External Peer Review Group:

Final Report

Faculty of Humanities
University of Iceland

January, 2006

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1 Summary of findings

Below are some of the main findings of the external peer review group (PRG), which the group has decided to file into recommendations to the Ministry of Education, to University of Iceland (UI) authorities and to the UI Faculty of Humanities. Further summaries of PRG conclusions and recommendations are to be found at the end of each chapter of the report.

- **Recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture:**

  - The current system of open access to the Faculty, and indeed the UI as a whole, is commended in principle by the PRG while noting that it also puts a strain on resources in numerous areas.

  - The PRG urges the Ministry to review its financing structure for the higher education institutions in Iceland. The PRG is under the impression that the current financial system almost exclusively encourages Faculties to build such as to reach maximum number of students and to establish new programmes of study. Although both are laudable aims, a key emphasis on these factors can come at the cost of quality in education and research. The PRG is concerned that this may happen at the Faculty of Humanities. Limited resources are often better spent by strengthening and building upon existing lines of study. Moreover, quality of education in the Humanities is crucially dependent on keeping classes small enough to permit discussions, which implies a reasonably high faculty-student ratio.

  - Following its numerous meetings with Faculty staff and students the PRG is generally impressed by the high quality of Faculty input and students output. Of course, there is nevertheless a need for having a strong system of quality assurance in place. However, the PRG recommends a revision in the English terms of reference to move away from the notion of 'quality control'; as control is a negative term towards 'quality assurance'. The PRG would like to recommend that the system be designed such as to emphasize support for academics to improve their performance.

  - The PRG recommends that the Ministry of Education reassess the self-evaluation process to ensure that it be the learning process for the Faculty that it should be and, in every other way, be as effective as possible. Special attention should be paid to the timing of the process so as to ensure that it fits well with the academic calendar.

- **Recommendations to the University of Iceland authorities:**

  - It is important for the University of Iceland if it wants to maintain its leading role as a national university, enhance its research role and maintain international recognition that it builds on a strong Humanities Faculty as one of its pillars. The study of ideas, languages, literature, art, and history is an important

contribution to Icelandic culture and society, to the understanding of its heritage, as well as to international culture and community. Education in the Humanities serves to foster intellectual values and activities that in themselves enrich the culture.

■ It is important for University authorities to explore the question of the policy of open access, which the PRG in fact applauds. But it creates a very diverse group of students particularly evident within the Faculty of Humanities and it could in some ways conflict with the policy of increasing research based studies. University authorities are urged to maintain awareness of possible friction between these two policies.

■ There is a perception within the PRG following this exercise that the University as a whole has not been able to adapt in the most effective manner to the changing higher education environment in Iceland, in particular in relation to Faculty and Department administration. The PRG would like to emphasize the necessity of the executive role of Faculty Deans whilst maintaining the commitment of Faculties as a whole to the decision making process. The PRG urges university authorities to review their policy regarding conditions of service, formal responsibilities and length of tenure both for Deans and Heads of Departments with the aim of increasing the ability of Faculties to respond more effectively to rapid developments in the external environment. There are some indications that the apparent lack of effective mechanisms for facilitating and managing change may be undermining morale within the Faculty of Humanities. The lack of administrative support within the Faculty, also, needs to be addressed within this context.

■ Student library resources and study space as well as the serious lack of accommodation for individual departments within the Faculty of Humanities need immediate attention and long-term planning.

■ **Recommendations to the Faculty of Humanities:**

  ■ It is necessary for the Faculty to maintain and sharpen its focus, based on clearly formulated policies and objectives.

  ■ The Faculty needs to establish more effective planning and delivery mechanisms which require cross-Faculty consent to achieve the legitimacy and authority on which their effectiveness will depend.

  ■ There is a feeling among PRG members that development of new subjects and/or study areas in recent years has been based on a 'trial-and-error approach' (encouraged by funding mechanisms) rather than on explicit Faculty policy. The PRG is aware that the current funding system may generate an incentive to constantly start new programmes rather than to consolidate and strengthen existing ones. Nevertheless, it is important for the Faculty to address this issue, set its priorities in a deliberate way, and plan the course for, say, the next five years.

■ It is the firm view of the PRG that the student output from the Faculty of Humanities is good, with many departments enjoying an impressive admission rate for their graduates in respected international universities (an important indicator of the international standing of the Faculty). Overall, graduates from the Faculty seem to have good labour market access. When interviewing external stakeholders and graduates of the Faculty, the PRG found evidence that the Faculty has turned out a number of graduates that are valued within the private and the public sectors for independent and creative thinking as well as for well honed powers of expression, attributed, at least in part, to their training within the Faculty of Humanities. There is also evidence that some of the graduates of the Faculty enter the workforce with more specialized labour skills needed in the global economy (e.g., language skills, sign-language interpretation, and translation skills). Most importantly the Faculty benefits from committed members of Faculty and students.

■ Nevertheless, it is important that the Faculty strengthen its mechanisms for quality assurance: peer reviews; self-evaluation reports on teaching; yearly reviews conducted by Department Heads; support and oversight for sessional teachers; common standards that enhance consistency between Faculty members and between courses as well as clarity for the student; Faculty-wide grading guidelines; mechanisms for handling breaches of academic integrity.

■ The PRG also urges the Faculty to pay increased attention to the relation between levels, credits, and grades. In that context, the Faculty should reassess the exact form of its BA thesis requirement.

■ There is a strong feeling within the PRG that good practices travel too slowly within the Faculty and between departments. Numerous examples of good practice were presented to the PRG during its site-visit. However, these practices were not evident in other departments within the Faculty and, in many cases, appeared not to be known to other departments. Dissemination of good-practice needs to be improved between Faculty departments, facilitated by Department Heads and the Faculty Dean.

■ Added emphasis should be put on formal presentation of official Faculty rules to staff, especially guidance material on teaching and assessment, as well as on formal integration procedures for new sessional teachers.

■ The PRG observed examples of grade-inflation within the Faculty, which the group suggests the Faculty take under consideration.

■ Increased cooperation with the Institute of Continuous Education should be explored more thoroughly as there were clear examples of growing frustration within the Faculty due to lack of incentive to promote practical studies on offer.

■ The PRG encourages the Faculty to continue its excellent international outreach, i.e. collaboration in research and exchange of students and scholars.

2 Introduction

This document represents the final report of the external peer review group (PRG) for the higher education external review of the University of Iceland, Faculty of Humanities. This exercise has been performed on the basis of rules on quality control in higher education nr. 666/2003 (see appendix A.2) and has encompassed all departments within the Faculty. The stated objectives of quality control in higher education are:

- to maintain and raise the quality of teaching in higher education institutions (HEIs).

- to improve the organization of HEIs.

- to promote greater responsibility of HEIs for their own activities.

- to ensure their competitiveness in the international arena.

The PRG was appointed by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture and consisted of the following individuals:

- Mr. Gústaf Adolf Skúlason, M.Sc., director of policy making and communications, Confederation of Icelandic Employers: chair of the peer review group.

- Dr. Colin Brooks, director of the HE Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics & Archaeology, University of Glasgow.

- Dr. Fred Karlsson, professor of general linguistics at the University of Helsinki and former dean of the Faculty of Arts.

- Mr. Hrafn Stefánsson, student representative, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Iceland.

- Dr. Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Ohio State University.

Secretary to the group was Mr. Unnar Hermannsson.

Initially, the PRG recommends to the Ministry a revision in its English terms of reference, to change the term 'quality control' (which is inherently negative) to 'quality assurance'.

The PRG held numerous meetings before, during and following the site-visit to the Faculty of Humanities. The site-visit encompassed meetings with the University authorities, the Faculty self-evaluation group, tenured and non-tenured Faculty staff, current and graduated students and external stakeholders (a number of whom were also alumni) in addition to a guided tour of Faculty facilities (see appendix A.3). The PRG did not meet any students who were proceeding with their studies exclusively

through distance and e-learning. The PRG is generally satisfied with the site-visit, although gaps in the Faculty self-evaluation report put undue time pressure on meetings, particularly with the self-evaluation group.

While recognizing that guidelines from the Ministry limited the length of the Faculty self-evaluation report, the PRG is in some aspects disappointed with the rather general approach and often vague conclusions of the report which the PRG felt was insufficiently self-critical, especially lacking in statistical support, for example regarding student progression and degrees conferred, and more concise presentation in general. This caused some difficulties for the PRG. However, the PRG recognizes that this is to some extent caused by the lack of administrative resources and difficult timing of the review. For future purposes, it is necessary for the Ministry of Education to review the self-evaluation process to ensure that it becomes as effective as possible. Special attention should be paid to the timing of the process so as to ensure that it fits well with the academic calendar.

The PRG feels particularly concerned in face of the evidence gathered during its site-visit regarding the self-evaluation process within the Faculty. From PRG interviews it seems, for example, that no formal student involvement took place in the process. In addition, there were clear examples of relevant material from particular departments not being included in the Faculty self-evaluation report. Indeed, representatives from these departments pointed out particular examples from the report that were not accurate. All of this indicates that the self-evaluation process was not managed in the most effective manner. There is a shared feeling among the PRG that Faculty members did not get the experience of the learning process that a thorough self-evaluation process should entail and is, in fact, one of the most important elements in projects of this sort. Many students and personnel who participated in the on-site discussions had been summoned only a day or a few hours in advance and the scope of the self-evaluation was not clear to many Faculty participants. Thus the PRG urges the appropriate authorities to examine the process with the aim of ensuring a more effective self-evaluation process, from the design and writing of the self-evaluation document to the preparation for the PRG visit, in future projects. Neither the Faculty of Humanities nor the University of Iceland is unique in this respect: In many countries and many institutions, limited preparation and discussion has unfortunately weakened the beneficial impact of review processes of this sort.

The PRG would like to note that the wide scope of the project, encompassing every department within the Faculty of Humanities, made it an impossible task to examine thoroughly the quality of content and format of study within each department. For example, the time constraints on the PRG did not allow for a review of study materials and syllabi. In addition, such a thorough review was not feasible, given the diverse subjects within the Faculty of Humanities and the specialties of the members of the PRG.

It is the general consensus of the PRG that the Faculty has been moving in a positive direction, with many excellent examples of good practice, but more work lies

ahead. It is the sincere hope of the PRG that this report may assist Faculty authorities in that work. To this end the PRG has deliberately attempted to maintain this report as concise and pragmatic as possible, drawing attention to strengths and weaknesses of the Faculty as well as offering to the Faculty's consideration some suggestions regarding further developments, while not summarizing or discussing in great length materials contained in the Faculty self-evaluation report or other documents relating to this exercise (see appendix A.4). It is the belief of the PRG that this approach will prove the most beneficial for both the Faculty and the University authorities, in addition to the Ministry of Education.

Finally the PRG would like to thank all relevant actors for their co-operation during this exercise, which has been in all instances enjoyable. Special thanks are extended to the Faculty self-evaluation group, and the Faculty Dean, as well as to the University authorities, for their hospitality and positive approach towards this project.

3   Context of Faculty

The University of Iceland is a national university that aspires to offer comprehensive education, to be a research university, and to have international standing as such. The University cannot reach this aim unless it maintains a strong Faculty of Humanities. Moreover, the Faculty is the only Humanities Faculty in Iceland and therefore has, both at present and in the future, a very important cultural role in Icelandic society.

The openness of the Faculty - indeed, of the University as a whole - is a service to Icelandic society and is as such commended by the PRG. However, quality considerations could call for the introduction of higher entrance requirements if the current trend of rising student numbers continues to strain Faculty resources, at least in the most popular disciplines.

The primary current objective of the University of Iceland is to increase the research focus of its Departments and, thus, to offer increasingly more advanced-level programmes. PRG discussions with Faculty members echoed this policy with a majority opting for strengthening the focus on graduate studies, especially MA level programmes, while maintaining the current strength of BA level studies. The PRG suggests that more analysis and reflection (for example regarding resource requirements) take place concerning the build-up of the MA level. For instance, this stated policy of increased emphasis on research and graduate study could conflict with the mass education that must follow a policy of open access. The PRG emphasizes that achieving the correct balance requires a financial mechanism which rewards careful and imaginative academic planning.

PRG discussions with external stakeholders indicate that the training of students from the Faculty has been appreciated in various sections of the labour market, notably in the media and publishing industries. Also, some stakeholders made comments on the value of independent thinking and strong communication skills that they had observed in alumni of the Faculty. The PRG regards the tradition of small class sizes and a relatively high faculty/student ratio within the Faculty of Humanities to be instrumental for cultivating the above-mentioned qualities. This tradition should, therefore, be safe-guarded. The programmes in the Faculty may not explicitly be designed with the employability of its graduates in mind, but teaching and learning practices clearly do enhance employability. Although employability should not be the prime concern of any non-vocational academic programme, it should be considered when new programmes are developed or existing programmes reviewed, as the Faculty has done in many instances.

The PRG noted the service to the community that the Faculty members provide through public lectures and the media. The PRG believes it to be of importance that

public discourse be advanced and particularly important that there are individuals devoted to the study of ideas and culture that are contributing to that discourse. It is also important that students be exposed to the study of ideas and culture before going out and contributing to this rapidly evolving society.

The Faculty serves a large student body. Roughly one third of the 2000 students enrolled seem to enter the University within a year of completing upper secondary school as full-time students, and earn a BA degree by age 25. However, a substantial number of the students are not full-time, some are older, and some take a long time to earn a BA degree. Breadth in age and experience within the student body can have beneficial effects on higher education, not least in the Humanities. Certainly, students who enter university late in life or have, due to personal circumstances, to spread their studies over a long time period may be among the most serious and the most accomplished ones.

However, during the external review, the concern rose that the current financial model, which bases funding on the number of students completing exams at a Faculty, may be creating financial incentives to keep, within the Faculty of Humanities, programmes that do not conform very well with the University's aspiration to be a research university and might even better belong within the Institute for Continuing Education. The PRG urges the Faculty to explore with the University whether there is any basis for this concern and whether there is a case for rethinking the Faculty's connection with the Institute of Continuing Education.

3.1   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- The openness of the Faculty and indeed the UI is in principle commended by the PRG, as this is clearly performing a service to Icelandic society in general. However quality considerations could call for the introduction of higher entrance requirements if the current trend of rising student numbers continues to strain Faculty resources.

- The stated policy of increased emphasis on research and graduate study could conflict with the mass education that must follow a policy of open access. Achieving the correct balance requires a financial mechanism which rewards careful and imaginative academic planning.

- PRG discussions with external stakeholders indicate that graduates from the Faculty seem to enjoy good access to a wide range of occupational fields, in particular where language skills, communication, knowledge of history and the ability to successfully confront complex, often theoretical, projects is in demand.

- The service to the community by Faculty members, noted in the Faculty self-evaluation report, by holding public lectures and media discussions, is commended.

Recommendations

- The University must maintain a strong Faculty of Humanities.

- Critically assess the impact of open access to the Faculty and its implications for other stated Faculty and/or University policies.

- More analysis and reflection, for example regarding resource requirements, is needed concerning the build-up of the MA level.

- The practice of reasonably small class sizes should be safe-guarded.

- Although employability should not be the prime concern of any non-vocational academic programme, it should be considered when new programmes are developed or existing programmes reviewed.

- The Faculty should explore with the University whether, due to financial incentives, programmes are being built within the Faculty that may better belong within the Institute of Continuing Education.

4   Faculty policy, objectives and vision

The overriding Faculty policy, as stated in the self-evaluation report, can be identified as 'being a leader in scholarly activity in the Humanities in Iceland' and 'to be a global leader in Icelandic studies is considered a duty of the Faculty' (pp. 22 and 24).

Other policies and/or objectives which the PRG could discern from the report were:

■ Aim to serve the Icelandic and international scholarly community by means of high-quality research in as many fields of Humanities and culture as possible.

■ Increase the range of studies: different fields, different levels of studies, reaching more students through distance (especially e-) learning.

■ Special emphasis on promoting graduate studies (in accordance with the main current stated objective of the University of Iceland).

■ Linking research and teaching at all levels.

■ Creating the opportunity for students to carry out independent research under guidance of academics; research related study.

■ Creating the opportunity for graduate students to receive training in preparing study material and teaching.

■ BA students gain broad grounding in their field.

■ Promote international exchange and collaboration.

■ Improve working conditions for students and academics.

■ Emphasis on equal status of men and women within Faculty.

■ Create, conserve and promulgate knowledge in its broadest sense including service to community and continuing education.

■ Inform society about the fields of scholarship pursued within the Faculty.

The PRG believes all the policies and objectives stated above to be laudable but notes they are all rather general in nature. There is evidence that some of the stated objectives are being implemented. For example: Faculty members are, on the average, actively publishing; there is some connection between research and teaching exemplified by the thesis requirement in both BA and MA programmes; there are some impressive examples of international collaboration and exchange; various programmes have been added at the BA and MA levels (e.g. Applied Ethics, Archaeology, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, Japanese, Medieval Studies, and Translation Studies), some of which are supportive to the build-up of Icelandic Studies; distance learning, via electronic media, has been established in Icelandic

and English. Nevertheless, the PRG has the impression that there is little overall discussion and planning about how to render the objectives more specific and, then, implement them. This is especially relevant when building up new programmes that affect the long-term institutional structure and the financing of the Faculty. Indeed, the PRG is somewhat worried about the emphasis on broadening the range of studies during an apparent period of financial stringency within the Faculty. There is an inherent danger of 'spreading the Faculty too thin' if resources are moved away from established programmes towards new ones. However the PRG recognises that this could be motivated by the current official financial scheme.

In general, the PRG would have liked to see more specific objectives and a clearer statement of how the Faculty is doing in achieving these objectives, i.e. is progress towards their implementation in any way measured both systematically and formally? Are there any processes in place or a development plan in effect, through which the Faculty makes a conscious effort to map where the Faculty is in fact situated in relation to the above mentioned objectives? The PRG urges the Faculty to take steps towards a process of this sort as it is necessary to work towards clearly stated objectives. This is a task which has to begin at departmental level but in which the Faculty – its Dean and Department Heads – need to play a crucial monitoring role, with all the responsibilities for ensuring further development.

It is necessary for the Faculty of Humanities to set formal, clearly articulated priorities regarding what it intends to achieve in the coming years. Which programmes are to be initiated in order to meet which academic needs? What are the resource implications of such developments? It must be clear that the Faculty does not have the capacity under current conditions to develop in many different directions. A clearer focus is called for by the PRG. The Faculty ought to consider not only expansion but also retrenchment: Are there programmes which are not sustainable (in terms not only of financial considerations but also of academic credibility and student demand)? It is recommended that 'areas of excellence' within the Faculty be documented by Faculty members and/or Faculty authorities and priorities set, building upon these respected areas. As mentioned above, more specific policies and objectives are called for by the PRG, and that work must coincide with setting Faculty priorities.

Besides formulating more precisely its objectives or mission statement, the Faculty needs to set out an agenda for developing and attaining these objectives in the coming years, step by step. For this purpose, an explicit (say, 5-year) plan on how to reach the objectives is strongly recommended. Discussions with Faculty members, students and University authorities assured the PRG that all the necessary elements are in place and the Faculty is in fact moving in a positive direction, but a formal written and generally agreed verification or statement of that journey is still lacking.

A clear policy on the connection between research and teaching is needed. In the self-evaluation report the PRG received rather general information regarding this

issue but during the interviews with Faculty it became evident that the sights have been set towards a more research-based Faculty, which the PRG commends. Again, however, the envisioned aim should be more precisely explained in official Faculty policy. Presumably, linkage between research and teaching does not simply mean that Faculty members are encouraged to teach in areas of their research speciality. It means that students understand and come, at the highest level of their study, to participate in the research process. Student understanding of research-teaching links and of the research process cannot be taken for granted. The PRG suggests that the linkage between research and teaching be strengthened by offering more intensive training for students in research methods particularly in relations to the BA thesis, which seems to be a stumbling block for many students who, as a consequence, do not complete their BA degrees.

As mentioned above, the PRG observed a clear general sentiment among Faculty members that the strengthening of MA level programmes should be a priority. The PRG applauds this as well as the awareness that Faculty members displayed of the need to promote international exchange and collaboration in connection with the strengthening of graduate level programmes. The PRG would like to stress the importance of international cooperation and/or collaboration, as well as student and staff exchanges to avoid intellectual isolation. Playing a full international role will not come at the expense of the University's national role; rather it will serve to clarify that national role and the distinctiveness of Icelandic culture.

The PRG believes it to be sensible for the Faculty to further build up both historical and contemporary Icelandic Studies (broadly conceived), as the Faculty enjoys unique access to invaluable sources in this field. However, it is important to maintain intellectual stimulation from abroad: For example, in the form of academic visitors, specializing in Icelandic studies or related areas, which can provide an outsider's view on the culture. A simple national paradigm is no longer sufficient, neither in purely academic terms nor in terms of the needs of the nation or of individual students.

4.1   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- The present policies and objectives are laudable but rather general in nature.

- There seem to be no detailed plans or mechanisms for further developing and implementing these objectives.

- The PRG applauds the current emphasis on strengthening MA level programmes as well as the emphasis on international outreach.

- The PRG applauds the emphasis on the build up of historical and contemporary Icelandic Studies, broadly conceived.

Recommendations

- Formulate clearer and more precise policies and objectives.

- Develop an explicit (say, 5-year) plan on how to reach those objectives.

- Establish more effective planning and delivery mechanisms within the Faculty, mechanisms which require cross-Faculty consent to achieve the legitimacy and authority on which their effectiveness will depend.

- Identify 'areas of excellence' to build on and set priorities for developing the Faculty.

- Articulate more clearly how research and teaching is to be linked at all levels of studies.

5   Resources

The following chapter is divided into four subsections: Administration, Facilities, Funding and Human Resources.

5.1   Administration

The formal administration system of the Faculty of Humanities is set up according to University of Iceland regulations. The Faculty Forum, where all tenured teachers are represented is where the highest decision-making power rests. The Dean has the initiative in formation of overall policy for the Faculty, monitors its work and administration, appoints administrative staff and is responsible to the University Council and Rector for the Faculty's finances. In addition the Dean has the duty to oversee quality of teaching by conducting annual reviews of Faculty members. The Faculty Council, made up of Heads of Departments, student representative and the Dean, e.g. has to confirm the Dean's proposal regarding annual fund allocation within the Faculty. The Faculty enjoys autonomy in internal affairs.

There is a clear consensus among the PRG that there could be improvements in making the vision of the Faculty clearer and more focused. Similarly there were indications of a common university situation, namely, that academic management is often difficult in a collegial setting. The PRG regards this to be currently hampering institutional and academic development in the Faculty of Humanities. This is not in any way the result of actions of certain individuals but rather the result of the system which is in place within the University, and in fact in most universities. The PRG urges the University authorities to review their policy regarding conditions of service, formal responsibilities and length of tenure both for Deans and Heads of Departments with the aim of increasing the ability of Faculties to instigate appropriate academic development and to respond more effectively to rapid developments in the external environment. There were indications that the apparent lack of effective mechanisms for facilitating and managing change was undermining Faculty morale. The lack of administrative support within the Faculty also needs to be addressed within this context (There is only one full time administrative assistant in the Faculty). It is important for the Faculty of Humanities that conditions be created that allow for effective leadership by the Dean.

The PRG observed that annual reviews had not been performed by the Dean (as prescribed by University regulations) due to the size of the Faculty. The PRG recommends that this function be delegated to Heads of Departments. The range of information available to the Head of Department should be enlarged from the current (apparently) almost single concentration on Student Evaluation questionnaires (in particular, faculty should be required to complete their own course evaluation). Such reviews should, for the most part, be supportive of the Faculty and focus on

possible improvement and opportunities. But when intervention is needed, it should occur and it should be firm. Department Heads could send problematic cases to the Dean.

It is the view of the PRG that inadequate administrative assistance weakens the executive position of the Dean, who cannot be allowed to become a mere 'dignified secretary'. The Dean should be acknowledged as the leader of the Faculty, initiating overall policy. As previously mentioned, there is an apparent lack of leadership, vision, priorities, and detailed plans for the future. This has nothing to do with particular individuals, indeed, there seems to be a long tradition for such an understanding of the decanal role. But the PRG recommends that that role be reconfigured; and that the University take steps to ensure that such reconfiguration is accepted by the Faculty members, not simply imposed.

The PRG would like to note that there is clearly a strong democratic tradition: There are many involved, creative, and independent members of the Faculty who are strong on individual initiatives. However, energies and resources seem a bit diffused. It is necessary to combine this valuable democratic and participatory tradition with an increased leadership role for the Dean and a more harmonized vision, as discussed above in chapter 4.

The current limited administrative resources seem insufficient e.g. for the gathering and analysis of data regarding student and alumni progression, the analysis of student backgrounds or drop-out. This situation is not satisfactory for the Faculty and has had an impact on this PRG evaluation exercise, as previously mentioned. Especially the statistical data and analysis provided in the Faculty self-evaluation report were not sufficient. It is an important element of modern management techniques to be able to analyze and respond quickly to changes in the most important variables in the environment. This is an issue that needs to be solved in cooperation between Faculty and University authorities.

The overall management of studies in the Faculty as well as management of specific study options are the responsibility of tenured Faculty staff.

Students seem fairly well represented in all relevant Faculty bodies and displayed overall satisfaction with their formal status within the administration of the Faculty, although there were some complaints that information is not always adequately disseminated from administration to students.

5.2   Facilities

The PRG received a tour of the Faculty facilities. The general consensus is that facilities, in particular staff offices and lecture halls were fairly good, although students expressed their dissatisfaction with lecture and study facilities. The main concern of the PRG related to the Faculty's library facilities and study space for

students. The PRG appreciates the grounds for the combining of the University and the National Library. It has to report, though, that students were extremely critical of what they perceived as a concentration in the library on inessentials (fixtures and fittings, e.g.) at the expense of its fundamental resources. In addition, the PRG heard evidence that there is sometimes a lack of alignment between the Library's purchase of on-line databases etc. and the academic requirements of the Faculty and its students.

From meetings with students it became apparent that there is a strong dissatisfaction with the range of academic texts available in addition to the limited number of individual texts. There were examples of this lack of resources at least delaying work on research projects, such as BA theses, which is unacceptable. Faculty members admitted that students often had to draw upon the personal libraries of teachers as the University Library could not provide particular texts.

In addition to these apparent deficiencies in library resources, the PRG is concerned with the lack of facilities for the Faculty and its departments. The departments apparently have no administrative centre and (with the exception of the Department of Philosophy) no space where their students can meet and exchange views. A student described the situation in the Deðartment of English as 'students carrying the department in their back-packs'. The PRG recommends that resources be made available to the Faculty as soon as possible to correct this situation.

The University intranet system (UGLA) is commendable and seems to the highest international standards. Students and staff enjoy good on-line access to available databases and a good interlibrary loan system, which however seems expensive for BA and MA students.

The language laboratory is modest in scale and the PRG received indications that some language students did not receive sufficient training within the facilities.

5.3   Funding

The PRG had discussions both with University authorities and Faculty authorities on the financial structures within which the Faculty is working. According to University authorities there is understanding of the special status of the Faculty of Humanities, as it serves distinct societal needs. University authorities have addressed this by distributing funds more favourably towards the Faculty than the initial calculations from the state higher education financial model suggest.

The PRG however is somewhat concerned that this financial model is exerting too strong an influence on the direction in which Faculties within the University of Iceland are being developed as they (at least Humanities) seem more inclined to offer funding towards new programmes rather than strengthening existing ones. This could create counterproductive incentives for Faculties to establish new initiatives

rather than develop their traditional and continuing strengths. The PRG could of course not analyse this current system in any detail but encourages the University authorities to examine wheteher the current system is generating counterproductive incentives and a funding model which gives the Faculties the opportunity to balance innovation and consolidation.

It is the view of the PRG that resource allocation, in addition to administrative structures, should encourage interdisciplinary studies within the University of Iceland, as a number of important social and national needs and current academic research initiatives are best tackled by disciplines in close co-operation. However, the mechanisms for such resource allocation must be designed so that they do not detract from the ability of Faculties to balance innovation and consolidation.

The PRG also urges the Faculty to review its relations with the Institute of Continuing Education as there is some evidence suggesting that the Faculty offers services which could be performed in co-operation or even within that institutional framework, for example practical language programmes.

Although external funding of the Faculty is very limited at present, the PRG would like to suggest that the University as a whole ensure both in its official policy and in its practice that the academic integrity and independence of the institution cannot be jeopardized. This is for instance standard practice within US universities.

The PRG recommends that the present Assistant Fund be strengthened as currently it allows professors to get only very limited support for teaching assistants. This needs to be strengthened as the graduate programmes are built such as to give the graduate students good training in teaching and make them rely less on funding their studies by work unrelated to their academic discipline.

5.4   Staff and human resource management

Within the Faculty of Humanities there were 72 tenured Faculty members in 2005, 25 professors, 20 associate professors, 12 lecturers and 15 adjunct lecturers. In addition there were 28 'full-time equivalents' of sessional teachers, with a total number of 101 hired in spring term 2005, only 30% of them employed full-time.

The attention of the PRG is drawn to the very wide use of non-tenured staff in the Faculty. Given the above numbers and the teaching duties of tenured Faculty members, we estimate that as much as 30% of the teaching in the Faculty may be done by non-tenured members. It is important that Faculty authorities take special notice of this trend and manage it as successfully as possible. It is suggested that emphasis should be put on integrating non-tenured staff members better into the Faculty and provide them with necessary teaching support as well as oversight. The PRG also recommends that there should be standard procedures, including notification of the Dean, for the recruitment of such sessional staff.

The PRG would like to warn against solving the problem of understaffing by increasing class sizes. The small classes are needed for keeping up the quality of education in the Humanities. Much of that education builds on discussions that are impossible to have in large classes.

The PRG would similarly like to urge the University authorities to provide the necessary funding for replacing, with the approval of the Dean, Faculty members who retire or resign (when the academic activities for which they were responsible continue after their departure). According to the self-evaluation report (p. 64), the University Council Finance Committee has several times refused such funding.

The present policy of offering reduced teaching load to Faculty members depending on age and research record, creates problems for covering teaching in at least some Departments. In any case, it seems odd to assume that research is so closely related to age. Research leaves should not be given as rewards for past research but, rather, in response to interesting and sound research proposals.

The self-evaluation report raises the possibility of having teaching duties vary depending on the research performance of subjects (p. 63). This option should be discussed within the Faculty. However, caution should be exercised in this matter, and it is probably ill advised to make teaching duties directly depend on fields of study. Some universities have experimented with giving research-inactive tenured members the option of moving to 100% teaching and service positions in exchange for having excellence in teaching and service count towards salary increases. This has worked well at least in some cases. Elsewhere, institutions are advertising teaching-only posts. The Faculty is urged to consider its policy in the context of such international developments.

The PRG would like to point out that the official policy of the Faculty is that new tenurable appointments are made conditional upon holding a Master's degree. A Doctorate is only considered desirable. The PRG would like to propose that the presumption should be that a Doctorate is required for appointment. It recognizes that this cannot be a general rule: for example, practising field archaeologists might appropriately be appointed and the traditional Cand.Mag. degree may be substantial enough to qualify a candidate for a tenurable appointment.

There is a general consensus among tenured staff that administration duties, including routine office work for Heads of departments and the Dean, take too much of their time. This is not surprising to the PRG following the earlier mention of limited professional administrative staff capacity within the Faculty. It is recommended that the Faculty and the University authorities address this issue and seek solutions. What might at first sight appear to be economizing might have significant hidden costs.

Heavy administrative posts like heading a department should fall on Full Professors as much as possible. This is a matter of fairness, given breakdown in duties and how time consuming it is to start up research and teaching careers.

Overall the PRG is pleased with the positive attitude of the academics interviewed towards their Faculty and their obvious dedication to teaching. The main concern of the Faculty members is the heavy administrative burden in their daily work and, more generally, lack of funding.

5.5   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- Need to put effort into management of the Faculty, as vision and leadership are needed to continue to move the Faculty forward in a period of financial stringency.

- Annual reviews have not been conducted by the Dean and need to be put on track and become an integral part of the Faculty quality process.

- There were strong indications that the resources of the University Library were insufficient and needed to be bolstered considerably.

- Insufficient facilities for departments within the Faculty and lack of study space for students.

- General feeling of lack of administrative resources.

- Tenured Faculty members bear much administrative responsibility due to lack of administrative assistance.

- Use of non-tenured teaching staff is high in the Faculty and there is clearly a problem with understaffing.

- Reduced teaching load related to age and research record makes the problem with understaffing particularly acute in some departments.

- Administrative duties take too much of Faculty time.

- PRG is pleased with the positive attitude of staff members towards their Faculty and their commitment to teaching.

Recommendations

- Work with University authorities towards more effective management structures within the Faculty.

- Dean should delegate annual reviews to Heads of Departments.

- The library resource issue needs to be addressed.

- University authorities need to address the lack of department facilities as soon as possible.

- University authorities and Icelandic educational authorities are urged to analyse if the current higher education funding structures could be creating counterproductive initiatives regarding the development of the Icelandic higher education system, unduly favouring the establishment of new courses of study compared to the strengthening of existing ones.

- Lack of administrative resources should be solved in cooperation between the Faculty and the University authorities.

- The Assistant Fund should be strengthened.

- The Faculty and the University as a whole are encouraged to continue drawing upon the strength of being a part of the University of Iceland by further developing interdisciplinary studies.

- Emphasis should be put on integrating non-tenured staff members into the Faculty and on providing teaching support and oversight for them.

- University authorities should, other things equal, provide funding to replace staff members and Faculty members that retire or resign.

- Problems of understaffing should not be solved by increasing class-sizes.

- University authorities should consider a change in policy of reduction in teaching depending on age and research record.

- The Faculty and the University authorities might want to reconsider the basic structure of Faculty duties (for example, by considering the possibility of introducing voluntary 100% teaching and service load for research-inactive Faculty members in exchange for salary increases based on teaching quality rather than research).

- Consider raising employment criteria by making a PhD in most cases prerequisite rather than desirable.

- Faculty and University authorities should address the problem of insufficient administrative assistance in the Faculty.

- Heavy administrative posts like heading a department should fall on Full Professors as much as possible.

6   Internal quality assurance of the Faculty

It is the perception of the PRG that the organization of internal quality evaluation has been and continues to be under development in the Faculty, with some aspects such as student course evaluation very advanced while other aspects such as the quality assurance of the curriculum or the analysis of Faculty graduates could be improved. Student course evaluations can provide a valuable feedback mechanism for instructors but are very limited tools for evaluating the quality of the education provided. Such surveys often measure the immediate reactions of students to their instructor, perhaps coloured by a sense of how the students are doing in the course and how personable they find the instructor.

There is a perception among the PRG that the issue of 'grade inflation' is relevant to the Faculty of Humanities as a vast majority (70-80%) of students received a grade of first distinction (7,5 – 8,9 out of 10,0). The PRG noted that this distribution of final performance is occurring at a time when some doubts were expressed as to the preparedness for higher education of a number of entrants. The PRG suggests that the issue of possible 'grade inflation' be analysed by Faculty authorities and a clear and publicly available set of descriptors of grades be developed, as further discussed in chapter 9.

The PRG would like to suggest that key indicators, such as the number of BAs conferred annually by each department and drop-out rates, become more relevant as key indicators of quality among Faculty members. Similarly, placement records of Faculty graduates are an important indicator of quality.

In addition there is evidence of insufficient contact between Department Heads or tenured teachers and sessional teachers. A notable exception from this is the Department of Roman and Classical Languages. Its current Head has initiated a programme in which the syllabi of all instructional staff is collected and reviewed by the Department's Head. The PRG recommends that other departments emulate this and stresses, more generally, that sessional teachers need to be brought more fully into the Faculty's quality assurance processes.

The PRG would like to encourage the Faculty to introduce a larger element of peer-review into the quality assurance process. This has been used at other universities, especially within the English-speaking world. Such peer review of teaching must be designed to facilitate improvement, and act as a collegial and not as a disciplinary device.

The University´s introduction of regular staff interviews is commended by the PRG and Faculty authorities are encouraged to make these formal staff interviews an integral part of the Faculty quality assurance process, drawing upon student course

evaluations, proposed self-evaluation reports, peer reviews, and syllabi reviews in addition to an annual research report and a record of service. However, in a large Faculty such as this one it is not practical that the Dean conduct all the interviews. The PRG proposes that this function be, at least to a considerable extent, performed by Department Heads (see also section 5.1 on this issue).

This increased formal communication within the Faculty is particularly important as the PRG observed signs of insufficient contact between sessional teachers and relevant tenured staff and/or Department Heads. Added emphasis should also be put on presenting official Faculty rules to staff, especially guidance material and formal contact procedures for sessional teachers.

The PRG encourages the Faculty to promote international standards in its quality assurance, especially with regard to the Bologna Process where quality assurance, qualificational frameworks, learning outcomes and proper use of ECTS are among the cornerstones of the process.

An important element in any quality assurance system is the ability to apply resources towards gathering, analyzing and disseminating statistics on relevant aspects of Faculty activity. It seems that the Faculty is under-resourced in this regard, as discussed above, and therefore an integral prerequisite in any quality system is largely missing. The PRG suggests that resources should be made available to the Faculty. Information must be made available in usable form and the PRG heard that on-line information met that requirement; but it is not clear that the information is actually used, or even designed for specific quality assurance purposes.

6.1   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- Organization of internal quality evaluation has been and continues to be under development in the Faculty, with some mechanisms such as student course evaluations being very advanced while others seem missing.

- Indication of insufficient contact between sessional teachers and relevant tenured staff and/or department heads to ensure educational quality.

- Introduction of a University-wide policy of regular staff interviews is positive, but it is not currently followed in the Faculty of Humanities.

- Insufficient ability to apply resources towards gathering, analyzing and disseminating statistics on relevant aspects of Faculty activity. Faculty seems under-resourced in this regard.

Recommendations

- The PRG is impressed by the seemingly wide use of student course evaluations in the Faculty, but warns against the limits and possible negative effects of relying on them exclusively for monitoring the quality of instruction.

- Greater element of peer review suggested.

- Important that annual staff interviews be performed, as required by the University-wide policy, and be administered effectively. They should be an integral part of the Faculty quality assurance system and delegated to Heads of departments.

- Added emphasis on formal presentation of official Faculty rules to staff, especially guidance material and formal contact procedures for sessional teachers.

- The Faculty would benefit from promoting international standards in its quality assurance, both in terms of outside recognition and internal quality.

- PRG encourages that added administrative resources be made available to Faculty for enhancing data gathering capacity and analytic ability.

- The placement of Faculty graduates, both in graduate programs and in the labour market should be recorded and used as indicators of the quality of provision and of the standards attained by the students.

7   Structure and content of study programmes

The programmes offered within the Faculty of Humanities can be categorised as: practical diploma courses, BA programmes, MPhaed and MA programmes, and PhD programmes.

Generally the PRG is concerned with the question of the connection between credits, levels and grades within the Faculty. The PRG believes that a discussion of levels is called for within the Faculty. For instance the PRG had the impression that the BA thesis, in most or all subjects, is too demanding, as currently envisaged by many Faculty members, for even the highest level of undergraduate work. Indeed, some sample theses, presented to the group during the site-visit, suggest that at least the research scope and length of the BA theses are equivalent to the MA level theses submitted at comparable universities.

The PRG suggests that the Faculty consider the following understanding of level, credit, and grade.

The PRG would like to stress that level cannot be directly related to the quantity of work and time devoted by a student to a particular course. Rather it is a measure of the type of academic demand which a particular course places on a student. Thus the BA thesis ought to be judged against what it is appropriate to ask a student to achieve when working to his (or her) full potential at the conclusion of a BA programme (i.e., at the stage when the student has successfully completed courses at lower levels, which made either fewer or less intense demands on the student, or both). The Faculty should review the intellectual progression on which its programmes are based and mastery of which a student must demonstrate in order to graduate. In that discussion, the Faculty should note that the nature of the commitment of Icelandic students to their university studies often makes the use of the descriptor 'year' irrelevant; use of the term 'level' is more appropriate (thus, a student who has interrupted studies, or has not taken a 'full load' may be in the fourth year of registration but taking what is notionally a second year course). It follows that the graduation requirement should be the successful completion of a certain number of credits at each academic level.

Credits reflect workload: the amount of time which a notional student would need to devote to a particular course in order to have a reasonable expectation of mastering its material, methodology and implications and hence of passing the requisite examinations. Faculty expectations of student work must be academically demanding but not unrealistic. No one benefits from an unrealistically overloaded curriculum. The Faculty is recommended to consider the work currently being undertaken on a European scale in structuring a credit system within the Bologna process.

Grades are the results assigned by Faculty to student work. There should be an agreed framework which relates the outcome of performance to a particular grade. In Humanities programmes, that framework should be indicative, not prescriptive. It should be the result of Faculty wide discussion and approval; and it should be publicly available, understood by Faculty and students alike. It is in this context that the Faculty should review the issue of the distribution of grades and the question of possible 'grade inflation'.

The PRG found the BA thesis to be a matter of paramount interest and of considerable concern to all the groups with whom it spoke, so specific attention is paid to it here. The PRG suggests to the Faculty to structure the BA programme in such a way that the BA thesis appears as a natural culmination of progressive training rather than as a major and self-standing hurdle at the end. The PRG received information that the Department of Philosophy is aware of the need for this and presented a document, intended for their students, on how to write a BA thesis which is expected to be of approximately 30 pages in length. Another example of good practice presented to the PRG is from the Department of History that offers a 2nd year methodological course including training specifically for writing the BA thesis. The PRG commends these initiatives and urges the Faculty to consider making them a standard part of Faculty-wide procedures that emphasize gradual introduction to the sort of work that students need to undertake in the BA thesis. The PRG also suggests that it be made clear to students that the thesis is not an imitation of a MA or Ph.D. thesis and to faculty that the BA thesis should not be envisaged as more demanding than a research project that would be done for a single course/seminar at the first graduate level. It should be mentioned in this context that students within the Faculty were generally in favour of the BA thesis as a demanding task at the end of their BA studies. The PRG suggestions above are in no way meant to jeopardize that tradition. Not least, familiarity with, and mastery of, the research process might be seen as a key characteristic of a successful Higher Education graduate.

The PRG heard of students who decided that the BA thesis is a step too far for them, in both intellectual and practical terms. Such students will already have completed a high proportion of the credits required of them for a full BA degree. The University and Faculty should consider whether an intermediate award might not be made available to such students, ensuring that the work which they have successfully completed (credits which they have completed and the grades for courses which they have achieved) is acknowledged.

Interviews with students also indicated that there are not enough distinct MA level courses on offer. MA students often take courses with BA students, but receive less credit for them or so-called 'Discounted credits'. This is a good example of the levels-question raised above. In some Departments within the Faculty a student at MA level can take a limited number of BA level courses but his/her credits are discounted (for example the student receives 3 MA credits instead of 5 BA credits).

The PRG regards this to be the wrong approach, suggesting that the MA level students do less work. Credits should not be discounted but rather written assignments and standards of assessment for a higher level student should be aimed at a higher level. Of course, the PRG regards it as most desirable that most MA level credits for course work be received for distinct MA level courses/seminars.

The PRG also shared some worries regarding admission requirements for MA programmes which are currently set at a 7.25 grade point average. As mentioned earlier, a vast majority of students within the Faculty, around 85% of those who graduated between 2000-2004, did so with a GPA of 7.25 or higher. Therefore, the PRG suggests to the Faculty that the bar could be set too low for entry into MA programmes. Also the Faculty should consider whether access to MA programmes is to be considered virtually as an entitlement, following successful completion of the BA programme, or whether it is to be considered (and administered) as competitive.

The Faculty has in recent years been increasing its range of studies and especially of graduate studies. MA programmes are now offered within all Departments, except the department of Romance and Classical Languages, although the Department of German and Nordic languages offers an MA only in Danish. Multiple MA programmes exist within some Departments and some interdisciplinary MA programmes are offered which the PRG particularly commends. Currently there are doctoral students in the fields of Icelandic Literature, in Icelandic Language, in History, including Archaeology, and in Comparative Literature.

The PRG is impressed with the fairly recent proliferation of new programmes such as Medieval Studies, Archaeology, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, Translation Studies, Japanese and Applied Ethics. However the PRG shared the worries, discussed above that the current funding constraints make it more important than ever for the Faculty authorities to prioritize their programme offering and be aware of the threat of spreading limited Faculty resources too thin and therefore jeopardizing established Faculty programmes. The PRG also recommends that different programmes consider sharing particular courses; indeed, particular courses might be explicitly designed with that end in mind (an example of this would be a course in aesthetics cross-listed in philosophy and art history or a general literary theory course cross-listed in comparative literature, Icelandic, and possibly the other languages). This would be both academically appropriate and a contribution to efficient operation. Leadership from the Dean would be appropriate in facilitating such cooperation.

The PRG is pleased to learn of novel ways within the Faculty of reaching new students through distance learning as there are such programmes, for example, in Icelandic and English. The PRG reviewed some of the material used in the English distance learning, including interactive video of lectures. The PRG is impressed by this material as well as by the awareness displayed by Faculty members of the

dangers of passive learning and by examples of Faculty attempts to address these potential pitfalls.

The PRG observed that the Faculty clearly serves the broader Icelandic community and continuing education, especially through the modern language departments. The PRG urges Faculty authorities to consider the possible interrelations and avenues for cooperation in this regard with the Institute of Continuing Education. There is room for innovative thinking about how to combine basic language instruction with a higher level study of language and literature, as well as research, within the Faculty of Humanities.

7.1 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- The definition of and connection between credits, levels and grades within the Faculty is not clear enough.

- The level of the BA thesis seems very high and the thesis seems to be a stumbling block for many students at the end of their BA studies.

- The offering of MA level courses seems unsatisfactory and the procedure of "discounting credits" of higher level students taking lower level courses exemplifies a poor way of relating credits and levels.

- During recent years, the Faculty has been increasing its range of studies, especially at the graduate level.

- The PRG is impressed with developments taking place within the Faculty concerning distance-learning.

- The Faculty clearly serves the needs of society by offering practical courses, particularly in languages.

Recommendations

- Discussions and actions are needed regarding the definition of and connection between credits, levels, and grades.

- The level of the BA thesis needs to be reconsidered. Similarly, progressive long-term student training for the thesis during the BA studies is recommended. Clear examples of good practice are to be found within the Faculty in this area which need to be disseminated more effectively, discussed and possibly made part of a unified Faculty policy.

- The University and the Faculty should consider whether to make available an intermediate award to students who have completed all but the thesis requirement for a BA degree.

- The practice of "discounted credits" should be replaced by the practice of more demanding assignments and standards of assessment for MA students than BA students who share classes.

- Entry requirements in MA level programmes should be reconsidered given the high GPA that BA students received, at least between 2000-2004. More importantly, the Faculty should consider whether access to MA programmes is to be considered virtually as an entitlement, following successful completion of the BA programme, or whether it is to be considered (and administered) as competitive.

- More MA level courses are needed.

- Although impressed with the proliferation of new programmes, the PRG is worried that the current funding constraints make it more important than ever for the Faculty to prioritize its programme offerings and be aware of the threat of spreading limited Faculty resources too thin and therefore jeopardizing established Faculty programmes.

- The PRG recommends that different programmes consider sharing particular courses; indeed, particular courses might be explicitly designed with that end in mind.

8   Teaching and teaching methods

It is the general perception of the PRG that teaching and teaching methods are generally in line with standard practice in similar universities with teaching performed mostly through lectures, supplemented with class-discussions. In addition, class-related discussions take place on the Internet through the UGLA-system. This is a very impressive use of technology for increasing students' access to instructors as well as for encouraging active learning. In addition students are expected to make seminar presentations, write essays and other assignments. It is the impression of the PRG that learning is fairly active. At the very least, the students interviewed by the PRG were engaged, lively, expressive, reflective and independent minded. The results of regular student course surveys are in general favourable within the Faculty and, hence, do not indicate any Faculty-wide problems.

The PRG has the impression that instructors are left with much discretion regarding both standards of study materials used and teaching methods in class situations (lectures, seminars or study groups) as well as examination methods and grading. This is to be expected at an institution of higher learning, where much is left to the creativity and expertise of the individual instructor. The quality of education would certainly suffer if this were sacrificed. However, there lie some dangers in giving great discretion to the instructors, especially with respect to maintaining a consistent and meaningful grading system. The Department of Philosophy has recognized this and taken some laudable steps towards setting and publicizing consistent standards for grading, but this cannot be left to the initiative of individual departments. A leadership from the Dean is needed in this matter.

The University and the Faculty ought, in an international context, to consider whether current practice does not allow too much discretion to the individual Faculty member, at the potential expense of consistency between Faculty members and between courses, and of clarity for the student. It is, alas, easy for a quality assurance system to become top-heavy. However this issue is exactly resolved, the quality assurance system has to be designed such as to allow for faculty members' initiative and judgment in designing and teaching courses as well as students' initiative and judgment in their work. The unpredictability and contested nature of much work in the Humanities must, also, be acknowledged when designing this system.

The quality assurance system must address the two issues of standards and quality. 'Standards' is shorthand for the level of competence that a student must display in order to pass, with a particular grade, a course and subsequently to graduate from a particular programme. Those standards must be internationally acceptable and comparable; and appropriate to the Icelandic situation. 'Quality' is shorthand for the

nature of the provision – the teaching provided, the resources available, the learning facilitated – through which the University and the Faculty allow, encourage and reasonably require a student to reach its standards for the award of one of its qualifications.

In addressing these issues, the Faculty must work not only from the 'teaching' side but also from that of 'learning'. Both the self-evaluation document and the Faculty contribution to the PRG discussions showed more concern for the former than for the latter; the same holds true with respect to the recent introduction of the new teaching organisation system 'Stokkakerfi' discussed in chapter 10. Teaching and learning are related, but they are not simply in a one-to-one relation.

By developing and publicizing such a quality assurance system, the Faculty will also make it easier for new teachers to be acclimatized into the Faculty. The PRG observed some difficulties that sessional teachers, in particular, have had with becoming integrated into the Faculty. During interviews, some former sessional teachers reported that they had felt isolated and had only a limited sense of whether they were designing their classes in a suitable way. With a well publicized quality assurance system, incoming academics will have a much better sense of what is expected of them. It would also be advisable that departments, as a rule, set up a data-bank with sample syllabi and other teaching material for their standard courses. Such a data-bank would be of great value for instructors teaching the courses for the first time as well as for those who are reconsidering their own approaches to teaching these courses. Heads of departments could also draw on such a resource when advising academics that are having problems with their teaching or when advising new instructional staff. Departments who rely heavily on sessional teachers might consider offering teaching workshops at the beginning of the year.

The PRG noted clear examples of good practice within the Faculty. The Department of Philosophy deserves mention as its administration and processes for example regarding student examination procedures. Also, the PRG is encouraged by positive initiatives both within the Department of History and the Department of English.

The PRG was pleased to learn of the University Innovation fund for teaching and believes that more should have been made of this in the self-evaluation report. In addition the PRG commends that the University annually gives formal awards to teachers, researchers and administrators for particularly good service. It hopes that these are appropriately publicized.

8.1   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- General teaching and teaching methods seem satisfactory.

- Staff is left with much discretion regarding both standards of study materials used and teaching methods in class situations (lectures, seminars or study groups) as well as examination methods. In this lie some dangers that need to be addressed by developing a well publicized quality assurance system.

- Lack of support for incoming academics and, particularly, sessional teachers, observed by the PRG.

- Encouraging examples of good practice within the Faculty.

- PRG pleased with the University practice of securing funds for innovations in teaching and teaching methods in addition to recognising formally good practice annually.

Recommendations

- Quality assurance system should be developed to enhance consistency between Faculty members and between courses as well as to increase clarity for the student.

- The quality assurance process is something which all faculty must understand and to which all must subscribe: it is central in the institution's maintenance and enhancement of quality.

- Incoming instructors should be given teaching support, for example, in the form of a data bank containing sample syllabi and other teaching material for standard courses.

- Sessional teachers should be better integrated into the departments and given support in developing their courses. Some departments might want to consider teaching workshops for sessional teachers at the beginning of the year.

9   Student assessment

It was not possible for the PRG to scrutinize scripts (and hence to form a precise view as to any over-marking and grade-inflation). Nonetheless, the very high proportion of students graduating with a GPA of 7.25 or above was striking. It may be that the situation has come about without much conscious understanding of its significance. The PRG urges the entire Faculty to adopt grading guidelines comparable to those which have been developed within the Philosophy Department. The PRG suggests that, while developing consistent guidelines for the allocation of grades for particular assessment exercises, the Faculty ought also to consider the banding levels used to characterize overall performance. It should decide whether such bands and the percentage of any graduating group which they contain should be norm-referenced or criteria-referenced.

Each course instructor does his/her study assessment, while external examiners are present in all oral exams. The PRG has some concerns regarding the apparent high degree of flexibility or discretion offered to instructional staff members regarding student assessment. Some sort of minimum requirements regarding student assessment are recommended for all courses within the Faculty, which make clear the requirements for the attainment of particular grades. Similarly, the Faculty should review the profile of assessment used across particular programmes: are the modes of assessment used suitable tools for judging the particular attainments which students are being asked to display. Faculty policy might lay down requirements for a variety of modes of assessment to be used, e.g. that all courses should have significant aspects of course work assessment. Class participation is similarly a recognized tool for student assessment in Master's level courses. The Faculty might wish to consider the establishment of a specific BA Examination Board to consider such matters of policy and practice.

The PRG believes that Heads of Departments must explicitly be given responsibility to maintain active oversight of student assessment measures in courses taught by sessional teachers under their oversight. Should the number of sessional teachers in a Department be too large for the active supervision by the Head, the Head should delegate the task to other tenured Faculty members of the Department. Similarly, the PRG recommends the Faculty consider some sort of quality assurance mechanism for tenured teachers and their assessment methods. A formal peer review of exams and their contents could for instance be considered by the Faculty.

These recommendations should not be taken to imply that the PRG has any reason to suspect that there are currently serious problems with student assessment at the Faculty. Indeed, student course evaluation surveys indicate that students see a good relationship between teaching, assignments, and assessment at the Faculty. Nevertheless, such safe-guards should be in place.

The PRG observed nothing to suggest that there is anything at the institutional level to require and help professors to enforce academic integrity. It is the PRG's view that it has become increasingly important for students to be taught academic integrity and academic integrity needs to be enforced. The presence of such an enforcement structure raises awareness of the issue and makes it easier for instructors to have students take this issue seriously. It can be dangerous to leave enforcement entirely up to the individual instructor, both for the sake of the instructor and the student. As is the case with many of our recommendations, this addresses an issue which is of international concern: much material on plagiarism (its causes, manifestations, avoidance and punishment, etc.) is available on-line (e.g. http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/documents/articles/plagiarism_in_philosophy_prevention _better_than_cure.html)

9.1   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- PRG considered the possibility of 'grade inflation' having occurred, which the group suggests the Faculty take under consideration in the context of developing and stating more clearly the standards expected of its students.

- An inappropriately high degree of flexibility or discretion offered to tenured staff members regarding student assessment.

Recommendations

- The PRG urges the incorporation of distinct Faculty-wide grading guidelines.

- Minimum requirements regarding student assessment should be recommended for all courses.

- Heads of Departments should be required to maintain active oversight of student assessment measures in courses taught by non-tenured teachers.

- The Faculty should implement a quality assurance mechanism for tenured teachers and their assessment methods.

- The Faculty should consider the establishment of a specific BA Examination Board to consider matters of policy and practice.

- The importance of academic integrity should be emphasised and some formal procedure installed for handling breaches of academic integrity.

10   Other student-related matters

The Faculty of Humanities is the largest Faculty within the University of Iceland with over 2,000 registered students in the academic year 2004-2005. However only 50-60% of the students are active with one third of the students categorised as 'full-time'. Females are two thirds of the students. Only approx. 30% earn a BA degree by the age of 25 and just over 60% by the age of 29.

The PRG commends the Faculty policy of open access while recognising that this puts pressure on Faculty resources. This policy generates a diverse student body age-wise and hence experience-wise, with benefits on many levels. However, the Faculty should use available statistical data to carry out a clearly focused analysis of the relationship between the various characteristics of student participation and achievement (or lack of it). In particular, the Faculty and University should be clearer as to the consequences of the fact that so many students opt for discontinuous study or, in any given year, do not take a full load of courses. Such practices may be socially and individually desirable, but they may also have resource and academic consequences.

The PRG notes and would like to express some concern about the contrast between the ratio of men and women in the student body and on the Faculty.

Students that the PRG met with were generally very positive towards Faculty members and regarded the access to Faculty members as very good. However students were disappointed with the flow of information within the Faculty and demonstrated, for example, out-dated lists of students.

Students were unanimously opposed to the recent introduction of a University-wide teaching organisation system, named 'Stokkakerfi'. In their experience the system has had negative effects rather than positive, with longer class times (in excess of what, it seems well known, is the maximum for effective student learning) and the piling up of classes on certain days of the week.

Students displayed some concern to the PRG regarding the correlation between workload and credits, which is discussed above in chapter 7. Similarly, the lack of access to sessional teachers outside the classroom was mentioned, and in general students regarded the Faculty reliance on sessional teaching as excessive. Students generally were in favour of the BA thesis, but clear discrepancies regarding the effort expected were displayed between students from different departments. At the BA thesis stage, students would like increased support and workload proportionate to credits. As discussed above, there is need for more guidance in making the transition from course-studies at the BA level to doing research for and writing the BA thesis.

The library is regarded unsatisfactory both in its lack of breadth of necessary academic texts and in number of each volume held. This has created difficulties for students for instance in their work on BA theses in addition to regular course work. Students also complained about lack of facilities for study and discussions outside the classroom. The importance of communal spaces, where faculty and students can gather for discussions, should not be undervalued. This is crucial for building intellectual community.

MA level students voiced concern at lack of student community on MA level, coinciding with a limited number of dedicated MA level courses, discussed above in chapter 7. The PRG encourages more student enterprise regarding the development of an 'MA level community'.

The PRG is particularly impressed with the Faculty service to students through the internet information system UGLA, displaying e.g. course catalogues and department publications.

Regarding the formal rights of students for appeal, the PRG observed that students have the right to submit a written complaint to the Faculty Office and appeal any Faculty decision to the University Council. In addition students have the right to receive an explanation of academic assessment of written assignments and to request an external examiner for reviewing assessment. The PRG noted that the students with whom it spoke did not have a full understanding of this appeal system.

10.1　Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- The PRG commends in principle the Faculty and, indeed, University policy of open access while recognising that it creates particular problems for the Faculty that need to be addressed with the University authorities.

- Appropriate analysis of statistical information regarding students is lacking.

- The PRG notes and would like to express some concern about the contrast between the ratio of men and women in the student body and on the Faculty.

- Students were generally favourable to Faculty members but had negative experience of the newly introduced 'Stokkakerfi'.

- Students wanted the BA thesis to remain a major part of their BA level studies but called for more consistency between credits awarded and the work necessary to complete the thesis. Discrepancies were observed by the PRG between departments regarding the assumed work-load by students.

- The library content is deemed unsatisfactory by students as were study and communal spaces.

- More designated MA courses and a 'sense of community' is called for by MA level students.

- The PRG commends the UGLA information system.

Recommendations

- The Faculty might examine the effects of the system of open-access with University authorities.

- As discussed at length in section 7, more discussion is needed on the credits/levels/grades issue, particularly in connection with the BA thesis work.

- Library deficiencies urgently need to be addressed by the relevant authorities. More study and communal space is also desirable.

- More MA level courses are recommended.

11   Research and its relevance to teaching

The number of publications within the Faculty of Humanities during the last year suggests that the members of the Faculty are active in research (19 books from 72 members; 2 articles per member on average; over one lecture abroad per member on average; 2 lectures in Iceland per member on average). However, table 22, summarizing points for research during 2003 (self-evaluation report, p. 74), suggests that some departments are significantly more active in research or research oriented activity than others, although the table may mislead because it contains results for only one year and the PRG heard evidence that the table is incomplete.

There are no data in the self-evaluation report to assess the quality of the research. In any case, that would have been outside the scope of the PRG and a daunting task indeed, given the size and diversity of subjects within the Faculty of Humanities.

During our meeting with students, it emerged that they would like more information regarding Faculty members' research interests, as this could be particularly relevant when choosing a tutor for the BA thesis. The PRG suggests that the Faculty increase the dissemination of knowledge of Faculty member research projects and areas of expertise to students.

The PRG is pleased to hear of international research projects in which Faculty PhD students participate. It is similarly encouraging that University funds are available for PhD students to take part in such projects and attend seminars abroad. Also, evidence from PRG interviews suggests that there are guest lectures from abroad at least in Icelandic Linguistics, History, and Philosophy. There were some worries expressed that it is hard to motivate students to get involved and attend lectures. One suggestion would be to have a faculty-led discussion of the work or the topic of the guest lecturer ahead of time, perhaps connected to an advanced class.

The PRG found impressive evidence of leadership within the Faculty on research projects that build international connections, directly involve students, and otherwise create suitable intellectual environment for education at a research university. To name three examples: in Icelandic Linguistics, 15 students of Icelandic are directly involved in such a project; in Philosophy, a research project has resulted in a large international conference; and in History, a large research project involves both scholars and doctoral students from 31 countries.

The PRG noted that several local and international conferences have been recently held at the Faculty and in collaboration with University Institutes or scholarly associations outside the University. Five research institutes function within the

Faculty. The Centre for Research is their common forum that provides research support to both faculty and graduate students, publishes a periodical in the Humanities, and annually sponsors a conference in addition to three seminars. The PRG is confident that this activity helps to create the sort of intellectual environment that is necessary for good graduate education and beneficial to undergraduates. The Faculty should consider whether the implications and benefits of being members of a research informed institution ought to be made apparent and explicit at all levels of a student's career (throughout the BA and the MA) or should be concentrated at the higher levels (e.g., at BA thesis level and above). Each approach has its merits. A research informed institution might begin by ensuring that students understand what research implies – dissatisfaction with the status quo; provisionality; rationality; arguments; support by evidence; acknowledgment of sources, etc – before requiring students to involve themselves in the research process itself.

Thesis writing at the BA level seems to be the main connection of education at the BA level with engagement in the actual process of research. The BA thesis and its level has been extensively discussed in the chapters above. However it is appropriate to repeat the student support for upholding the thesis as an integral part of their BA studies.

The PRG suggests Faculty authorities consider regular Faculty research seminars involving perhaps both Faculty members and graduate students.

The PRG received no breakdown of Faculty resources regarding research financing.

11.1   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- Research activity seems respectable within the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Iceland. However, the PRG is disturbed by indications that the relevant data, regarding particular departments, are not accurate as well as by the complete absence, in the self-evaluation report, of quality indicators for publications.

- Students generally wanted more information regarding Faculty members' research interests and current activity.

- The PRG commends Faculty members´ participation in international research projects, often involving a considerable number of students.

- Relation between teaching and research is at least manifest at the BA thesis stage.

Recommendations

- More dissemination of Faculty member research activity to students.

- PRG encourages more active student participation in Faculty research projects and is pleased to find interest in this regard both from Faculty members and students.

- Build upon the impressive evidence of participation in international projects to strengthen an international and research oriented focus within the Faculty.

- PRG suggests Faculty authorities consider regular Faculty research seminars, involving perhaps both Faculty members and graduate students.

- The Faculty might explicitly consider what a research informed environment means in terms of particular academic programmes (and at particular levels within those programmes).

12 External relations

The PRG received no indication that the Faculty´s relations with other Faculties within the University of Iceland were anything but positive. Increased emphasis within the Faculty of advising students to attend courses in other University Faculties seems to underscore that indication. This development is commended by the PRG and it suggests further strengthening of such relations, by making the cooperation more formal through interdisciplinary courses/programmes.

The PRG suggests increasing awareness of and engagement with the on-going Bologna process, which could for instance guide Faculty authorities in its credits/levels/grades discussions proposed by the PRG in chapter 7. However, it is important that the Faculty takes its time to implement the Bologna mandates as there are issues that still need to be clarified on the national level.

The PRG encourages the Faculty to build upon its already impressive evidence of international cooperation, through exchanges of students and teachers as well as through collaborative research projects. During interviews, all Faculty members indicated their willingness to focus on strengthening advanced level education and an international outlook for the Faculty.

In recent years, the Faculty of Humanities has been systematically cultivating international relations. In this context, it should be noted that several departments have offered, for the benefit of international students, courses taught in English. There is a BA programme in Icelandic Studies for Foreign Students and a MA programme in Medieval Icelandic Studies, taught in English, has recently been launched. The Faculty also encourages its students, especially graduate students, to visit foreign universities for shorter or longer periods. The PRG commends these developments

The PRG heard of one particularly interesting example of outreach to the professions. The Philosophy Department offers a post-graduate 30 credit programme in Applied Ethics that gives professionals the opportunity to study the ethics of their respective professions. Such a programme also serves to underline the essential academic background and context of vocational programmes, and the crucial role of the Humanities Faculty in addressing immediate societal needs and concerns. Similar things can be said about a newly launched programme in Translational Studies as well as Practical Language Programmes on offer.

As mentioned in section 3, the PRG noted considerable service to the community that the Faculty members provide through public lectures and the media.

12.1   Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- In recent years, Faculty has systematically opened up to international relations. This development is commended.

- There are some good examples of outreach to the professions, e.g. the Applied Ethics programme within the Department of Philosophy.

- Faculty members provide service to the community through public lectures and the media.

- Faculty seems open to further cooperation with other University Faculties.

Recommendations

- Increased awareness of the Bologna process and its implications suggested to the Faculty.

- Faculty should continue to seek international cooperation when developing its graduate programmes.

- Clearer internationalization of the Faculty is suggested, for example through direct involvement in international research networks.

- Faculty relations with private, public and professional bodies within Icelandic society should be strengthened.

A   Appendices

A.1   PRG Guidelines from the Ministry

Introduction

In recent years, in policy formation for higher education institutions in Iceland, emphasis has been placed upon increasing their autonomy and responsibility, and also upon strengthening their internal and external quality control. The Universities Act of 1997 stresses that higher education institutions bear the main responsibility for their activities, while the role of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is primarily to monitor that higher education institutions meet standards for teaching and fulfil their plans. In recent years the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has been developing methods to evaluate higher education, and in this context it has been an active participant in European and Nordic collaboration on evaluation of higher education. The Ministry has carried out evaluations during the past few years of several higher education institution and faculties. In 1999 the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issued rules on quality control in higher education, which have been revised (see appendix). The Ministry of Education has recently presented a three-year plan for external reviews at the higher education level.

The objective of quality control in higher education is to maintain and raise the quality of teaching in higher education institutions (HEIs), to improve the organisation of HEIs, to promote greater responsibility of HEIs for their own activities, and to ensure their competitiveness in the international arena.

This booklet contains guidelines for external review of undergraduate and graduate programmes offered at the Faculty of Humanities in the University of Iceland.

The guidelines are intended to serve two purposes:

a)   To guide the experts and hopefully lighten their work-load;

b)   To ensure the relative homogeneity of the external reviews initiated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture by providing some points to be considered and criteria to be used in making the evaluations.

The process described in these guidelines is outlined step by step. However, it is meant to guide the peer review group in its work but not to restrict it.

Aims and Objectives of External Review

According to the rules on quality control in higher education in Iceland the objectives of external review of higher education teaching are:

1.   To gather methodically information on the teaching carried out in the relevant institution/Faculty in Iceland.

2.   To encourage the relevant institution/Faculty to examine its policies and work, among other things by means of self-evaluation, and to enable it to have its strengths and weaknesses evaluated by outside experts.

3.   To gather information on whether the institution/Faculty meets the standards required for its work.

4.   To elicit proposals from higher education institutions and independent experts on emphasis, policy and improvements in education in the relevant field.

External quality control of higher education teaching may cover an HEI as a whole, specific disciplines, departments, study programmes, faculties, or other specified units within the institution. External quality control may also extend to several HEIs or units at the same time. External quality control covers all factors concerned in teaching, including management, human resources, study assessment, student affairs and facilities.

In external review of teaching in higher education the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture stresses the following factors:

1.   The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the implementation of the review.

2.   The relevant institution/Faculty shall carry out a critical self-evaluation. It is important that the self-evaluation be a true evaluation of the activities and not simply a collection of data for the reviewers.

3. A review shall be carried out by external experts, who visit the relevant institution/Faculty, and verify and criticise the self-evaluation report.

4. The results of the external review shall be made public, demonstrating the accountability of higher education institutions to interested parties – students, the labour market, government and the public.

Within this framework certain factors are stressed:

• The role of the experts in the peer review group is primarily to throw light on and evaluate the perspectives of the self-evaluation, and not to investigate as such.

• The external review does not entail a comparison of institutions/faculties, nor the creation of a "league table". The primary emphasis is upon evaluating the connection between objectives and performance. Higher education institutions in Iceland are of various kinds, with varying objectives and performance. The evaluation of higher education institutions is thus primarily a matter of how well they achieve their stated goals.

• Some emphasis is placed upon compilation of statistical data from the institution's records, as such data can provide a picture of the performance of the relevant institution/Faculty.

• It is important that the quality evaluation should reveal the stakeholders important in higher education (students, parents, alumni, employers, government and others parties who fund higher education), and how their expectations may be met. It should be borne in mind that the concept of quality may signify different things to different stakeholders.

• By an external review, the aim is to encourage development within the relevant institution/Faculty.

Approach of the External Review

Procedure

The process of an external review of a higher education institution is as follows:

• The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture notifies the relevant institution/Faculty of the planned external review.

• The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture sends guidelines for self-evaluation to the relevant institution/Faculty, following consultation with the institution.

• The relevant institution/Faculty carries out its self-evaluation, and submits a self-evaluation report to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2-3 months).

• A peer review group makes a site visit to the relevant institution/Faculty (1–5 days).

• The peer review group prepares a review report. Before the report is finalised, the relevant institution/Faculty shall have the opportunity to comment on the factual content of the report.

• The peer review group submits its final report to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (two months after the visit).

• The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture promulgates the report of the peer review group on the Ministry's website.

• Within three months of the promulgation of the final report, the relevant HEI shall promulgate its report on its response to the findings. Within two years of that time the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture shall ascertain whether and how the HEI has responded to the findings of the external review.

The peer review group

The peer review group is appointed by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. The group is responsible for carrying out the external review. According to the rules on quality control in higher education appointments to a peer review group shall take account of the following:

•   A peer review group shall comprise 3-6 people. The team shall include individuals who meet some of the following criteria: qualifications in the relevant field of scholarship, or extensive experience of university work, of quality control and of employing graduates.

•   No member of the peer review group may have any connection to the institution evaluated.

•   At least one of the group's members shall be employed outside Iceland.

The work of a peer review group shall be subject to guidance and a letter of appointment from the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. It shall have a secretary who organises its work and writes its report. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture shall issue a schedule for the review, its time-frame and its costs, and guidelines for self evaluation, and shall monitor the implementation of the review.

The following are the members of the peer review group for the external review of the Faculty of Humanities:

Mr. Gústaf Adolf Skúlason, head of division of policy making and communications, Confederation of Icelandic Employers: chair of the peer review group.

Mr. Colin Brooks, director of the HE Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics & Archaeology, University of Glasgow.

Mr. Fred Karlsson, professor of general linguistics at the University of Helsinki and former dean of the Faculty of Arts.

Mr. Hrafn Stefánsson, student representative, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Iceland.

Ms. Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, assistant professor, Department of Philosophy, Ohio State University.

The secretary of the group is:

Mr. Unnar Hermannsson

Education in Humanities in Iceland

The foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911 marks the beginning of the modern Icelandic system of higher education. This first national university is established by merging three professional schools founded during the previous century: a school of theology, a school of medicine and a law school, and adding a new Faculty of arts. Before that time Icelandic students had mainly travelled to Denmark for higher education.

The Faculty of Arts is established in 1911. In 2004 the name of the Faculty is changed to Faculty of Humanities. There are seven departments within the Faculty:

1. Department of Icelandic Language and Literature including Icelandic for foreign students

2. Department of History

3. Department of Philosophy

4. Department of Comparative Literature and Linguistics

5. Department of English

6. Department of German and Nordic Languages (Includes German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish as well as Japanese)

7. Department of Romance and Classical Languages (Includes Spanish, French, Classical Latin and Classical Greek)

The Faculty of Humanities offers programmes at the undergraduate and graduate level for the degrees of B.A., M.A. and Dr. Phil. The Faculty also offers special graduate programmes in English, Danish and Icelandic for teachers and short training programmes at the undergraduate level in practical Icelandic, French, Spanish, Danish, German and English. Most of the Faculty's students, or approximately 1,600, study for the degree of B.A. About 200 students are (autumn 2004) enrolled in the various M.A., M. Paed and Dr. Phil. programmes. About 140 students are enrolled in Icelandic as a foreign language. Foreign students are admitted to the Faculty of Humanities through various exchange programmes or by enrolling as full-time students.

Some of the courses at the undergraduate level are taught in English (http://www.hug.hi.is/page/english).

Task of the Peer Review Group

In general the assignments of the peer review group are the following:

The group is to form an opinion on the basis of information supplied by the Faculty in the self-evaluation report, and by means of discussions held on the site, about the quality of education and the quality of the educational process, including the organization of education and the standard of the graduates. In making its evaluation, the peer review group will take the expectations of the students and of society into account, as far as possible.

The group is to form an opinion on the connection between the Faculty and the university, and to consider the connection to research conducted within the institution.

The group is to make recommendations on how to improve the quality of the Faculty.

Preparatory meeting/s of the peer review group

Verification of the self-evaluation report

The task of the peer review group is to verify and comment on the content of the self-evaluation report, as well as to respond to questions raised by the report and during the site visit. It is important to study the self-evaluation report carefully before the peer review group meets. The comments should focus on the following questions:

- Is the report sufficiently critical and analytical?
- Are the strengths and weaknesses clearly presented?
- Is any information missing?

Previous experience has shown that these elements are often lacking in self-evaluation reports. However, in examining the reports with these questions in mind the peer review group should not formulate its final judgement. This is a first impression, based on written information. During subsequent discussions and the site visit there will be time to form a more considered opinion.

Each member of the peer review group is requested to send his/her comments on the self-evaluation report to the secretary of the group by October 17th. At the first meeting the secretary will summarize the comments of all peer review group members, and subsequently prepare an information sheet about the Faculty, summarizing quantitative data and its principal characteristics, based on the self-evaluation. In addition the secretary of the group will formulate a draft version of the terms of reference for the site visit, for discussion at the preparatory meeting.

Formulation of the terms of reference

Every expert has implicit ideas about the quality of a curriculum or the qualities of the graduates. Individual terms of reference will also differ because of the different backgrounds and different experiences of the members of the group. It may therefore prove helpful if one of the first tasks at the meetings of the peer review group is to make implicit opinions explicit and to formulate common terms of reference, acceptable to all peer review group members. This would provide the framework for the group to evaluate the Faculty of Law.

In defining their terms of reference, the peer review group should always keep in mind that the aims and objectives as set forward by the Faculty of Law have to be the starting point for their evaluation. The intention is not to impose external criteria and/or standards, for example from a professional body. However, the peer review group must verify whether the aims and objectives proposed by the Faculty are sufficiently clear, complete and academically rigorous.

During its meetings the peer review group will:

discuss the self-evaluation report

come to an agreement on its terms of reference

decide upon a division of labour for the group

Possible topics for discussion

During the meetings, certain topics concerning the terms of reference will probably be brought up. One of the basic problems is how to evaluate the quality of education, or what the peer review group should be looking for. This involves at least four questions:

Are the goals and aims clearly formulated?

How are these goals and aims translated into the curricula?

Do student assessments and examinations reflect the content of the programmes and courses?

Does a graduate have the expected knowledge, skills and attitudes?

These factors defining quality are further formulated in the following figure:

Stated goals and aims	$\rightarrow$	Translation of goals/aims in curricula	$\rightarrow$	Reflections of programme contents in examinations and assignments	$\rightarrow$	The graduate: what did he/she acquire with regard to: a) knowledge b) skills c) attitudes

The peer review group is also asked to take the following questions into consideration:

Are the programmes offered by the Faculty of Law of sufficient academic standard from an international perspective?

Are law graduates from the Faculty of Law well prepared for the labour market?

Should any subject areas/study fields be more strongly emphasized in the curriculum?

How does the research aspect of law function in the Faculty?

Quality is a concept which can be interpreted in many ways. We cannot speak of "quality"; we have to speak about qualities, or aspects of quality. The consequence is that a peer review group has to look for the requirements of the different stakeholders: the students, the academic community, employers, government, and society at large. This is difficult to judge at first, without spending a great deal of time in lectures and seminars, but that is not the role of the peer review group.

Indirectly, an opinion can be formed by drawing on the comments of students with respect to the educational provision, the extent to which the lecturers are able to receive teacher training, and the extent to which teaching skills are taken into account in the appointment and promotion of staff. These are aspects to discuss with staff and students.

The quality of the educational programmes is further determined by the content and level of the subject matter taught. The content is again strongly dependent on the objectives and the manner in which these are translated into final student assignments. To a certain extent, the course description gives some insight into the course content. Questions which can be asked in this context are related to the consistency of the programmes and the underlying philosophy.

The given restraints and educational policy also determine the quality of the educational programme. What are the conditions under which the degree programme must give shape to the educational process? What is the relationship between teaching and research? What is the situation concerning study load? What policy is followed with respect to education? An important aspect of educational organization and management is the structural quality control. In what ways are these attended to? What is done as a result of evaluations?

The relationship between education and research

The main emphasis of this review is on teaching. Nonetheless, the link between teaching and research is characteristic for a university, and hence educational quality cannot be evaluated without taking this link into account. Questions like: "How do students come into contact with research? What role does research play in the programmes?" cannot be avoided and must be answered during the review. The evaluation of research projects or research programmes as such is not part of the terms of reference of the peer review group.

The Site Visit

The site visit schedule for the institution should include the following:

1.   Initial meeting with the university authorities

The visits should start with an introductory meeting with the rector (president) of the institution and senior members of the administration. During this meeting the mandate and objectives of the peer review group should be presented.

2.   Meeting with the self-evaluation group

During this meeting the peer review group can inquire about points made in the self-evaluation reports, and request clarification and explanation.

3.   Meetings with representatives of different departments

The meeting with the department staff will be used for a discussion on the content of the curricula, aims and objectives. Other topics to be discussed are the manner of student assessment, examinations, students' work, research projects etc.

4.   Meetings with representatives of the student body

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture receives nominations for student representatives from the student organisations, approximately one student from each department. The students are a rich source of information, but the information needs to be compared with the ideas of the staff members. Student interviews are important for gaining insight into the work load, the teaching qualifications of the staff, the coherence of the programme, whether they are familiar with the goals and aims of the curricula, and the organization of the curricula and the facilities. Interviews with students should be held in the absence of staff members so that the students may speak freely.

a.   Meeting with undergraduates

b.   Meeting with postgraduates

5.   Meeting with graduates

The peer review group will meet approximately seven graduates who have graduated within the last 10 years.

6.   Meeting with external stakeholders

The peer review group will meet approximately five external stakeholders. The aim of the meeting is to hear outside views on matters concerning humanities in Iceland.

7.   Examination of facilities

Part of the programme of the site visit should be dedicated to examining facilities: lecture halls, working group rooms, laboratories, practical rooms, libraries etc. For the visit to the facilities, the peer review group could be split up.

8.   Final meeting with the university authorities

The visit should conclude with a discussion between the peer review group and those representatives of the university authorities who participated in the initial meeting. It may be the case that the peer review group finds it relevant at this time to present its preliminary impressions. In that case the peer review group should use the occasion to discuss the main elements of its findings. It is at this point in the evaluation that the peer review group can have a personal discussion about a number of things, since the public report will not include any of the elements involving individuals.

The Final Report

It is important that the peer review group spend some time at end of each day to formulate its findings. The group will also be able to spend time together after the visits in order to sum up for the report.

After the site visit, the secretary will write a first draft of the Faculty, drawing on peer review group member comments and minutes of the meetings. The secretary will use a format for the report that is compatible with the format and structure of the guidelines for self-evaluation. The draft report will be distributed among the members of the peer review group for additions and comments. The final version will then be sent to the institution for clarification of factual errors. The peer review group will decide how to deal with any comments from the Faculty. The final report of the peer review group shall be completed within two months of the end of the site visit.

The following is a suggestion for the format of the peer review group report, based on the items of the *Guidelines for self-evaluation.* The peer review group may choose to structure its report in a different way, combine some items, omit others or include new ones.

Checklist on structure and approach of the peer review report

1.   Introduction

    The peer review group

    Terms of reference

    Working method

    Short evaluation of the review

2.   The Faculty's policy and objectives

    Official objectives of the university

    Research policy and objectives regarding teachers' research

    Policy on connection between research/scholarship and teaching

    Policy on students' on-the-job training (if applicable)

    Policy on weight of individual study factors

    Connection of quality policy with the formal quality assurance system
    of the university

3.   Internal quality assurance of the Faculty

    Organisation of internal quality evaluation

    Measures on the quality of study/teaching

    Students' involvement in internal quality evaluation

4.   Structure and content of study programmes

    Organisation of study programmes (undergraduate, postgraduate,
    Ph.D)

    Connection between objectives and courses

    Connection of study material to teaching

    Relative emphasis on Icelandic and foreign-language teaching
    materials

5.   Teaching and teaching methods

Organisation of the programme and responsibility for instruction

Teaching methods, e.g. proportional weight of assignments, lectures and seminars

Support for students, e.g. regarding study methods and skills

Connection between regular instruction and on-the-job training (if applicable)

6. On-the-job training (if applicable)

Duration and timing of on-the-job training during the study process

Preparation of students for on-the-job training

Preparation of tutors and teachers supervising students in on-the-job training

Tasks of students in on-the-job training

Organisation, responsibility and monitoring of on-the-job training by the higher education institution

Guidance, counselling and on-site instruction of students in on-the-job training

Connections to other studies

Student evaluation of on-the-job training

7. Student assessment

Methods and tools for student assessment (NB distance learning if applicable)

Frequency of examinations

Responsibility for content of examinations, and examination requirements

Connections between student assessment and objectives

8. Students

Student numbers/interpretation of statistical data: e.g. trends in student numbers, number of new enrolments, graduates, and place of residence, gender and age.

Admission requirements and selection of entrants.

Drop-out rate

Progress of study, duration of study

Results of study

Teachers' guidance

Students' right to influence study

Students' responsibility for their own studies.

Student attitudes to the Faculty

Students' progress after graduation (e.g. vis-à-vis employment, salary, postgraduate study)

9.   Staff and human resources management

Staffing: number and composition

Division of teachers' responsibilities in teaching, administration, research (utilisation of teachers' specialist skills)

Employment policy (e.g. appointments, termination, job security, autonomy), renewal, training, ongoing education of staff etc.

Teachers' qualifications and experience

Methods of evaluating teachers, e.g. teaching evaluation

Application of the findings of teaching evaluation to personnel management

Staff attitudes to the Faculty

10.   Facilities

Lecture halls, laboratories, libraries, computer rooms etc.

Infrastructural support

Budget and sources of funding

11.   Administration

Overall management of studies

Management of specific study options

Management of on-the-job training (if applicable)

Students' right of appeal

Methods of monitoring students' progress

12. Research and development work

Connection between teachers' research projects and study objectives

Connection between research and teaching and student assignments

Co-ordination of projects and co-operation on research

Teachers' and students' links to research agencies

Teachers' activity in research

Promulgation of findings of teachers' research

Principal means of funding research

Financing of research

13. External relations

Faculty's contacts with private, public and professional bodies

Consultation with external parties concerning new programme offerings

Contacts with other institutions of higher education, nationally and abroad

Participation in international student-exchange programmes

International links and collaboration agreements between the institution/Faculty and other parties

Relations with other faculties with the institution

14. Summary of findings

Main conclusions and recommendations

A.2　Rules on Quality Control in Higher Education

No. 666 12 September 2003

RULES

on quality control in higher education

I. Objectives

Art. 1

The objective of quality control in higher education is to maintain and raise the quality of teaching in higher education institutions (HEIs), to improve the organisation of HEIs, to promote greater responsibility of HEIs for their own activities, and to ensure their competitiveness in the international arena.

II. Quality assurance systems in higher education institutions

Art. 2

An HEI shall fulfil its obligations to monitor quality of teaching by having a formal quality assurance system. One aspect of this is systematic internal evaluation by the HEI, or units within it, and formal consideration of the evaluation by the HEI, with the purpose of improving teaching. The work of teachers shall also be systematically evaluated. The HEI shall promulgate a description of its quality assurance system. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture may at any time request information relating to the quality assurance system.

III. External quality control

Art. 3

External quality control of higher education teaching may cover an HEI as a whole, specific disciplines, departments, study programmes, faculties, or other specified units within the institution. External quality control may also extend to several HEIs or units at the same time. External quality control covers all factors concerned in teaching,

including management, human resources, study assessment, student affairs and facilities.

An HEI shall meet the expenses of its self-evaluation from its funding. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture meets the costs of external review.

Art. 4

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture determines when an external review shall take place as provided in these rules, and what the focus of the review shall be. The minister shall appoint for this purpose a peer review group, which shall be responsible for carrying out the review. Appointments to a peer review group shall take account of the following:

a.   A peer review group shall comprise 3-6 people. The group shall include individuals who meet some of the following criteria: qualifications in the relevant field of scholarship, or extensive experience of work in higher education, of quality control and of employing graduates.

b.   No member of the peer review group may have any links to the institution evaluated.

c.   At least one member of the group shall be employed outside Iceland.

The work of a peer review group shall be subject to guidance and a letter of appointment from the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, and it shall have a secretary who organises its work and writes its report. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture shall issue a schedule for the review, its time-frame and its costs, and guidelines for self-evaluation, and shall monitor the implementation of the review.

Art. 5

The rector of the HEI appoints a self-evaluation group and its chair. The chair organises and is responsible for the self-evaluation, and writing of the self-evaluation report. He/she also liases with bodies inside and outside the relevant HEI and organises the peer review group's site-visit. The self-evaluation group shall comprise at least four and not more than six members, who shall correctly reflect the internal organisation of the unit being evaluated. They shall all work within the relevant unit, and the group shall include representatives of Faculty, students and administration.

Art. 6

After self-evaluation has been completed the peer review group visits the institution, verifies the self-evaluation report, examines other factors it may deem necessary, and submits a report on its findings. The peer review group shall complete its report within two months of the conclusion of the visit to the HEI. Before the peer review group submits its final report, representatives of the relevant HEI shall be given the opportunity to comment upon the factual content of the report. The peer review group shall consider the HEI's comments and then complete its report for submission to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Art. 7

The report of the peer review group shall be promulgated in its entirety. Within three months of the promulgation of the final report, the relevant HEI shall promulgate its report on its response to the findings. Within two years of that time the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture shall ascertain whether and how the HEI has responded to the findings of the external review.

Art. 8

These rules are issued on the basis of authority provided in para. 1 art. 5 of the Universities Act no. 136/1997, and they shall take effect immediately. Rules no. 331/1999 on quality control in higher education teaching shall also be abrogated from that time.

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 12 September 2003.

Davíð Oddsson.

Guðmundur Árnason.

A.3   Agenda for PRG site-visit

Higher Education External Review

Faculty of Humanities – University of Iceland

October 24th to October 28th 2005

Monday October 24th 2005

10:00-12:00   **First Meeting of the Peer Review Group**

The Radisson SAS Saga Hotel (Conference Room D)

12:00-13:00   **Lunch**

The Radisson SAS Saga Hotel (Skrúður)

13:00-14:00   **First Meeting with the University Authorities**

University of Iceland (Main building)

Kristín Ingólfsdóttir, Rector

Ásta Hrönn Maack, Head of Administration for Operational and Executive Affairs

Guðmundur R. Jónsson, Director of Operational and Executive Administration

Halldór Jónsson, Director of Research

Magnús D. Baldursson, Managing Director of the Rector's Office and Head of Quality Administration

Þórður Kristinsson, Director of Academic Affairs

14:00-17:00   **Meeting of the Peer Review Group**

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Coffee Break during the meeting

Tuesday October 25th 2004

08:00-09:00   Meeting with the Self-Evaluation Group

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Jón Axel Harðarson, Associate Professor, Chair of the Department of Icelandic and Chair of the group

Oddný G. Sverrisdóttir, Associate Professor and Dean

Höskuldur Þráinsson, Professor and Vice-Dean

Ástráður Eysteinsson, Professor and Chair of the Department of Literature and Linguistics

Gro Tove Sandsmark, Lector and Chair of the Department of German and Nordic Languages.

Hólmfríður Garðarsdóttir, Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Romance and Classical Languages

Matthew Whelpton, Associate Professor, Department of English

Róbert H. Haraldsson, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy.

Valur Ingimundarson, Associate Professor, Department of History

Marvin Lee Dupree, Student

09:00-10:15   Meeting with the Department of Comparative Literature and General Linguistics

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Guðni Elísson, Associate Professor and Vice-Chair of the Department of Literature and Linguistics

Ástráður Eysteinsson, Professor

Auður Ólafsdóttir, Assistant Professor

Gauti Kristmannsson, Adjunct

Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir, Adjunct

Rannveig Sverrisdóttir, Assistant Professor

10:15-10:30   Coffee Break

10:30-11:45   Meeting with the Department of English

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Matthew Whelpton, Associate Professor

Guðrún Björk Guðsteinsdóttir, Associate Professor

Pétur Knútsson, Assistant Professor

Julian Meldon D´Arcy, Professor

Kári Gíslason, Part Time Lecturer

12:00-13:00   Lunch with the Rector of the University of Iceland

13:15-14:30   Meeting with the Department of Romance and Classical Languages (Includes Spanish, French, Italian, Classical Latin and Classical Greek)

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Hólmfríður Garðarsdóttir, Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Romance and Classical Languages

Ásdís Rósa Magnúsdóttir, Associate Professor

Margherita Giacobazzi, Assistant Professor

Sigurður Pétursson, Assistant Professor

Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson, Assistant Professor

Francois Heenen, Part Time Lecturer

14:30-15:45   Meeting with the Department of German and Nordic Languages (Includes German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish as well as Japanese).

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Gro Tove Sandsmark, Lector and Chair of the Department of German and Nordic Languages

Auður Hauksdóttir, Associate Professor

Magnús Sigurðsson, Adjunct

15:45-16:00   Coffee Break

16:00-17:00   Meeting with External Stakeholders

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Mjöll Snæsdóttir, Institute of Archaeology

Jón Karl Helgason, Editor at Bjartur Publishing

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Member of the City Council of Reykjavík

Ingi Bogi Bogason, Educational affairs at the Federation of Icelandic Industries and a member of the alumni

Viðar Hreinsson, Literary Historian and Manager of the Reykjavík Academy

Ólöf Pétursdóttir, Head of Translation Centre, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

17:00-18:00   Meeting of the Peer Review Group (301 Nýi Garður)

Wednesday October 26th 2005

09:00-10:30   Meeting with the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature including Icelandic for foreign students

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Jón Axel Harðarson, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Icelandic

Guðrún Nordal, Professor

Jón G. Friðjónsson, Professor

Sigríður D. Þorvaldsdóttir, Adjunct

10:30-10:45   Coffee Break

10:45-12:00   Meeting with the Department of Philosophy

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy

Vilhjálmur Árnason, Professor

Róbert Haraldsson, Associate Professor

Björn Þorsteinsson, Part Time Lecturer

12:00-13:00   Lunch

Nordic House

13:00-14:15   Meeting with the Department of History

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, Professor and Chair of the Department of History

Anna Agnarsdóttir, Professor

Valur Ingmundarson, Associate Professor

Orri Vésteinsson, Assistant Professor

Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, Part Time Lecturer

14:15-14:30   Coffee Break

14:15-15:15   Meeting with the Dean and other Faculty Authorities

(301 Nýi Garður)

Oddný G. Sverrisdóttir, Associate Professor and Dean

Höskuldur Þráinsson, Professor and Vice-Dean

Anna Agnarsdóttir, Associate Professor and Former Dean

Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson, Professor and Former Vice-Dean

Vilhjálmur Árnason, Professor and Member of the University Council

Róbert Haraldsson, Associate Professor and Member of the University's Council Committee of Finance

Torfi Tulinus, Professor and Head of the Centre for Research in the Humanities

Guðrún Nordal, Professor and Representative of The Icelandic Centre for Research

15:30-16:30   Looking at the Facilities

Nýi-Garður (Presentation of the Intranet (UGLA), The Language Centre, the Website Icelandic-Online,), Oddi, Árnagarður, The University Library, The University Main Building, The Nordic House,

Supervision: Oddný G. Sverrisdóttir, Dean, Guðrún Birgisdóttir, International Coordinator and Public Relation Manager and Matthew Whelpton, Associate Professor

16:30-18:00   Meeting of the Peer Review Group

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Thursday October 27th 2005

09:00-12:00   Meeting of the Peer Review Group

The Radisson SAS Saga Hotel (Conference Room C)

12:00-13:00   Lunch

The Radisson SAS Saga Hotel (Skrúður)

13:15-14:00   Meeting with Representatives of the Student Body - Undergraduates

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Jón Skafti Gestsson, History

Hlynur Orri Stefánsson, Philosophy

Silvia Seidenfaden, German

Hulda Kristín Jónsdóttir, English

Auður Halldórsdóttir, Literature

Valý Ágústa Þórsteinsdóttir, Romance and Classical Languages

Stígur Helgason, Icelandic

14:15-15:00   Meeting with Representatives of the Student Body - Postgraduates

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Anna Þórsdóttir, Spanish

Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir, History

Silke Wälti, German

Bjarki Már Karlsson, Icelandic

Ida Lön, Danish

Anna Margrét Bjarnadóttir, Danish

15:00-15:15   Coffee Break

15:15-16:00   Meeting with Representatives of the Student Body - Graduates

University of Iceland (301 Nýi Garður)

Hallgrímur Þór Þórdísarson, Spanish

Haukur Ingvarsson, Icelandic

Sigrún Pálsdóttir, History

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Icelandic

Sigríður Héðinsdóttir, German

Aðalheiður Jónsdóttir, Enska

16:00-17:00   Meeting of the Peer Review Group

(301 Nýi Garður)

19:00   Dinner at the Pearl (Perlan)

Friday October 28th 2005

09:00-10:30   Final Meeting with the University Authorities

University of Iceland (Main building)

Kristín Ingólfsdóttir, Rector

Ásta Hrönn Maack, Head of Administration for Operational and Executive Affairs

Guðmundur R. Jónsson, Director of Operational and Executive Administration

Halldór Jónsson, Director of Research

Magnús D. Baldursson, Managing Director of the Rector's Office and Head of Quality Administration

Þórður Kristinsson, Director of Academic Affairs

10:30-12:00   Final Meeting of the Peer Review Group

The Culture House (Þjóðmenningarhús), Hverfisgata 15

Round table meeting room (Hringborðsstofa)

12:00-13:00   Lunch

The Culture House (Þjóðmenningarhús), Hverfisgata 15

A.4   List of documents received

- Self Evaluation Report, Faculty of Humanities, University of Iceland, 2005

- Official introductory leaflets/booklets for Faculty and individual departments

- Examples of BA thesis

- Examples of MA thesis

- Data on grading and exam procedures from Department of Philosphy