Public	978	No
3. Iceland University of Education (Reykjavik)	1971	Education	Public	1385	Yes
4. Bifrost School of Business (Bifrost)	1989	Education	Private	301	No
5. Icelandic University of Agriculture	2004	Agriculture	Public		No
6. Holar College (Holar)	2003	Agriculture	Public		No
7. Icelandic Academy of Arts (Reykjavik)	1998	Education	Private	321	No
8. Reykjavik University (Reykjavik)	1998	Education	Private	912	No
9. Technical University of Iceland (Reykjavik)*	1972	Education	Public	807	No

\* The Technical University of Iceland (which was public) has now been merged with the Reykjavik University, thus acquiring the status of private university.

Higher education institutions in Iceland operate within the general framework of recent legislation (*The Universities Act, No. 136/1997*). In the *Universities Act*, the Icelandic term “háskóli” is used to refer to traditional universities, as well as institutions which do not carry out research. Thus, the Act does not make any distinction between universities and other types of higher education institutions. The *Universities Act* applies only to the 7 (now 6) universities which operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. According to the Act, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture determines whether and to what extent the institutions shall engage in research and is also responsible for establishing rules on the evaluation and recognition of all degrees offered. The specific role of each higher education institution is further defined in special acts or charters. As shown in the above table, there are also two universities operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture. The activities of these two universities are ruled by the *Agricultural Education Act* enacted in 1999. Of the 9 (now 8) universities included in the above table, only two (the

University of Iceland and the Iceland University of Education) are legally entitled to award doctoral degrees and can thus be regarded as “universities” in the sense used by EUA.

It is interesting to note that the three private universities in Iceland are run with state support at least in respect to their teaching funds. State funding in Iceland is allocated to the universities on the basis of contracts and there are separate funding lines for teaching and research. State funding for teaching is allocated to all universities in Iceland, both public and private, based on a general funding formula but the research funding is allocated to all Universities at different levels.

As mentioned earlier, a rapid expansion of higher education occurred in Iceland over the last three decades. This expansion consisted mainly in the creation of specialised higher education institutions, although two new multidisciplinary universities were also established (the University of Akureyri and the Reykjavik University). As part of this expansion was the establishment of private institutions. The recent expansion of the higher education system in Iceland should be considered as the result of a rather inexplicit national policy based on the intention of the Icelandic Government to improve competitiveness in all crucial action areas within society and the economy, including higher education. At the same time, during our discussions we heard also other supportive arguments for that expansion, which were based on the one hand on the necessity to fulfil Society’s expectations and needs, which could no longer be served by the University of Iceland alone, and on the other hand on the view that keeping one University (like the University of Iceland) so much larger than the others would lead to an unbalanced and asymmetric situation. The review team, however, was surprised that a small nation such as Iceland has decided to establish so many higher education institutions.

## 2. The profile of the University of Iceland

### § 8

The University of Iceland (UoI) was founded in 1911 and it was the only university in Iceland until 1971 (founding date of the Iceland University of Education). It is now the largest teaching and research institution in Iceland and the only comprehensive university, covering a multidisciplinary range of subjects, and aimed at functioning as a research university at an international level.

The UoI consists of 11 faculties and 28 departments operating under the faculties. The key statistical figures, which were provided by the University, are summarised in the table below.

Faculties	Departments	Number of all registered students	FTE teaching staff	FTE admin. staff (only in Faculties)	Ratio (students/teaching staff)	Ratio (teaching/admin. staff)
Theology	0	150	6	0,75	25,0	8,0
Medicine	2	453	57	8.6	7,9	6,6
Law	0	570	12	4	47,5	3,0
Economics & Business Administration	2	1171	32	5	36,6	6,4
Humanities	7	1914	73	5,5	26,2	13,3
Pharmacy	0	137	7	1	19,6	7,0
Odontology	0	71	14	3	5,1	4,7
Engineering	4	877	34	2	25,8	17,0
Science	6	1008	69	2,5	14,6	27,6
Social Sciences	7	2259	47	6,5	48,1	7,2
Nursing	0	587	19	6	30,9	3,2
TOTAL	28	9197	370	44,85	24,9	8,2

The UoI has also numerous research institutes and affiliated institutions which function as centres for research, instruction, conferences and many other activities. Some of them have a close relation with the University, while others have a more or less loose connection to it.

The figures in the above table refer to all registered (undergraduate and graduate) students. The number of postgraduate students was thereof about 1450 in 2004. The number of students at both levels (undergraduate and postgraduate) shows a considerable increase during the five-year period 2000-2004. The number of undergraduate students has increased by almost 25% and the number of postgraduate students has increased by almost 270%. The number of doctorate students has more than six folded since 2000 but, in that case, the respective absolute number still remains very low (only 137 for 2004) as compared to undergraduate and masters student numbers. The low number of PhD degrees awarded by the UoI (only 10 in 2004) is one of the issues that have to be faced by the University in the coming years. As the performance audit conducted for the UoI by the Icelandic National Audit Office states, the

UoI has to reach the yearly award of 64 PhD degrees in order to achieve, for example, the average performance of the other Nordic countries. The review team fully understands the dilemma of the UoI on this point. On the one hand, UoI needs more PhDs to strengthen its research profile; on the other hand, it is a great advantage for the Icelandic society and for the UoI that so many of the permanent staff earned their PhDs abroad.

As we were told, there is an historical explanation for this. The UoI was later in introducing masters' studies on a broad scale than Universities in the neighbouring countries – and this also explains even more the low numbers of PhD students. Given the growing numbers of masters' students, it can be expected that the numbers of PhD students will also rise in the years to come. It also has to be kept in mind that there are proportionally more Icelanders doing doctoral degrees abroad than among the neighbouring countries

According to the SER, the rapid increase in student numbers has not been met by an analogous increase in the number of permanent teaching staff. For example, the number of registered students had increased in the period between 1994 and 2004 from 5364 to 9197 (71%), while the number of permanent teachers had increased from 341 to 422 in the same period (24%). This asymmetrical increase resulted in a worsening of the students to (permanent) teaching staff ratio from 16 in 1994 to 22 in 2004. In order to face this problem, the UoI turns to the solution of the so-called “*sessional*” teaching staff members who are employed on a part-time basis in the UoI, while many hold jobs outside the University. The employment of sessional teachers has reduced the gap in the students to (permanent and sessional) teaching staff ratio, from 12 in 1994 to 15 in 2004.

### **3. Main findings of the review**

#### **3.1 The University and the State**

##### **§ 9**

At a very early stage of the preliminary visit the review team became aware of tensions between the University and the Ministry of Education. The sources of these tensions appear to be the perception of unfair support by the Ministry for private universities and concerns about the preparations of a new university Law without adequate consultation.

While private institutions receive the same level of state funding for teaching as the UoI, they can charge student fees and enjoy greater freedom in employment issues than the public sector, which is bound by state employment legislation. The UoI was also aggrieved by the failure to receive funding for students admitted beyond the existing quota despite assurances that there would be negotiations on this issue.

The review team considers that funding issues are strongly connected to policy. For example, funding issues with regards to the UoI are strongly connected to the issues of open access admission and tuition fees. Governmental policy in Iceland consists in leaving these issues open and in letting the universities alone to decide upon them. The review team, however, considers that both issues are politically sensitive and believes that leaving these issues open indicates the lack of an explicit higher education policy in Iceland.

The review team stresses that autonomy and academic freedom are guiding principles that are necessary for ensuring a healthy university system. The review team recommends, therefore, that the UoI should seek to be proactive in the development of the new Law. This means that the UoI should take appropriate initiatives and play a leading role in the overall higher education landscape in Iceland.

#### **3.2 The impact of private universities**

##### **§ 10**

The establishment of private universities has led to a new situation for the UoI. The review team has been informed that the establishment of private universities in Iceland has derived from a governmental policy to increase competition, under the reasonable assumption that competition would improve quality.

The review team had the opportunity to hear different opinions on this point - the opinions of the outside partners being in general opposite to those of University members. Taking these views into consideration, the review team wishes to comment specifically on the competition argument. Iceland is a small nation and – equally - its higher education community is small. What is needed therefore is to improve the dynamics and the quality of the higher education community at large in order to be competitive in the wider European or international landscape. This is where competition makes sense for a small country with a small higher

education community. The way to succeed is to join the national higher education forces through effective and efficient collaboration among the various higher education institutions.

Therefore, the review team recommends that competition should be approached from its European and international perspective regarding the Icelandic higher education at large, while collaboration among the higher education institutions in Iceland should be encouraged. The UoI should develop its own strategy in that context, while at the same time it should seek access to non-governmental sources of funding (e.g. EU-funding, funding from external stakeholders etc.), utilising the same resources as those available to other universities.

### **3.3 The University and Society**

#### **§ 11**

The review team is aware of the high esteem that the UoI enjoys from society. On the other hand, during our interviews, there were critical voices (outside partners, stakeholders and business community, and even a few students) arguing that the University is not as integrated in the Icelandic society as they would have wished. This is not easily understood by the review team, all the more since the UoI has developed for many years a policy with a genuine social dimension, especially regarding both its position in favour of open access and its opposition to the introduction of tuition fees.

Nevertheless, the review team recommends that the UoI should further develop its links with society. In that context the review team considers that the University Council should be strengthened by increasing its lay representation. This development should not come about through government appointments, but rather through representation from the business community and other stakeholders appointed by the University.

### **3.4 Issues concerning students and their studies**

#### **§ 12**

The overall impression gained by the review team is that students in the UoI are very happy with their University, their studies and their teachers. The team notes, however, that UoI students are affected by the overall marketing of the private universities in Iceland, and have a relatively positive view of them. One specific point that the review team would like to raise in this context is the students' tendency to underestimate theoretical studies. They consider it as a comparative advantage of the private universities, especially in fields like business and engineering, that they are less theoretical than the public ones.

It seems that the major problem that students face in the UoI is the difficult period of their first year of studies when, due to open access, the large number of students causes problems in teaching (including space) and in establishing good relations with their teachers. These are problems that tend to disappear after the first year of studies. However, this situation seems to

result in rather high drop-out rate, which is compounded further by the fact that first-year students do not have a clear view of the courses that are taught and for what reasons, and experience difficulties in the abrupt change in the conditions of studies as they move from secondary to university education. The review team was informed of drop-out rates exceeding 42%, which are rather high.

The review team recommends that the UoI address the problem of drop-outs through a qualitative study. At the same time, the University should ensure a proper student orientation in order to clarify the demands that university studies make on students and to give them proper information about their courses.

Other points that were raised during the discussions with students included: the inconsistency between the credits awarded and the students' workload, the need for more efficient utilisation of modern technology to enhance the learning environment, and the relevance of their study programmes to the needs of the labour market. Although graduates from the UoI do not currently face serious unemployment problems, students are concerned about their employability in the future.

The review team recommends that the UoI should adjust its credits system to ensure that there is a consistency between the credits awarded and the workload of the students, while at the same time it should keep the study programmes under constant review to see that they meet the reasonable demands of the labour market. Furthermore, the review team recommends that best practices in the use of technology to enhance the learning environment should be embedded. The review team had the opportunity to observe such good practices in the Faculty of Law with the highly satisfactory use of the Intranet, and we were also informed of similar good practices in other Faculties as well.

One of the points that the review team wishes to raise is the small number of PhDs related to the number of undergraduate and master's students. The review team understands that this seems to be a general situation in Iceland. According to national reports in the context of the Bologna Process, the number of students to enter a PhD programme in Iceland in 2003 was only 27 as compared to 944 students entering a second-cycle study programme, 2110 students completing a first-cycle study programme and 5277 students entering first year of first-cycle.

An explanation for this situation has already been presented in this report (end of fourth section in §8) and the review team can understand this approach. Furthermore, we realise that the UoI is aiming at increasing the number of PhDs and we fully support the University in this respect. The review team recommends, therefore, that the UoI should strengthen its efforts in order to handle effectively this situation. Perhaps, in a first phase, an effective policy should be to establish joint masters' and PhD programmes with universities outside Iceland.

### **3.5 Issues concerning teaching staff**

#### **§ 13**

The UoI academic staff is well educated and comes from different international universities all over the world, thus creating a dynamic academic community. However, the continuous

increase in student numbers due to the University's open access policy is not accompanied by an analogous increase in the number of academic staff. This results in a continuous worsening of the students to teaching staff ratios and an increase in the teaching duties of the staff. At the same time, it seems that a significant part of the academic staff workload is devoted to intensive involvement in administrative duties, primarily at faculty level. Under these conditions, there is little time left for research: this is a weakness that the UoI has to face efficiently. The review team recommends that a greater degree of flexibility is introduced in assigning duties to staff in the areas of research, teaching and administration, together with a strengthening of the administrative support at faculty level.

The UoI tries to overcome these problems by employing the "sessional" teachers. While this solution leads to better students to teaching staff ratios, it also increases the number of part-time academic staff members who are not involved in research. The review team realises that the employment of sessional teachers is an inescapable necessity for the UoI under these conditions. However, the review team wishes to draw the University's attention to the necessity that high qualifications and standards should be assured for the sessional personnel as well. The recommendation of the review team is that control mechanisms should be introduced to ensure the quality of sessional staff.

It is interesting to note here that the above mentioned worsening of the students to teaching staff ratios was not mentioned at all in the interviews with the students. This is more evidence of the fact that academic staff members maintain a high level of teaching. The only complaints the review team heard had to do with the teaching and pedagogical skills of a small number of teachers, and this applies to both categories (full-time and sessional staff). Thus, the review team recommends that the University provide opportunities to improve the teaching and pedagogical skills of its staff, both full-time and sessional.

### **3.6 Issues concerning research**

#### **§ 14**

Regardless of the effect caused by the high students to teaching staff ratios, the research profile of the UoI is impressive, in terms of both the quality of the work and the high level of productivity. The review team refers here to the findings of the "*Evaluation of Scholarly Work at the University of Iceland*", a study carried out for the Ministry of Education of Iceland in 2004/2005, in which interesting comparisons are made with various countries in Europe and elsewhere.

However, there are two points that the review team wishes to raise. The first point has to do with the necessity for establishing research priorities in the University. The University has to set priorities because it is not possible for a contemporary international university to achieve excellence in all research fields. Prioritisation is a necessary precondition for the strengthening and improvement of the University's research policy and strategy. The research activities should in any case contribute, as a whole, to the image and the overall profile of the University. Prioritisation means taking advantage of strong research fields and further



improving them, while paying attention to national needs, and without completely ignoring other fields.

Therefore, the main recommendation here is that the University should set research priorities according to above mentioned principles. This means that the University has to establish the necessary procedures to reach that aim. Once the targets for research are set, progress for achieving them should be carefully monitored.

The second point has to do with the numerous research institutes and other institutions which are affiliated to the University and which function as research or teaching centres. The review team realises that the relationship of these units with the University is rather loose, and most probably that these loose links provide for much higher degrees of autonomy and flexibility. However, the review team believes that the activities and the objectives of all these research units should be considered as part of the University's integrated research strategy. This leads to the recommendation that the research institutes should be core elements and central to the research activities of the University.

### **3.7 Issues concerning internationalisation**

#### **§ 15**

The UoI is a truly international university. Most of its academic staff members hold Masters degrees and PhDs from all over the western world. At the same time, there is a high percentage of international students studying at the UoI, while the respective administration unit of the University serves as the Erasmus National Centre for the whole country, playing thus a wider, positive role for the internationalisation of higher education in Iceland.

The only recommendations of the review team concerning internationalisation are that the University should use its international links as a means to support research aspirations and, at the same time, that these international links should be used to foster to a larger extent the development of joint Masters' and Doctoral Degrees with universities from other countries in Europe and elsewhere.

### **3.8 Issues concerning equal rights**

#### **§ 16**

The review team is aware of the Equal Rights Policy which has been established in the UoI, following the Nordic tradition. The review team had the opportunity to observe in many cases the results of such a policy, which is embedded across the University. This policy, however, is applied inconsistently. For example, the Equal Rights Committee is the only one of the six standing committees of the University Council with a female chair. Another example is that there are no women in the Committee of Finance, which is considered as the most important standing committee. Perhaps, these examples are mere exceptions or accidental cases and may be of minor importance. This situation, of course, has changed with the election of a female Rector. However, the review team wishes to recommend that the University should endeavour to ensure a proper balance between the sexes in all university activities, and particularly to ensure that there is a proper representation at the highest level of university management.

### **3.9 Issues concerning restructuring at faculty level**

#### **§ 17**

As mentioned earlier in this report, the UoI consists of 11 faculties and 28 departments operating under the faculties. It should be noted also that some of these faculties correspond to single study fields. Such examples are the four faculties in the Health Sciences (Medicine, Pharmacy, Odontology, Nursing) and the faculties of Humanities and Theology. The review team is aware that there are concerns about the possible merger of faculties that seem to offer the greatest potential for synergy and that there is some support for the centrifugal forces that would favour greater fragmentation, e.g., the Midwifery programme in the Faculty of Nursing and the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The review team is aware of the reasons that have resulted in this type of academic fragmentation. There is the argument that the potential merger of faculties will merge different cultures and that this does not make sense. Of course, there is also a counter-argument that merging different cultures may sometimes create a new dynamics in the system. There are examples of strong disciplines that oppress and marginalise the weaker disciplines inside one faculty. The coexistence of Medicine and Nursing under one single faculty in the past may be such an example.

However, the review team believes that this fragmentation reduces the efficiency of the University, while at the same time it results in a waste of resources. The review team believes that further academic fragmentation of the UoI will lead to a structure that will become increasingly unmanageable and will result in the isolation of the disciplines. Furthermore, the review team believes that this situation may also affect the overall academic functioning of the University, especially with regards to the interdisciplinary/interfaculty research and teaching collaboration and the promotion of academic coherence and synergy between the various disciplines.

Under these conditions, the review team recommends that in a rapidly changing environment, the academic structures should be under constant review. In other words, the UoI should reconsider its academic structure at faculty level, aiming at increasing its efficiency and at promoting academic coherence. In the meanwhile, the University should encourage pooling of administrative resources between faculties as a first step against waste of resources. At the same time, the University should make every effort to remove any obstacles to interdisciplinary collaboration, as a first step to promote synergy and to improve academic coherence.

### **3.10 Issues concerning organisation and central administration**

#### **§ 18**

The review team notes the satisfaction of the university leadership with the new organisational structure concerning administration, where the previous six administration units have been replaced by only two, with one director for academic affairs and another for finance and management.

The team, however, is aware of reservations against central administration raised mainly in the faculties, according to which the new structure may somehow prove to be highly centralised. The review team believes that at the central level, the University needs to strengthen academic leadership with academics who have cross faculty interest. Today, the only academic leaders of this kind, apart from the Rector, are the chairs of the standing committees. But, this is not enough, since they have no concrete or visible power. Therefore, the review team recommends that the University introduce one or more Vice-Rector(s) as in most European universities. The Vice-Rector(s) would provide a significant assistance to the Rector and would play important roles in the central leadership scheme, as for example, in the role of the vice-chair of the University Council or, where appropriate, the role of chairing one or more of the standing committees.

### **3.11 The decision-making and governance system**

#### **§ 19**

Two major points must be mentioned with regards to decision-making and governance in the UoI: the first relates to the dual structure embodied in the University Council, which has supreme power, and the University Forum, which has consultative responsibilities; the second has to do with the fact that the faculties are not represented in the University Council. The overall impression of the review team is that this model has operated satisfactorily so far.

This model, however, favours the appearance of tensions between central and faculty management. These tensions are reasonable, given the decision-making model and the fact that the deans are elected by the faculties without any say from the Rector. Deans are expected to play a dual role in the university. On the one hand, they represent their faculties,

securing and promoting the interests of their own faculty. But, on the other hand, the deans should form the leadership team of the University together with the Rector (and the Vice-Rector or the Vice-Rectors). The initiative of the then Rector to establish regular meetings with the deans of faculties was a step forward, which may help overcome the tensions. However, the review team believes that the above mentioned leadership team of the University should be as cohesive and coherent as possible. Therefore, the review team recommends that, in order to ensure closer harmony between the central university and the faculty management, the Rector should be involved along with the faculties in the selection of deans.

### **3.12 Efficiency and effectiveness of University management**

#### **§ 20**

The review team had a very informative discussion with the persons in charge of the performance audit of the UoI, conducted by the Icelandic National Audit Office. The review team notes with satisfaction the primary outcome of this report, which states that *“The UoI is run in a relatively cost-effective manner compared with equivalent European universities, and its performance in many areas of teaching and research is also fairly high”*. The review team also found that the cost-effectiveness of the UoI is quite impressive.

The review team shares the view of this report when it states that *“However, the UoI’s possibilities of developing as a strong international research university will be determined largely by what management and development policy will be set in the coming years”*.

According to the review team, this is a significant challenge for the UoI and one of the major priorities for its (new) leadership. Furthermore, the review team wishes to mention one of the weaknesses in the University management, which has to do with the lack of administrative support, due to a small administration that, compared to other universities, definitely is too few in number.

### **3.13 Issues concerning financing**

#### **§ 21**

In all its meetings, the review team was made aware of the paramount importance for UoI of the limited state resources. As mentioned earlier, state funding is allocated to the universities on the basis of contracts and there are separate funding streams for teaching and research. State funding for teaching and research is allocated to all universities in Iceland, both public and private. The state funding for teaching is allocated to all universities in Iceland, both public and private, based on a general funding formula but the research funding is allocated to all universities at different levels. The problem with the UoI derives from the way in which state funding for teaching is allocated to the universities. The allocation formula is decided by the Parliament in the state budget and is connected to the number of FTE students in each university. This formula has a maximum value for each university and, when the university

exceeds this number, it does not receive any funding for the extra students. This is the case with the University of Iceland, which follows an open access policy.

As already mentioned (§7), the Icelandic Government has not introduced so far a “numerus clausus” policy for admission to the universities. It has left the Icelandic universities free to decide their own policy. In this context, the review team considers that it is not fair if a public university is left by the Government to follow an open access policy, without been paid for the total number of the students enrolled every year. The review team fully supports the UoI in its efforts to ensure that it is fully funded for all the students it teaches and further recommends that it should initiate a campaign to raise public awareness of the University’s financial situation.

Another important issue concerns the fact that in Iceland postgraduate courses are funded in the same way as undergraduate ones. However, it is an established fact that postgraduate courses cost much more than the undergraduate ones. Therefore, the review team recommends that the UoI should seek an appropriate level of funding for postgraduate students as well.

For the review team, it is obvious that Government has (or still tries to) set up a competitive environment in Icelandic higher education. This environment provides a clear comparative advantage for the UoI, since it is the largest, the oldest and the only comprehensive and multidisciplinary national university in Iceland, being at the same time an international university of high standards and high reputation. The UoI is held in very high esteem in Icelandic Society. Thus it has all the advantages to dominate in this competitive environment. The review team recommends therefore that the UoI should strengthen its position and maximise its external funding in order to further increase the quality of its work.

## 4. Strategic management and quality assurance at the UoI

### 4.1 Strategic management at the UoI

#### § 22

The UoI remains the largest university in Iceland and the only comprehensive and multidisciplinary one, being at the same time the only significant research institution in Iceland. This means that the UoI will continue to dominate the higher education landscape in Iceland. The UoI, however, has to live in the new higher education landscape (new universities, private universities, competitive environment). As the report of the National Audit Office states, *“The UoI is now competing with other Icelandic Universities for funding, students and staff. In addition, rapidly raising student numbers cause some concern as they tighten the university’s financial belt, at the same time that ambitious ideas for postgraduate programmes and research call for increased funds and staff. Some strategy for how to tackle these trends is necessary”*.

The UoI has therefore to adapt its strategy to this new reality. As mentioned earlier, the UoI has to further improve its comparative advantages within Iceland (age, experience, expertise, research, internationalisation, multidisciplinary and comprehensiveness allowing for the establishment of interdisciplinary and joint programmes, etc.). In that sense, the UoI has to further improve its profile as a European or international university. Improvement of the European or international profile means that the UoI could claim an active and leading role in the international higher education landscape.

The UoI has to clarify its characteristics as a research university. Should it retain (or further develop) its research profile, it has to seek answers to questions such as:

- How to improve as a research university with such a low number of PhDs?
- What should be the balance between basic and applied research?
- What should be the balance between research and teaching?
- In which priority fields should excellence in research be improved?

These questions set clearly the need for prioritisation in research. But, prioritisation will be a necessity in many other cases as well, and all priorities should be reflected in the new strategic plans of the University. The review team is aware that the academic year 2005-06 is expected to be a turning point for the UoI. The new Rector will take over and the University policy will need to be reassessed. This will apply equally to the research and education policies, the strategic plans of the faculties and the next five-year strategic and development plan of the University. Therefore, the review team recommends that the UoI sets up the procedures for the preparation of its new strategic plan and that these procedures should be inclusive and transparent across the University. At the same time, given the lack of funds and the political situation, the UoI should pay close attention to prioritisation in its strategic planning.

When it comes to strategic management, it is important to consider the need for its effective and efficient implementation. It is necessary, therefore, that the UoI establishes a systematic procedure, which will continuously monitor both the implementation of the strategic plan and the validity of the objectives. Nevertheless, and irrespective of this monitoring procedure, the efficiency of the strategic management in a university is affected greatly by the way in which the functioning of its leadership and of its decision-making and the management of its collective bodies, both at institutional level and at the level of the various faculties, is informed by a strategic perspective. This means that, in the case of the UoI, both the University Council at the institutional level and the respective bodies at the level of the faculties should be in position to take strategic decisions, i.e. decisions that will improve the strategic goals of the University. And, in that context, an important task for the leadership of the University is to *inspire* and to *lead* the university community in this strategic perspective.

## 4.2 Quality assurance procedures at the UoI

### § 23

Quality assurance is a central element in European higher education today. Furthermore, it has also assumed a key role in the Bologna Process and the report of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance) “*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*” has already been adopted by the European Ministers in Bergen in May 2005, building also in this way a European perspective and a European context for quality assurance in higher education. Furthermore, every country participating in the Bologna Process must have established its own national quality assurance system by 2007 according to the above standards and guidelines by ENQA. In parallel, EUA actively encourages its member Universities to implement their own internal quality assurance mechanisms and to develop a quality culture shared among universities throughout Europe. In this context, universities should be able to demonstrate to themselves and to their stakeholders and to society at large that they can answer the following fundamental questions:

- What is the University trying to do? (Mission)
- How is the University trying to do it? (Plans)
- How does the University know that the plans work? (Monitoring/Evaluation)
- How does the University change in order to improve? (Strategic planning)

The review team is aware of the fact that in Iceland it is the responsibility of each university to set up a formal internal quality control system. This means that there is not any formal system for quality assurance at national level. However, the Ministry of Education has the authority to take initiatives in conducting external evaluations both at institutional or at programme levels. And it is obvious after Bergen that the Icelandic Government will now have to introduce a national system for quality assurance. However, the review team recommends that the UoI should play a proactive role and initiate discussion with other higher education institutions on quality assurance at the national level.

The UoI has already established a Quality Assurance Committee, which however is not included among the six formal standing committees associated to the University Council. This actually means that the quality assurance procedures need to be further improved in the UoI

and to be developed in a systematic manner. In this context, the review team recommends that the UoI should establish a formal procedure for internal quality assurance with leadership at the highest level (if possible, at the level of a future Vice-Rector).

One specific point that the review team wishes to raise regarding quality assurance is the procedure of assessment of teaching by the students. The review team was informed that this procedure results simply in an interview of each teacher with his or her dean of faculty. This is a two-person affair and only in extraordinary cases does the Rector intervene. There appears not to be any other kind of impact (e.g., penalty or monitoring future improvement of teaching). The students can easily participate in the teaching assessment process, even through the Intranet. However, their participation falls continuously, because they feel that there is no impact, and the danger for the degeneration of the overall process is visible.

The evaluation of teaching by students is a very sensitive procedure. This process is quite common in most European countries. Students have the opportunity and the obligation as well *to evaluate* both the courses and the teachers by filling a questionnaire. As mentioned earlier, this process is already applied in the UoI, but with serious weaknesses. One question usually raised concerns the consequences of this process. The simplest answer to this question is that the results of the evaluation should affect the promotion of the academic staff members. However, this is a consequence that has to be handled with care, and the review team would rather recommend that the process and the results of the evaluation are used as an *inspiration* to promote quality control and to staff development. If the results of the teaching evaluation procedure are not adequately exploited, if they are not analysed properly and integrated into the continuous improvement of the content and the methods of teaching and learning, then it is probable that the teaching evaluation process will *degenerate* into a bureaucratic and meaningless operation.

Therefore, the review team recommends that the UoI should pay increased attention to the teaching evaluation process and to organise and systematise it as soon as possible. The teaching evaluation process should be carried out with the proper methodology and with a visible impact on the improvement of teaching, and should be integrated into the overall internal quality assurance process. It must be stressed, however, that students and teachers should be *convinced* and, even more, *inspired* and *motivated* to get actively and effectively involved in such a process. Opportunities for staff members to address weaknesses in their teaching should be made available, and even be made compulsory in cases of continued failure.



## 5. The capacity for change

### § 24

#### *The general perspective*

Besides the quality assurance issues, the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme focuses on the **capacity for change** of the universities visited. The reason for this is a widespread conviction that European universities are exposed to increasing **demands** from society and the labour market and in many countries they are also exposed to growing **competition** from other institutions of higher education, either from the non-university sector or from private institutions.

If the universities do not seize the initiative themselves and show their capacity for change and their adaptability to radically new conditions in an era of mass higher education, then there may be **risks** that even the important core academic values, which we undoubtedly all want to preserve, might be jeopardised.

Universities have always had and still have the twofold duty of **defending** traditional values and of **leading** society into new areas. There have been periods in their very long history, when the universities were too successful as defenders of the traditions at the price of **isolation** from society and petrification. But fortunately enough, we can also look back to epochs, when the universities were true centres of **innovation** in many respects.

The capacity for change requires firstly the determination of all the factors requiring change, as well as of the features and the content of the change needed. Secondly, it requires each university to determine its own mission in conjunction with the changes needed and to set its priorities. Thirdly, it requires determining the strengths and weaknesses of each university with respect to its own identity and characteristics and to the existing external conditions. And finally, it requires an efficient mechanism to continuously assess the course of each university towards its objectives, towards the changes required. What we have to ask ourselves is whether the traditional organisation and leadership of a university will be capable of fulfilling its task at the beginning of the 21st century.

The review team wants to stress that **the capacity for change is a sine qua non condition for a modern university in a modern society**. The capacity for change requires clear mission, inspired vision and realistic objectives for the university. It also requires effective strategic planning and the establishment of a quality culture. And, furthermore, it requires tools such as action plans and milestones. These are the internal requirements. There are of course external requirements as well. They have to do with resources (both financial and human), and with the legislative framework and the relationship between the universities and the state, which have to encourage and support the universities in strengthening their capacity for change.

But, apart from these internal and external requirements, the capacity for change requires, above all, inspiration. It requires inspired, motivated and determined people. It is extremely important to realise that elements of strategic planning do not themselves change the universities. Changes in universities have to be driven by people: Staff and students and an

inspired university leadership making sure that the actions in the action plans are in progress and that the milestones are achieved.

## **§ 25**

### ***The specific perspective of the University of Iceland***

Coming to the specific case of the UoI, the review team has found in the UoI a satisfactory situation that may be summarised in the following characteristics:

- It is a well functioning university - despite it being under funded.
- It is a university of high standards in many sciences and scholarly fields from an academic point of view.
- It is a university in which students generally seem to be happy with the studies and the education they obtain.
- It is a university with a traditional governance and management structure that on the whole seems to be operative and functional.
- It is a university enjoying high esteem in Society.
- It is a university with a strong international culture.

In that context, therefore, if we have to speak about the capacity of a university like the UoI for change, we should refer to three principal action lines: Firstly, to actions concerning the changes needed in order to adapt to the new European landscape built through the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. Secondly, to actions concerning changes required to adapt to the new landscape of higher education in Iceland. And, thirdly, to actions related to the need to be proactive, especially in a country like Iceland where the higher education policy is not always very clear or explicit.

## **6. Recommendations**

### **§ 26**

Before coming to the end of this Report, the following summarises the main recommendations, as they have appeared underlined in the several paragraphs of the Report.

1. The review team recommends that the UoI should seek to be proactive in the development of the new Law. This means that the UoI should take appropriate initiatives and play a leading role in the overall higher education landscape in Iceland.
2. Competition should be approached from its European and international perspective regarding the Icelandic higher education at large, while collaboration among the higher education institutions in Iceland should be encouraged. The UoI should develop its own strategy in that context, while at the same time it should seek access to non-governmental sources of funding (e.g. EU-funding, funding from external stakeholders etc.), utilising the same resources as those available to other universities.
3. The UoI should further develop its links with society. In this context, the University Council should be strengthened by having increased lay representation. This development should not come about through the appointment of Government representatives, but rather through representation from the business community and other stakeholders appointed by the University.
4. The review team recommends that the UoI address the problem of drop-outs through a qualitative study. At the same time, the University should ensure a proper student orientation in order to clarify the demands that university studies make on students and to give them proper information about their courses.
5. The UoI should adjust its credits system to ensure that there is a consistency between the credits awarded and the workload of the students, while at the same time it should keep the study programmes under constant review to ensure that they meet the reasonable demands of the labour market. Furthermore, best practices in the use of technology to enhance the learning environment (like the good practices in some Faculties among which the Faculty of Law with the highly satisfactory use of the Intranet) should be embedded.
6. The review team recommends that the UoI should strengthen its efforts in order to handle effectively this situation. Perhaps, in a first phase, an effective policy should be to establish joint masters' and PhD programmes with universities outside Iceland.
7. Greater degree of flexibility should exist in assigning duties to the staff in the fields of research, teaching and administration, together with the need to strengthen the administrative support at the level of the faculty.
8. Quality control mechanisms should be introduced to ensure the quality of sessional staff.

9. The University should provide opportunities to improve the teaching and pedagogical skills of its staff, both full-time and sessional.

10. The University has to set priorities because it is not possible for a modern international university to achieve excellence in all research fields. Prioritisation is a necessary precondition for strengthening and improving the University's research policy and strategy. Research activities should in any case contribute, as a whole, to the image and the overall profile of the University. Prioritisation means taking advantage of strong research fields, and further improving them, while paying attention to national needs, without completely ignoring other fields.

11. The University should set research priorities according to above mentioned principles. This means that the University has to establish the necessary procedures to reach that aim. Once the targets for research are set, progress for achieving them should be carefully monitored.

12. The research institutes should be core elements central to research in the University.

13. The University should use its international links as a means to support research aspirations. At the same time, these international links should be used also to foster the development of joint Masters' and Doctoral Degrees with Universities of other countries in Europe and elsewhere.

14. The University should endeavour to ensure a proper balance between the sexes in all University activities, and particularly to ensure that there is a proper representation at the highest level of university management.

15. In a rapidly changing environment, the academic structures should be under constant review. In that sense, the UoI should reconsider its academic structure at faculty level, aiming at increasing its efficiency and at promoting academic coherence. In the meanwhile, the University should encourage pooling of administrative resources between faculties as a first step against waste of resources. At the same time, the University should make every effort to remove any obstacles to interdisciplinary collaboration, as a first step to promote synergy and to improve academic coherence.

16. The University should introduce one or more Vice-Rector(s), as in most European universities. The Vice-Rector(s) would be a significant assistance to the Rector and would play important roles in the central leadership scheme, as for example, the role of the vice-chair of the University Council or, where appropriate, the role of chairing one or more of the standing committees.

17. In order to ensure closer harmony between the central level and faculty management, the Rector should be involved along with the faculties in the selection of deans.

18. The UoI should strengthen its efforts in order to ensure that it is fully funded for all the students it teaches and should further initiate a campaign to raise public awareness of the financial situation of the University.
19. The UoI should also seek an appropriate level of funding for postgraduate students.
20. The UoI should strengthen its position and maximise its external funding in order to further increase the quality of its work.
21. The UoI should set up the procedures for the preparation of its new strategic plan and these procedures should be inclusive and transparent across the University. At the same time, given the lack of funds and the political situation, the UoI should pay close attention to prioritisation in its strategic planning.
22. The UoI should establish a systematic procedure, which will continuously monitor on the one hand the implementation of the strategic plan and on the other hand the validity of the objectives.
23. The UoI should play a proactive role and initiate discussion with other higher education institutions on quality assurance at the national level.
24. The UoI should establish a formal procedure for internal quality assurance with leadership at the highest level (if possible, at the level of a future Vice-Rector).
25. The UoI should pay increased attention to the teaching evaluation process and to organise and systematise it as soon as possible. The teaching evaluation process should be carried out with the proper methodology and with a visible impact on the improvement of teaching, and should be integrated into the overall internal quality assurance process. But, the necessary precondition is to ensure that students and teachers are **convinced** and, even more, **inspired** and **motivated** to get actively and effectively involved in such a process. Opportunities for staff members to address weaknesses in their teaching should be made available, and even be made compulsory in cases of continued failure.

## **ENVOI**

### **§ 27**

Coming to the end of this Report, the review team feels the need to express once again its sincere thanks to the University of Iceland for the excellent arrangements provided to make its two visits a challenging and delightful, although very intensive, experience. At the same time the team wishes to thank the University of Iceland for the generous and overwhelming hospitality.

It has been a great pleasure and a very stimulating experience for the team to be introduced to the UoI during this specific and crucial period, both for the Icelandic higher education but, also, for higher education in Europe at large. And it has also been a privilege and a sheer joy for us to meet so many enthusiastic and highly committed people.

The review team has been positively impressed by the developments it has seen and by the momentum and the dynamics of the University. The review team is convinced that the initiatives undertaken by the current leadership of the UoI are taking the University in the right direction and it strongly support the new leadership of the University to continue on this course.

Our recommendations are intended to be our own contribution to the process of change and to help the UoI take best advantage of the opportunities and cope with the threats existing in its route to the future. But, at the same time, our Report aspires to function as an inspiration for the University as a whole, but more specifically for all those people, students and staff, who have a concern for the future of the University.