

# Accreditation Report

Doctoral Studies in the Fields of Health and Social Sciences

University of Iceland

Expert Committee Report

April 2009

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## **I. Introduction**

### ***I.1 The Expert Committee***

Dr. Christian Thune, Past Executive Director of the Danish Evaluation Institute, Denmark  
(chair)

Prof. Dr. Maurice P. Boland, Principal, College of Life Sciences, University College Dublin

Prof. Dr. Raimo Hiltunen, Dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Helsinki

M.A. Magnus Lyngdal Magnusson, Head of Division for Science and Innovation, The Icelandic Centre for Research – RANNIS, Reykjavik, Iceland (Liaison Officer).

### ***I.2 Terms of Reference***

The expert committee is appointed according to Art. 4 of Rules No. 37 on Doctoral Studies in Higher Education Institutions to provide reference of the ability of higher education institutions to provide Doctorate Degrees. The committee is to base its reference on the components of Art. 3 of the same act. They are:

- a. Role and objectives of higher education institutions for organising doctoral studies.
- b. Definition of doctoral studies with regard to the National Qualification Framework issued by the Minister of Education.
- c. Title of degree and duration of doctoral study programme.
- d. Description of admission requirements and demands for satisfactory preparation.
- e. Description of application procedure.
- f. Information about structure of doctoral study administration, including doctorate committee, doctoral defence and qualifications requirements of examiners.
- g. Accreditation of the field of study by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

- h. Supervisors' position within the relevant study field, activity in research and published work.
- i. Information about the structure of research activities and future strategy within the relevant field of study.
- j. Information about relation between undergraduate and graduate study programmes and the number of graduated students at Masters level for the past few years.
- k. Position of the higher education institution within the study and research field and its sub-fields in international comparison. Cooperation with research institutions at national and international level, higher education institutions and companies.
- l. Description of financing of doctoral studies.

### ***1.3 Working Method***

The Expert Committee received the application and documentation for doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland on 8 December 2008. The first Committee meeting was held on 11 January 2009. The Committee made a site visit to the University of Iceland on 12 January 2008 (see Appendix 1).

The Committee had the occasion to meet the Rector Kristín Ingólfssdóttir together with Jón Atli Benediktsson, Head of Development (and now Vice Rector), and Þórður Kristinsson, Head of Division for Academic Affairs for an introductory session on the research visions of the University and strategies for enhancing the quality of research by well functioning doctoral studies.

The Committee had a further interview with the leadership group responsible for the new Graduate School. The group included apart from Jón Atli Benediktsson and Þórður Kristinsson also Halldór Jónsson, Head of Division of Science and Research, Magnús Diðrik Baldursson, Office Manager, and Róbert H. Haraldsson, professor.

In four further sessions with representatives from the many schools, faculties and centers the Committee had the possibility to discuss strategies, problems and facilities of doctoral studies with first deans of schools and heads of faculties, secondly representatives of science committees and graduate studies commission, thirdly representatives of doctoral students and finally with PhD supervisors.

The Committee considered its conclusions and reported its first impressions to Ministry of Education, Science and Culture representatives on 15 January 2009. Following the visit, drafts of sections of the report were circulated and the committee agreed on a final version of the report by email correspondence.

The descriptive parts of the final version were sent to the University of Iceland for a check of factual errors and misinterpretations on 16 March 2009. The Committee received some corrections and made minor changes to sections III.a, III.e, III.f, III.h and III.i. The changes had no bearing on the accreditation.

The Expert Committee was given excellent help by Magnus Lyngdal Magnusson from Rannis in preparing and conducting the visit and most recently during the finalization of this report.

#### ***1.4 Short evaluation of the work process***

The University of Iceland's application is very long and to an extent reproductive of documents also placed in the many documents listed in appendixes. The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Education in future accreditations specific the expectations in terms of format and content of applications and documents.

However, after the Committee had made itself familiar with the application and documents it could consider it well prepared for the site visit that took place in a constructive and forthcoming atmosphere.

The Committee appreciated the clearly articulated message from the Rector and other leadership members concerning the priorities and ambitions of the University for research in general and doctoral studies in particular.

The main part of the visit was sessions with deans of schools and heads of faculties (20 participants), with representatives of science committees and graduate studies

commission (14 participants), with representatives of doctoral students (18 participants) and finally with supervisors (19 participants). The first two of these were one hour sessions and the two latter one and a half hour sessions.

It follows that the Committee faced a major challenge in organizing these large sessions in a manner that secured a coherent and transparent feedback on key issues. The Committee did largely succeed in this, but at the same time experienced very different reactions during the sessions towards issues such as critical mass, risks of inbreeding, availability of qualified supervisors and the prospects for maintaining sufficient funding for doctoral studies in the present state of national finances. The Committee took note that all participants in these discussions clearly demonstrated their focus and motivation towards the furthering of doctoral studies.

In sum the Committee succeeded in combining the application documents and the site visit interviews to provide a satisfactory foundation for its conclusions on accreditation of the University of Iceland, which in general terms gave the Committee a clear impression of a mature university well prepared to proceed with doctoral studies.

## **II. University of Iceland**

The purpose of doctoral studies at the University of Iceland is described in accordance with the Rules on Doctoral Studies in Higher Education Institutions No. 37/2007 according to Art. 7 of the Higher Education Act No. 63/2006 and in the Rules for the University of Iceland No. 458/2000. General rules are stated in Art. 66-69 of Chapter VI which concern the regulations for doctoral degrees and titles, admission to doctoral studies, general framework of organized study programmes for doctoral degrees and doctoral degrees without prior programmes of organized study.

Further requirements and criteria are delineated in doctoral programme regulations of the former Iceland University of Education which are set in accordance with Rules No. 37/2007 on Rules for doctoral programme in universities according to Art. 7 of the law No. 63/2006. Standards and requirements for quality of doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland are described in the University of Iceland Quality Control System approved by the University General Forum in May 2004, a part of the University of Iceland's quality assurance system.

According to the mentioned requirements, the University of Iceland has numerous obligations related to quality assurance, pursuant to legislative instruments and contractual agreements concerning the funding of teaching and research. The obligations are listed in the above mentioned University of Iceland Quality Assurance Programme in which also are listed the objectives of the programme and quality assurance programme. It is assumed at the outset that the University's quality assurance programme meets the minimum requirements set forth in legislative instruments and in the contractual agreements for funding of teaching and research. The quality assurance programme covers among others teaching, research, students, and faculties in educational and scientific fields and joint administration in which is defined that the Rector is the University's quality assurance manager, and the Office of the Rector and the Quality Assurance Committee are responsible for the implementation and execution of the quality assurance programme.

### **III. State of doctoral Studies at University of Iceland**

#### *a. Role and objectives of higher education institutions for organising doctoral studies.*

The Expert Committee got a strong impression from the application and the visit of the high priority set by the University of Iceland on becoming a leading university at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. This target is planned to be reached by expanding and strengthening doctoral studies at the University, increasing the number of papers published in respected international scholarly journals, attracting the best-qualified students and academics, promoting collaboration with respected universities overseas, strengthening the bond with the Icelandic society and economy, reinforcing the University's administrative system, and improving its support services.

The Committee notes that the aim of the University of Iceland is to increase the annual number of candidates awarded the doctoral degree by a factor of five before the year 2011, to around 65 per year. The University estimates that roughly one-third of the doctoral students at the University will be foreign students. The University has already undertaken diverse measures in order to execute this plan and it will continue to do so to an increasing extent. It is the University's assessment that this enhancement of doctoral studies is the key to its success in research in the future. In November 2008 there were 331 registered doctoral students at the University of Iceland, thereof 72 in

the field of health sciences and 72 in the field of social sciences, including 27 registered in the School of Education.

On the one hand the Committee certainly applauds a strategy that aims at diminishing the risks of too little critical mass in the doctoral programmes and further the risk of inbreeding in small research entities. On the other hand the Committee does feel the need to question whether the present and coming funding situation for the University of Iceland will make this ambitious strategy viable.

The present and perhaps future financial crisis in Iceland has already had a serious impact on funding with a 10% cut in the 2009 budget. It is positive that University leadership is very conscious of the need to secure the quality of activities in this situation.

A running theme during the site visit sessions was also the balance between those qualified students taking their PhDs abroad and those taking PhDs at the University of Iceland. It was stated by several during the sessions that in their opinion the best students go abroad. This is perhaps not the best advertisement for Icelandic graduates to proceed with a local doctoral study and care must be taken by the University that those students are not de-motivated, who do study at the University of Iceland and perhaps at the present with restricted possibilities for studying abroad.

For its present planning period 2006-2011 the University of Iceland lists as priorities outstanding research, outstanding tuition and outstanding administration and support services. This is an element in its long-term objective of becoming one of the 100 best universities in the world, and the University of Iceland policy emphasizes that the promotion of doctoral studies will open up new opportunities for organized collaboration with other higher education institutes in Iceland and abroad. However, the UI Policy points out at the same time that the promotion of doctoral studies entails that conditions and facilities for research in many fields at the University of Iceland must be greatly improved.

In this context one of the issues brought up by the Committee in the discussions with the Rector and other leadership was the extent to which University of Iceland planned to broaden its research base by going into partnerships with related research groups in other Icelandic universities. The reaction to this question was not overwhelmingly



positive and cooperation with other universities is confined to the level of individuals. Again the main focus is on utilizing the University's strong international placement.

### *Graduate School*

A recent important initiative from UI leadership has been to establish a special Graduate School at the University for ensuring the quality and supervision of Master's and doctoral studies. The Graduate School is an institute under the auspices of the University Council. Its purpose is to oversee and uphold established standards and rules concerning the quality of graduate studies. Further the role of the Graduate School is to maintain and develop the quality of doctoral studies and to support their continuation in accordance with the decisions of the University Council.

The Graduate School executes its work in various ways as stated in details in Art. 2 of the Rules for the Graduate School at the University of Iceland, No. 490/2007. For instance the role of the Graduate School is to encourage improvements in quality, to establish and uphold shared standards and requirements concerning the quality of graduate studies, to act as a monitor to ensure that faculties follow general rules concerning entrance requirements, entrance procedures, entrance examinations, to confirm that graduate supervisors fulfill established standards and requirements, to act as a forum for consultation and co-operation regarding graduate studies within the University, to promote internationalization and work in order to ensure that graduate studies at the University are always in line with recognized international standards of excellence. A further important role for the Graduate School would be to facilitate interdisciplinary programmes.

The Committee recognizes the importance and potential impact of the Graduate School. At the same time it was evident during the site visit that this is a top down initiative which is not yet readily accepted or understood at by all at other levels of the University. Some of the faculty heads accepted the concept of one graduate school with a general responsibility for the totality of doctoral programmes. Other faculty heads argued that the concept of graduate schools would work better at the faculty level. Among supervisors and other staff there was an uncertainty or lack of knowledge about the graduate school initiative. The Committee recommends that the UI leadership gives a priority to enhancing throughout the University co-ownership with the Graduate School.

*b. Definition of doctoral studies with regard to the National Qualification Framework issued by the Minister of Education.*

The application describes the learning outcomes for the doctoral study programmes offered in the fields of health sciences and social sciences in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework for Iceland issued by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture on 8th February 2007. According to the Higher Education Institution Act No. 63/2006, Art. 5, Higher Education Institutions are required to issue comparable learning outcome descriptions, for every study program. According to the framework, there are three subsequent cycles of higher education. As a general rule, studies offered at Higher Education level in Iceland provide instruction to the following degrees: a) a Bachelor's degree, which normally takes three years, b) a Master's degree taking one to two years, and a doctoral degree, taking three to four years. As each cycle can cover different qualification objectives, the cycle is divided into levels. The application lists the doctoral programmes offered in the field of Health Sciences and in the field of Social Sciences.

In the opinion of the Expert Committee, the University of Iceland has satisfactorily met the requirements of Art. 5 of the Higher Education Act No. 63/2006 by publishing learning outcomes for doctoral programmes in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework of Iceland.

*c. Title of degree and duration of doctoral study programme.*

The application clarifies academic titles and degrees for doctoral study programmes as stated in Paragraph 3 in Art. 54 and in Art. 66 and 69 of the Rules for the University of Iceland. The application sets out the framework and quality criteria of doctoral study programmes in accordance with Art. 68 and 69 of the Rules and with the general rules of the UI and the document standards and requirements for quality of doctoral programmes and with the faculties own rules for graduate studies.

Duration of doctoral study programmes vary from 3 to 5 years according to the prerequisites for study in each instance and further requirements and criteria set out in the rules for graduate studies pertaining to each faculty, as presented in the application. The rules on doctoral studies of faculties specify the time estimated for normal study progress and the maximum length of the study period. A doctoral degree shall, as a rule, be based on a minimum of 180 ECTS following the completion of a Master's degree.

*d. Description of admission requirements and demands for satisfactory preparation.*

The application states the general admission requirements for doctoral studies in accordance with Art. 67 of the Rules of the University of Iceland. The other requirements and criteria are set out in the rules for graduate studies pertaining to each faculty and the former Iceland University School of Education. A person wishing to defend a doctoral thesis shall, as a rule, have completed a candidatus, Master's or professional qualification degree. A university faculty may organize a doctoral programme in individual subjects, in accordance with the detailed provisions of Art. 68 of these Rules and provisions on study programmes in the sections on the faculties concerned. In addition, the application declares that any further rules, set by a faculty on such programmes, must be ratified by the University Council.

Students who fulfill the demands of the faculty in question concerning previous study may apply for admission to a doctoral programme. A Faculty may arrange an assessment examination for applicants as stated in Paragraph 2 in Art. 67.

The University of Iceland has outlined the admission in accordance with the specifications of the law.

*e. Description of application procedure.*

The application procedure for the doctoral study programmes is described in Paragraphs 2-3 in Art. 68 of the general Rules of the University and the rules for graduate studies pertaining to each faculty. According to the Rules an application for doctoral study must, as a rule, be accompanied by a draft study schedule, a description of the research project and a plan of research. In addition to that a faculty may require that an application be accompanied by a detailed account concerning the study schedule and research project. The student may select a supervisor if this is requested in the appropriate faculty rules, but in other cases this is done in consultation with those responsible for doctoral programs. If a draft application for funds is already available it should accompany the application for studies.

*f. Information about structure of doctoral study administration, including doctorate committee, doctoral defence and qualifications requirements of examiners.*

Ar. 68 of the UI Rules stipulates that each faculty, which is authorised by the Council to award Master's or doctoral degrees, shall have a special standing committee. The

application relies clearly on the information about the role of the standing committee and the general structure of doctoral study administration, including doctorate committee, doctoral defence and qualifications requirements for examiners as laid out in Art. 68 and 69 of the UI Rules and in the descriptions of procedures which are set out in the rules for graduate studies pertaining to each Faculty. In the cases of the Faculties of Medicine, Pharmaceutical Sciences and Odontology doctoral, studies are administered by a joint Committee for Post-Graduate studies (CPGS). The role of the CPGS in brief is as follows: the committee sets and revises rules for post-graduate studies, organizes and runs courses for masters and doctoral students, processes applications for Master's and doctoral studies, collects and reviews progress reports. The Faculty of Nursing has its own rules on its doctoral programme. The School of Education has established in January 2009 a Committee for Doctoral Studies, which will administer the doctoral studies for the Faculty of Teacher Education, Faculty of Sport, Leisure Studies and Social Education and Faculty of Educational Studies.

The application delineates the structures and functions of standing and doctoral committees as stipulated in Art. 68 of the UI Rules. The application also gives directions and guidelines for evaluation of submitted thesis, submission and format of the final thesis, requirements of supervisors and their duties and guidelines for external examiners, opponents and doctoral defence procedure. Furthermore, the application describes the appointment an Evaluation Committee, its composition and requirement specifications for the members of Evaluation Committee in accordance with Art. 40 of the UI Rules.

Requirements for supervisors, mentors and others who assess the studies and doctoral projects set down in the Rules of faculties on doctoral studies are principally the same in all faculties concerned. In general, the supervisor shall be a tenured member of teaching staff in a relevant field and they must hold a doctoral degree or have achieved equivalent qualifications. Supervisors must be a recognized specialist in the field concerned and have published works connected to the doctoral student's project.

The application also describes the administration and composition of studies of the post-graduate programme (Doctor of public health, DrPH) for Public Health Sciences which is a joint effort of all the faculties of the UI, hosted by the Faculty of Medicine. Students for this programme are enrolled by similar mechanisms as practiced in the host faculties.

Applications are processed and approved by the Board of Public Health Education as well as by the CPGS of the Faculty where the student is registered.

In the application the Faculties of Health Sciences briefly elucidates the background of post-graduate study programmes in the Faculties and explains the ongoing interdisciplinary and international post-graduate programmes and the present status in doctoral studies and estimate annual completion of doctoral degrees in the future.

The application text of the University of Iceland covers over ten pages the administration of doctoral studies in the health science faculties. The Expert Committee notes that the application contains no similar coverage at all concerning the Faculty of Social Sciences. However, the Committee has gone through the relevant annexes laid forward by the Faculty of Social Sciences. This documentation makes it evident that the structure for the administration of doctoral programmes and supervision and assessment of doctoral students are at this faculty in good accordance with the Rules of the UI and the regulations of the faculties concerned.

*g. Accreditation of the field of study by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.*

The University of Iceland has received on 22 April 2008 an accreditation for sub-doctoral degrees in the fields of health sciences and of social sciences.

This accreditation covers also the School of Education that was in 2008 accredited as the University of Education and is now merged with the University of Iceland.

*h. Supervisors' position within the relevant study field, activity in research and published work.*

According to the accreditation application, the R&D expenditure in Iceland was 2.8% of GDP in 2005. Among the OECD countries Iceland was ranked number five after Sweden, Finland, South Korea and Switzerland. In the statistic of the relative citation indices for 30 OECD countries in the period 2001 to 2005 Iceland received high scores, especially in the fields of agricultural, medicinal, natural sciences and in the field of humanities. In this ranking agricultural sciences were ranked no. 2nd after Finland, medicinal sciences and natural sciences were both ranked no.3rd after Switzerland and United States. Social sciences were ranked no. 16th and humanities no. 4th.

The agreement between the University of Iceland and the Union of University Teachers stipulates rules for evaluation of academic staff. This formal system offers a good tool and indicators for evaluating research activity and output.

In the terms of average research points of the faculties included in the present accreditation application the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences received the highest average points in 2007 (36) followed by the faculties of Social Sciences (35), Nursing (26), Law (25), Economics and Business Administration (21), Medicine (18) and the Faculty of Odontology (17). The average number of points in the School of Education is 21 for professors, 19 for associate professors and 17 for assistant professors. In the terms of published articles in ISI in 2007 the Faculty of Medicine published most (127) followed by the faculties of Pharmaceutical Sciences (20), Nursing (15), Social Sciences (14), Odontology and Economics and Business Administration (both 7 publications), and Education (5). Values for the Faculty of Law were not on hand. In these statistics difference in sizes should be noticed.

A great number of the University's academic staff has carried out their degrees from the world's top universities as demonstrated in the application. The Expert Committee considers this to be one of the strengths of the University of Iceland. The same goes for the long standing international contacts of the staff members, faculties and research institutions. The co-operations of the UI in research with foreign universities in Scandinavia, other European countries, the USA and the other countries has increased year by year (with the exception of the year 2005) to the level of over 400. At the same time the Committee must note that the high priority on internationalization of research is costly in budget terms and that university leadership must accordingly take care that present budget cuts do not unduly compromise this priority.

According to the University of Iceland Policy 2006-2011, doctoral studies are subject to strict quality requirements; in order to meet these criteria; a university must have outstandingly talented supervisors. In addition to that, Art. 68 in the Rules for The University of Iceland No. 458/2000 stipulates that supervisors of master's and doctoral students must be recognized specialists in the field concerned and have published works connected to the student's project in an arena where professionally high demands are made.

As described in the application and its appendices the supervisors in doctoral programmes in the fields of the Health Sciences and Social Sciences at the University of Iceland have satisfactory and in many cases excellent educational backgrounds, research outputs, international contacts and collaborations with foreign universities and fulfill established standards and the requirement set up in Art. 2 of the Rules on Doctoral Studies in Higher Education Institutions according to Art. 7 of the Higher Education Act no. 63/2006.

*i. Information about the structure of research activities and future strategy within the relevant field of study.*

Future strategy within the Health Sciences will be based on a strategic plan for the period 2006-2011. The Faculties of Health Sciences, except the Faculty of Odontology, have established strategic policies for this time period. Characteristic for all the policies are the aims for increasing collaboration with other faculties of the University of Iceland and other higher education institutions, both in Iceland and abroad. The objectives are also to increase basic funding and competitive funding from business and donations, renovate and improving research premises and facilities, increase the number of enrolled doctoral students and generally increase research activity, raise the quality of research and the number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, in the application, the Faculty of Odontology emphasizes collaboration among disciplines in the UI through interdisciplinary research and study programmes and encourages international collaboration in research projects.

Research in the Faculty of Medicine is mainly organized in cooperation with Landspítali–University Hospital (LUH) and with a number of research institutes and institutions in the field of the Faculty of Medicine as explained in the application. The vision for the future is described in detail in the well prepared document on Faculty Medicine Policy 2006 – 2011. This strategic plan is ambitious and strives for a significant increase in the number of annual doctor's degree. The Faculty's goal is to double funding from business and donations and to increase international collaboration. The plan for the given span is aspiring but realistic and reachable.

In the Faculty of Nursing research activities are focused in collaboration with local health institutions, primarily with LUH. The Faculty also collaborates with the Faculty of Medicine by participating in interdisciplinary research and doctoral graduate

programmes in Public Health hosted by the Faculty of Medicine. The Faculty is also in collaboration with the Research Institute of Nursing Sciences, which is a cooperative project of the Faculty and LUH.

According to the future vision of the Faculty, the number of doctoral students shall be increased, facilities offered will increase substantially and similarly research collaboration with LUH will also increase substantially. The strategic plan is that one-third of faculty members will participate in multidisciplinary research projects and a half of Faculty members will be participants in international research projects with outstanding universities with Nordic and other European universities as targets.

The Faculty of Odontology emphasizes international and interdisciplinary research and study programmes and focuses in the subjects of its own discipline as given in the application. The Faculty collaborates with the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences in the field of drug development and testing, including clinical trials. The other partners in collaboration are the Institute of Public Health, the LUH and collaborators abroad, e.g. the University of Indiana and the University of Manchester. In the application the Faculty gives an overview of current and ongoing research activity.

The research activities in the Faculty of Pharmacy are strongly focused in cooperation with domestic and international partners. Collaborations are based on formal agreements made with: LUH regarding clinical education of pharmacy students as well as with other institutions such as the Heart Association, the Icelandic Medicines Control Agency, the Environmental Agency, and the Keldur Institute for Experimental Pathology. In addition to the collaborations listed above, there is also teaching and research cooperation between the Faculty and a number of the companies mentioned in the application.

A very important partner in the Faculty's research is the Research Institute for Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy (RIPOP), established in 2007 on the initiative of the Faculty. The collaborating partners of the institute are the Ministry of Health, The Directorate of Health, LUH, Icelandic Medicines Control Agency, and the Pharmaceutical Society of Iceland. Various research projects are underway at the institute in cooperation with these partners and international collaborators. Many of the ongoing research projects belong to the top subjects in worldwide pharmaceutical research.



The Faculty of Social Sciences is the largest at the University of Iceland with around 2.500 students. The Faculty graduated 434 students in 2006 and has during recent years had a strong focus on doctoral studies. For the present there are 50 students enrolled in these programmes. However, only four have yet concluded their studies.

The application covers extensively the research activities across the Faculty. A key role is held by the Social Science Research Institute, which has the objective of promoting the practice of social scientific methods and importantly to give the public an understanding of the practical applications of the Faculty's research. This institute functions at the same time as a common forum for twelve scientific centers and institutes in the Faculty.

The Faculty of Social Sciences presents its future research strategy 2006-2011 in terms of a strong emphasis on doctoral programmes leading to an increased international profile in research, staff and publications. The Faculty aims to promote the development of an Icelandic scientific community, which meets international standards. It is not clear to which extent this vision includes cooperation with social science researchers in other Icelandic universities. The Faculty states that this strategy calls for additional revenues and funding of research. This raises the question of the extent to which the strategy can be pursued fully as the present financial situation of Iceland implies a decrease rather than an increase in government funding.

The Faculty of Economics and Business Administration is divided into the Departments of Economics and of Business respectively. The Faculty has more than 1.600 students and considers itself to be the leading Icelandic teaching and research institution in its field. The research strategy 2006-2011 aims at placing the Faculty on par with that of the best business schools in the other Nordic countries. An important element in this strategy is the continued build up of the doctoral programmes. The aim is a group of 12-16 active doctoral students, graduating 3-4 per year. Again an increase in funding is indicated as necessary.

The Faculty of Law was established in 1908 is the largest law faculty in Iceland with 740 students and app. 30 staff members. The Faculty aims to increase greatly research in order to reach the level of faculties of law at the other Nordic universities. The Institute of Law is the centre for research at the Faculty and has entered into increasing

international and Nordic cooperation. In doctoral programmes there is cooperation with the Danish universities offering similar programmes.

The specific aim of the doctoral programmes is an annual turnout of two PhDs. Again the majority of research is expected to be sponsored by external funding and contracted research. In the same way the ambitions for research at the Faculty are stated in the strategy for 2006-2011 as calling for a major increase in support for studies of Law with more funding for research.

The School of Education was formerly the Icelandic University of Education, which was merged 1st July 2008 with the University of Iceland. The school has three faculties of respectively Teacher Education, of Sports, Social Education and Leisure Studies and of Education Studies.

A Standing Committee for research supports the operations of twelve research centers and groups. The School of Education has formulated a research policy for the period 2008-2013 with the overall aim to strengthen the School's research and its impact on the Icelandic educational system and with specific aims and activities to strengthen its doctoral programme. A standing committee for doctoral studies has also been established.

The Expert Committee finds that the present research activities of the Health and Social Science Faculties and Schools are at an acceptable level to form the basis for doctoral programmes. The Committee notes the very relevant, but also ambitious strategic plans of the different faculties, and it feels some concern that a key premise for these plans is increased funding at a time when the prospect for this is not evident.

*j. Information about relation between undergraduate and graduate study programmes and the number of graduated students at Master's level for the past few years.*

Total number of graduated students at Master's level has increased from 192 to 369 during the last five years in the faculties included in the present application. In particular, the number of degrees has increased in the Faculty of Economics & Business Administration from 33 to 124, being on average stable in the rest of faculties. On the other hand, the total number of doctoral degrees awarded in these faculties has not increased. The number of doctoral degrees ranges from 3 to 9 during a time span of 2003-2007.

The application states that faculty rules shall account for possible integration of and connections between Master's and doctoral study, with regard to courses, graduate seminars and final theses. It is also mentioned in the application that the faculty rules must specify the maximum number of credits from undergraduate courses which may be used for graduate study. According to the faculty rules, a Master's thesis is not allowed to be used as the basis for a doctoral thesis.

The general approach in the faculties is for research and teaching to be integrated at all levels of study, in so far as this is possible. The intention is to communicate to students the knowledge which is created through the instructors' research, in other words, to execute research based teaching.

*k. Position of the higher education institution within the study and research field and its sub-fields in international comparison. Cooperation with research institutions at national and international level, higher education institutions and companies.*

As described above (e.g. sections III.h and III.i) the supervisors in doctoral programmes in the fields of the Health Sciences and Social Sciences at UI have excellent educational backgrounds, research output, international contacts and collaborations with foreign universities. The international activities of faculty members of the faculties under consideration are characterized by their expertise in editorial boards of international journals, reviewing domestic and international research proposals, and working as reviewers for high impact journals. The faculty members are used as referees and opponents for foreign doctoral dissertations. They are also working in various advisory committees of companies and institutions and they have been invited to be guest lecturers at foreign universities.

All the Faculties at the School of Health Sciences have already long-term and always expanding international relations, practices and agreements both in teaching including postgraduate education and research. A great number of supervisors at these faculties have received their doctoral degrees from universities abroad and have later been generators in building up research networks between the UI and universities all over the world.

The faculties under consideration have made numerous formalized collaboration agreements, most frequently with universities in Scandinavia, other European countries,

the USA and the other countries. Collaboration agreements have been made also with institution other than universities.

Names of international partners, universities, institutes, institutions objectives of cooperation and modes of action are described in the application. Domestic cooperation among faculties of Health Sciences and with national commercial enterprises is remarkable.

*1. Description of financing of doctoral studies.*

Basic principles at the University of Iceland for financing of teaching and research in general and for allocation among the faculties are described in the application.

The main principle in financing postgraduate studies is that doctoral students apply together with their supervisor for grants in three different competitive funds of the University of Iceland or they apply for external competitive funds. Some students are funded by grants obtained by their supervisor or funded by partners in industry. In addition to mentioned possibilities, students may apply for supports from funds managed by Rannis, which annually offers a limited number of grants to doctoral students. Currently, from a total of 220 enrolled doctoral students, approximately 100 students have received funds from the UI and 20 students from funds managed by Rannis.

During recent years, the UI's income has grown rapidly which, among other things, reflects the large increase in students. The number of active students is noticed in allocation of funds to the universities of Iceland.

The financial statement of the University of Iceland for the period 2006 and 2007 is attached to the application. By estimation, total revenues increased 15.3% in total from 2006 to 2007 whilst total expenditures increased 13.9% and net income was negative. The expenditures in all faculties of Health Sciences thus increased from 2006 to 2007, ranging from 13.1% to 28.1%.

In other words the application certainly reflects that Iceland and Icelandic universities have been enjoying years of prosperity and growth that now may be seen as extraordinary. It is impossible for the Expert Committee to form an opinion on the consequences for university funding of the present deeply rooted financial crisis. However, the Committee

notes the concern and commitment of university leadership on this issue and expresses the expectation that the doctoral programmes will not face undue negative consequences of the present and possible future budget cuts – even if the goal for a factor 5 increase in number of doctoral students may be open for re-consideration.

#### **IV. Issues arising**

The Expert Committee was overall impressed with the scope and level of research at the University of Iceland and the prospects for doctoral programmes. The application documents and the site visit, however, do provide us with the occasion to raise a number of issues.

The University of Iceland is a large university with many faculties. We met a strong leadership, dedicated staff and motivated doctoral students. But the UI would benefit from more transparency in the structure of the doctoral degree programmes, in the general research system and better communication between the various levels of the system. One example of this issue is the different attitudes towards and interpretations of the new Graduate School.

The UI and its leadership have a strong commitment towards the enhancing of research through a strong priority on doctoral programmes. The number of research entities is, however, so high that there may be risk that doctoral students may be spread too thin in some faculties. In other words the university must take care that the research environment for some doctoral students will not be characterized by too limited critical mass.

Some concern must also be raised as to whether the number of qualified supervisors will in all fields be at a satisfactory level. A similar concern may be raised in some instances concerning academic scholarship of advisors.

The Committee is further unsure as to whether the proportion of theoretical studies is in all doctoral programmes at a sufficient level.

The UI leadership is aware of the potential risk of inbreeding in a relatively small university in a small country and point to the strong international dimension of research and the many substantial international contacts that open the windows so to speak. The

Committee accepts this argument, but still wishes to add that closer cooperation in relevant fields with other Icelandic universities would reduce this potential problem of inbreeding and perhaps increase synergies in Icelandic university research. However, apart from purely individual contacts the inclination towards that form of cooperation among universities does not seem to be strongly developed at the UI.

The Committee notes further that the University of Iceland seems to give more value to a doctoral degree achieved at a renowned university outside Iceland. For a small country this is commendable attitude in principle, but care must be taken that young Icelandic students at the doctoral programmes of the University of Iceland do not consider themselves in any way at a secondary level.

## **V. Recommendations**

The Expert Committee agrees to recommend that the University of Iceland is given the right to award doctoral degrees in the fields of Health Sciences and of Social Sciences.

## **VI. Signatures of the Accreditation Expert Committee.**

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Dr. Christian Thune, *Denmark*  
Chairman

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Prof. Dr. Maurice P. Boland, *Ireland*

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Prof. Dr. Raimo Hiltunen, *Finland*

## **Appendix 1: Agenda of site visit of Expert Committee to the University of Iceland 12 January 2009**

- 09:00 – 09:30** Visit to Rector at her office
- 09:30 – 10:30** Introduction to the Graduate School and discussion  
Jón Atli Benediktsson (Head of Development), Þórður Kristinsson (Head of Division for Academic Affairs) and Halldór Jónsson (Head of Division of Science and Research)
- 10:30 – 10:45** Coffee
- 10:45 – 11:45** Meeting with Deans of Schools and Heads of Faculties – Gimli (G102)
- 11:45 – 13:00** Lunch, Skróður
- 13:00 – 14:00** Meeting with representatives of Science Committees or/and Graduates Studies Committees – Gimli (G102)
- 14:15 – 15:45** Meeting with representatives of doctoral students – Gimli (G102)
- 16:00 – 17:30** Meeting with supervisors – Gimli (G102)



## **Appendix 2: List of documents received**

### **From the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture**

Higher Education Act 63/2006 (draft translation)

Rules on Doctoral Studies in Higher Education Institutions according to art. 7 of the Higher Education Act no. 63/2006

### **From the University of Iceland** (in addition to the application itself):

#### **Documents applying to the University as a whole**

- Appendix 1: The Organisation of the University from July 1st 2008
- Appendix 2: Rules for the University of Iceland - No. 458/2000
- Appendix 3: Standards and requirements for quality of doctoral programmes at the University of Iceland
- Appendix 4: University of Iceland Quality Assurance Programme
- Appendix 5: The University of Iceland Policy 2006-2011
- Appendix 6: Regulations for the Graduate School at the University of Iceland, no. 490/2007
- Appendix 7: Learning Outcomes for doctoral studies
- Appendix 8: Letters of April 22nd 2008
- Appendix 9: Rules for Evaluation
- Appendix 10: Rules on the Professional Duties of Academic Staff
- Appendix 11: Rules on Promotion of Instructors, Specialists and Scholars at the University of Iceland - No. 863/2001
- Appendix 12: Overview of University of Iceland research institutes and affiliated institutions
- Appendix 13: The 2007 Financial Statement of UI
- Appendix 14: Agreement between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the University of Iceland, January 2007

### **Faculty of Medicine**

Appendix FM1: Functions of Committee for Post-Graduate Studies

Appendix FM2: Rules for doctoral studies

Appendix FM3 : ISI papers (2005-2006)

Appendix FM4 : Faculty of Medicine Policy

Appendix FM5: Law concerning the Institute for Experimental Pathology at Keldur

Appendix FM6: Collaboration agreement on rheumatic diseases

Appendix FM7: Charter of Gerontological Research Centre

Appendix FM8: Collaboration agreement with the Icelandic Cancer Society

Appendix FM9: Co-operation agreement with deCode

### **Faculty of Nursing**

Appendix FN1: List of PhD projects at the Faculty of Nursing 2004-2008

Appendix FN2: Rules on the Doctoral Program in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Iceland

Appendix FN3: Overview of the Fields and Sections of Sciences in the Faculty of Nursing

Appendix FN4: Collaboration agreement between the University of Iceland and the University Hospital

Appendix FN5: Collaboration agreement between the University of Iceland and Primary Health Care of the Capital Area

Appendix FN6: University of Iceland Faculty of Nursing Policy 2006-2011

Appendix FN7: Rules on the Institute for Research in Nursing at the University of Iceland and the National University Hospital

Appendix FN8: Charter for the Ingibjörg R. Magnúsdóttir Research Fund

Appendix FN9: Memorandum of agreement between the University of Minnesota and the University of Iceland

Appendix FN10: International cooperation agreement between the Pace University, New York and the University of Iceland Faculty of Odontology

Appendix FO1: Summary of doctoral studies with which the Faculty of Odontology has been associated 1998-2008

Appendix FO2: Report of the Special Interest group meeting on Harmonisation of the European PhD in Dental Science

Appendix FO3: Rules for doctoral studies

### **Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences**

Appendix FP1: List of Ph.D. students from Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences

Appendix FP2: Policy of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences

Appendix FP3: Rules on PhD Studies at the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences

Appendix FP4: Adjuncts and part time instructors, Education and Position

Appendix FP5: Formal Collaboration Agreements, with other Universities

### **Faculty of Social Sciences**

Appendix FS1: Rules on Doctoral studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences

Appendix FS2: The role of Doctoral committee

Appendix FS3: Procedures for a Doctoral Dissertation in the Faculty of Social Sciences

Appendix FS4: A letter to opponents at a dissertation

Appendix FS5: Research, teaching, grades, grants, management

Appendix FS6: Role of Science Committee

### **Faculty of Economics and Business Administration**

Appendix FEB1: Regulations for research-based studies

Appendix FEB2: The Institute of Business Research (Rules no. 824/2001)

Appendix FEB3: The Institute of Economic Studies (Rules no. 738/2001)

Appendix FEB4: The research strategy of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration

### **Faculty of Law**

Appendix FL1: Rules on Doctoral studies at the Faculty of Law

Appendix FL2: Rules on Assessment in Doctoral studies at the Faculty of Law

Appendix FL3: Rules for the Institute of Law

Appendix FL4: Rules for the Institute of Human Rights School of Education (formerly Iceland University of Education)

Appendix SE1: Iceland University of Education: Doctoral Programme Regulations

Appendix SE2: Admission guidelines for graduate studies in Education

Appendix SE3: Objectives and roles of Iceland University of Education.

Appendix SE4: Organisation of teaching and research (School of Education)

Appendix SE5: Rules for the establishment and operation of research centre, research units and research groups at the Iceland University of Education

Appendix SE6: List of faculty members, their education and fields of study

### **Other Documents**

The University of Iceland Bibliography, listing works by nearly all academics, see [http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/arbok\\_og\\_ritaskra](http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/arbok_og_ritaskra)