

Final Report

Hólar University College (HUC)

Date : 11 November 2007

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1. Introduction

Accreditation Report on the Hólar University College site visit conducted in October 2007.

1.1 The Expert Committee

Professor Maurice Boland, Head, School of Agriculture, Food Science and Veterinary Medicine, University College, Dublin, Ireland, **Chairman.**

Professor Gerhardus Schultink, International Development Planning, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, USA.

Professor Ragnar Ludvig Olsen, Norwegian College of Fishery Science, University of Tromsø, Norway.

Dr Anna Kristin Danielsdottir, Senior Advisor, Division of Research and Innovation, The Icelandic Centre for Research – RANNIS, Reykjavik, Iceland, **Liaison Officer.**

1.2 Terms of Reference

The Expert Committee (EC) was appointed by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture to review the applications for accreditation of Higher Education Institutions within the field of Agriculture, and as stipulated in the Higher Education Act, No. 63/2006, cf Rules on Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions according to Article 3 of Higher Education Act, No. 1067/2006. The role of the EC is to review applications and subsequent information on the basis of the *National Qualification Framework of Iceland and Rules on Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions No. 1067/2006.*

The EC shall include the results of evaluation using the criteria as laid out in Article 2(3)(a)-(i) in the Rules of the following factors:

Objectives and roles.

Administration and Organisation.

Organisation of teaching and research.

Personnel qualifications requirements.

Admission requirements and student rights and obligations.

Teacher and student facilities and services.

Internal quality system.

Description of study according to learning outcomes.

Finances.

The review shall further evaluate the following, cf Article 3 of the Rules:

Expertise and competence in the field of study and the administration therein, taking account of the quality of teaching and research and the appropriate facilities, dissemination of knowledge and relative status within society.

The manner in which the support of the Higher Education Institution is arranged towards: the academic forum as a whole, teaching staff and experts in the relevant field and appropriate measures for the education and training of its students.

Special attention shall be paid to research and any subdivisions therein, with regard to educational infrastructure, especially cooperation between undergraduate and graduate studies and any other relevant fields of study, as appropriate.

The status of fields of expertise and subdivisions therein on a national and international level. Attention shall be paid to cooperation with other Higher Education Institutions and other bodies on a national and international level in that particular field of study.

1.3 Working Method

The three foreign members of the Expert Committee (EC) received the HUC accreditation application along with the appendices in advance of arrival in Iceland by accessing it electronically from a webpage. The additional documents were circulated electronically to the EC members by Dr. Anna Kristín Daníelsdóttir (AKD), the Icelandic member of the group. On arrival, they received a CD disk with the documents.

The EC came together initially in the morning on **Sunday, September 30th** at the hotel's meeting room, meeting for the first time. This allowed the committee members to get to know one another in an informal setting and learn more of individual members' background experience. The EC started to prepare for the three site visits and divide the writing between the members. AKD arrived after lunch to explain the role of each member, providing local support and contextual information but maintaining neutrality in terms of the expression of opinions and influencing decisions. The remainder of the day was spent in preparatory work, discussions of the materials provided and issues arising. At 19:00 the committee drove to Sauðárkrókur arriving at Hotel Tindastoll at 23:30.

Monday 1st October, was spent visiting various sites of the Hólar University College (HUC). First the EC visited the Verið Science Park at Sauðárkrókur, the HUC Aquaculture and Fish Biology research facility and met various members

of academic staff escorted by the Rector, Skúli Skúlason and the Liaison officer of the HUC, Prof. Helgi Thorarensen. The Rector, Skúli Skúlason gave a general introduction to the purpose, strategy for development and future vision of this relatively small and new university. Then each of the Heads of Departments gave a presentation on more detailed description of the study programmes, present status and future vision: Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir Head of the Department of Rural Tourism, Víkingur Gunnarsson Head for the Department of Equine Science and Helgi Thorarensen Head of the Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology. The EC sought clarification on some issues after the presentations.

After a tour of the building, the EC drove out to Hólar in Hjaltadalur where the main buildings of Hólar University College are located. It is the location of the former Hólar Agricultural College, established in 1882 and the Bishop's seat and a school that was established in 1106. Prof. Skúli Skúlason, Rector of the HUC, supported by Heads of each of the Departments showed the on-site facilities and gave an introduction to the facility. Following lunch at the school's dining area the EC met with a group of seven students studying a variety of courses. Four were overseas students (from Germany, Scandinavia, Austria and Canada). The students were uniformly enthusiastic about the quality of personalized education they were receiving and praised the response to student feedback, leading to visible improvement. Access to books, computing facilities etc. was also good, but the library could be better organized. In view of the fact that the HUC has relatively few students and a restricted scope, the EC questioned the students on contact with other national and foreign universities. There is such contact at the student level, both in joint BSc studies and complementary course offerings.

Next the EC had a meeting with recent graduates from HUC: Margrét Björnsdóttir, BA Rural Tourism, Rósa Vésteinsdóttir, Diploma Rural Tourism, Arnþór Gústavsson Diploma Aquaculture, Ísólfur Þórisson Equine Science. Issues raised by EC included strengths and weaknesses of the programme; why they studied at Hólar; if their expectations were met; if the staff were approachable and responsive to queries; and if they would recommend the program to someone else?

The responses obtained include the following:

- Program was selected for reputation on knowledge of horse training.
- Field visits are a good supplement to classroom instruction.
- Student are provided with good access to scientists and facilities.
- Generally there is easy access to staff and resultant problem solving.
- Staff is very approachable and responsive.
- Good professional opportunities created by study program.
- Students would like to have had better access to relevant research outputs and professional publications.

Conclusions:

- Graduates are very satisfied with the quality of the learning experience.
- Small class sizes facilitate good staff/student interaction.

Thereafter, the EC had a phone conference with employers of recent graduates, 3-5 years from graduating: Hlífur Karlsson Diploma Aquaculture and employer of two recent graduates at Rifós hf laxeldistöð, Lóni, Kópasker and Áskell Heiðar Ásgeirsson BA and Diploma in Tourism and employer of two recent graduates. Issues raised with employers included perceived weaknesses in the graduates, satisfaction with their performance; and if they would continue to hire graduates from HUC?

The responses obtained included the following:

- No perceived apparent weaknesses.
- Graduates appear to be well trained.
- The program facilitates contact between practice and HUC, which is considered important.
- Continued interaction with HUC is anticipated.
- Generally, the employers were very pleased with the quality of the graduates.

Conclusions:

- Although this represents a small and perhaps not representative sample, feedback indicates a high degree of satisfaction with the graduates hired.

After this the EC had a meeting with the Professors, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Adjunct Professors: Guðrún Helgadóttir Professor of Rural Tourism, Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir Assistant Professor of Rural Tourism, Þórarinn Eymundsson Assistant Professors of Equine Science, Guðrún J. Stefánsdóttir Assistant Professors of Equine Science, Bjarni K. Kristjánsson Associate Professor of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, Stefán Óli Steingrímsson Associate Professor of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, Ragnheiður Traustadóttir Adjunct Professor of Rural Tourism and Director of Hólar Archeological Project. The meeting with academic staff concentrated on strengths, weaknesses and any other issues they wished to raise.

The responses obtained include the following:

- The size of the University is considered both a strength and a weakness.
- Academic staff are faced with a significant amount of administration.

- The small size of the institution permits for good student-staff interaction.
- No internal funds are available to support start-up research.
- Current specializations are perceived as a strength.
- An asset is that Hólar College is located in a peaceful and isolated locality.
- The Departments are mutually supportive.
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Conclusions:

- Academic staff is generally content with the location and facilities.
- Lack of clerical/technical staff support is a concern.
- There is evidence of strong leadership and a good collegial atmosphere prevails.

The EC then had a meeting with the management team: Skúli Skúlason Rector, Sigríður Magnúsdóttir Administrative Manager, Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir Head of Department of Rural Tourism, Víkingur Gunnarsson, Head of Department of Equine Science and Helgi Thorarensen Head of Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology. Issues raised with the management team included: financial stability; the presence or absence of a Rector's strategic fund; the balance between teaching and research; how to address the financial shortfall.

The responses obtained included the following:

- A small financial deficit exists.
- Potentials to address the deficit were identified: the Rector suggests increasing undergraduate student numbers; other academic staff suggested increasing external research funding.
- The small size of the institution leads to a relatively high proportion of time spent on administration duties.
- There is no Strategic Development Fund in place, but it is considered highly desirable.
- The idea of an external scientific advisory committee was well received.

Conclusions:

- There is a cohesive group that is aware of the challenges faced.
- Academic staff is prepared to develop a strategic plan to help identify priorities for the University for the next 5 – 10 years.

After the meeting the EC drove from Hjaltadalur to Hótel KEA, Akureyri where they had a meeting to crystallize thoughts from the HUC visit. The EC compared impressions and drew preliminary conclusions and planned the writing of the report.

Much of the report was drafted before the EC members departed on the 6th of October and plans were made for the remaining work. The draft material was further edited and refined by circulation between the EC members over the next several weeks, and additional material received on the 8th October, 2007 was incorporated. A draft of the factual part of the report was sent to HUC for checking and comment. Following receipt of these comments the report was finalized for submission to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

1.4 Short Evaluation of the work process

The EC found the assessment process to be very efficiently organised and implemented. The team size and composition provided for a collaborative and supportive endeavor. It is essential to have a local person to organize the process; this proved invaluable where additional information was needed. We wish to pay special tribute to Dr Anna Kristin Danielsdottir for her guidance, knowledge and dedication to the process. She was always on time, worked long and hard days and was ever cheerful, which made our task easier. We also want to thank all staff at Hólar University College for their courtesy, help and frank manner in which they dealt with the EC during the visit. They were well-organised and prepared to discuss any issue raised. If data were not available immediately, they were produced very quickly.

One area of concern for the EC was the large and fragmented volume of material that had to be obtained, read and evaluated before and during the site visit. This could be improved substantially by ensuring that future ECs will receive a single document containing all material relevant to the accreditation process. Of course appendices, weblinks etc can be used, but it will facilitate the review process.

2. Roles and Objectives

Hólar University College is a scientific educational and research institution and its objectives are to train students to vocational diploma or BSc level and to carry out research that will lead to Masters or PhD degrees in the specialized fields of study (Rural Tourism, Equine Science or Aquaculture and Fish Biology). It is the goal of the University to enhance the knowledge and professionalism related to the fields of study. The University aspires to be at the cutting edge of knowledge development and have excellent facilities. It plans to build on its unique interaction with the local community and industry, and further develop its areas of specialization. The University outlined the following specific objectives:

Aquaculture and Fish Biology : (i) to gather and disseminate knowledge in the fields of aquatic biology, aquaculture and fish biology; (ii) to promote the professional development of aquaculture in the spirit of sustainable development.

Rural Tourism: (i) to gather and disseminate knowledge on tourism affairs to increase professionalism and innovation; (ii) to ensure the sustainable development of tourism in Iceland through teaching, research and development. This is achieved by placing emphasis on quality, collaboration and diversity in research and development.

Equine Science: (i) to provide professional education in the fields of horse breeding, horse training, horsemanship and riding; (ii) to work towards development and innovation through its research activities; (iii) to increase the profitability of the sector and enhance the welfare of horses.

Conclusions:

- The roles and objectives are well articulated and the staff is committed to achieving the objectives.
- The size of the University may be a constraint in meeting the teaching and research objectives.
- Size, however may provide an advantage in focussing academically on the specializations offered.
- Attaining sufficient depth may be problematic because of the need to cover many essential areas with limited staff numbers.

3. Administration and Organisation

Hólar University College operates pursuant to the Act on Agricultural Education, no. 57-1999, with subsequent amendments. The University is under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, which is also responsible for ensuring that it meets the educational quality requirements set forth in the Act on Universities, no. 63/2006.

The Rector of Hólar University College is the University's highest-ranking administrator and representing the University to the outside world. The Rector is appointed for a five-year term, supervises the University administration, is responsible for the preparation of work schedules and operational plans, subject to approval by the Board of Directors. The Rector also takes the initiative in ensuring that the Board of Directors formulates overall policy and appoints all personnel. The Rector chairs the Board of Directors to which he is responsible. The latter is an anomalous situation and should be addressed.

There are three Departments (Rural Tourism, Equine Science and Aquaculture and Fish Biology) in the University. The Rector operates in association with a Management team (comprised of the Rector, Heads of departments and Director of operations). There are four divisions operating across the three departments (Academic, Graduate Studies, Research and Operations). The Management team carries out the daily operations and co-ordinates the work of divisions and departments.

The departments are responsible for the programs of study and the educational and research projects. The program of study across departments comprises the Division of Academic affairs. The Rector appoints a Divisional Director for two years. This Director oversees co-ordination of the study programme. The employees of the Division of academic affairs oversee student registration and academic records, assist the departments in admission and the organisation of instruction, and preparation of curricula. The Academic affairs committee oversees affairs related to technical aspects of study and handles affairs concerning collaboration with other universities.

The Division of Research is responsible for overall research direction. The Chair is appointed for two years and the committee coordinates the research of the University. The main role is to provide assistance with applications for funding and management of research projects.

The graduate Studies Division is mandated with co-ordination of graduate studies within the University. The Director is appointed by the Rector for two years and chairs the committee. The committee has representation from each department, plus an outside person (appointed by the Rector), and a graduate

student. The main role is to assure quality management and to ensure collaboration with other universities.

The Operations division is responsible for general office functions, operation of support units, human resources and finances and real estate management.

In recent years there has been systematic development of the facilities for teaching, research and student accomodation at Hólar. The equine facilites are particularly impressive.

Hólar University College was granted permission to establish graduate study programmes (MSc and PhD) in 2007 (cf Act no. 57/1999, with subsequent amendments).

Conclusions:

- The University has a sound administration and management structures in place.
- There is excellent leadership from the top and very strong collegiality shown by staff at all levels.
- There is an ambitious plan for future development but the strategy to achieve this needs further articulation.
- The relatively short administrative appointment for 2-year terms may cause great variability in management style and pose difficulties in consistency and personnel management.

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Recommmendations:

- The Board of Directors should have an Independent Chair, who is not the Director; the Direcor must be a member of the Board.
- A 5-year appointment period for upper-level administrative appointment should be considered.

4. Organisation of Teaching and Research

The rules for Hólar University College are consistent with Section III on Universities, no 63/2006. Studies at Hólar are organised according to European Credit Transfer Systems (ECTS) standard academic units. In general, each academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS units. Diploma students in Tourism Studies and Aquaculture complete 24-30 ECTS in practice. Hólar University College grants the following academic titles pursuant to Acts no. 57/1999 and 63/2006:

- a) Diploma – Young Horse Trainer
- b) Diploma – Riding Instructor and trainer
- c) Diploma – Tourism Studies
- d) Diploma – Aquaculture
- e) BSc
- f) BA
- g) MSc

The University has rules to ensure that the study programmes offered fulfil the criteria for higher education and degrees, cf Article 8 of the Act on Universities. This information, together with detailed information on the study programmes, is published on the HUC website.

The arrangement for teaching, the structure of study programmes as well as research and development work meet acceptable standards and are comparable to some international standards. There has been significant emphasis on collaboration with national universities and with national research institutes and with international universities/institutes on an individual staff member basis. Efforts continue to enhance the physical infrastructure, employee qualifications and the development of an internal quality management system. The rules allow for students to receive credit for comparable studies conducted elsewhere. Emphasis has been placed on establishing formal collaboration with universities and research institutions in Iceland and overseas. Hólar University College has established the following collaboration:

The University of Iceland

In 1997 a framework agreement was signed concerning collaboration between these schools. In 2001, an agreement was made concerning the reciprocal recognition of studies in Tourism. An agreement was established with the University of Iceland Research Centre in 2005 concerning collaboration relating to teaching, research, and student and staff exchange. A collaboration agreement in teaching and research in Aquatic Biology has recently been established and this facilitates the establishment of a joint BSc degree programme by the two schools.

Agricultural University of Iceland

An agreement in 1999 ensured that Hólar University Colleges diploma in Riding Instruction and Training would be accepted for credit as part of the BSc degree programme in the Department of Agricultural Science at the Agricultural University of Iceland. A broad-based agreement with respect to teaching and research in equine science was established in 2007, which also involves a joint BSc programme where students completed the third year and part of the first year at Hólar.

The University of Akureyri

A collaboration agreement was established in 1998 concerning teaching in the field of Tourism and a further agreement in relation to Aquaculture was established in 2004.

University of Guelph

In 1995, Hólar University College participated in a comprehensive collaboration agreement involving four Icelandic Universities and the University of Guelph. The agreement which was renewed in 2001, covers research as well as student and staff exchange. The University of Guelph will grant credits in Rural Tourism and Aquatic Biology.

NOVA - A collaboration forum for Nordic universities of Agriculture

Hólar University College participates actively in Masters programmes in Aquaculture.

The esteem with which some of the programs (e.g. Equine Science) are held is substantiated by fact that about 35% of the students in the programme are foreign, despite the fact that the language of instruction is Icelandic. The staff include three internationally certified breeding judges that judge internationally.

Research

The staff at Hólar University College have substantial experience in applied research in the chosen fields of specialization. The research tends to be industry-driven and this is one of the strengths of the projects undertaken – they address issues of local (economic) importance. This can also be a weakness as the research may have major local - but little (inter)national impact. The research activities have increased rapidly in recent years and this has been facilitated by increased external funding for specific projects. The research conducted is complementary to the teaching programme and it is evident that some research is translated to the teaching programme. The staff have established a broad network of collaboration; staff and graduate students spend periods of time at international institutions on applied research. Academic staff has also

participated in the organisation of, and participation in international conferences. Staff regularly present their research findings at national and international conferences. Research results are published in peer-reviewed national and international journals.

Research facilities have improved in recent years. The facilities for research in aquaculture and aquatic biology are situated in a new aquatic research centre that has generally adequate space for research and for graduate students. These facilities are designed especially for genetic and breeding research on freshwater fish. In the town of Sauðárkrókur is a state-of-the-art teaching and research facility. The equine facilities are excellent while the environment at Hólar supports the programme in Rural Tourism very well. One issue that must be addressed across all departments is critical mass to achieve the opportunity for world-class output in research.

Conclusions:

- The organisation of teaching and research is carefully described
- Some facilities are excellent and the rest are deemed generally appropriate for the program.
- Reaching and maintaining critical mass in teaching and research programs is an issue for serious consideration.

Recommendations:

- Further strengthen the postgraduate programmes by focussing on areas of specialization and expertise.
- Establish an international committee to advise on development of research programmes to enhance the reputation of Hólar University College.
- Develop academic collaboration in a strategic and focussed manner.
- Build on the current developments in distance education.
- Establish a sustainable multi-annual budget to allow for strategic and specialized development with a plan to increase student and staff numbers.
- Consider some sort of amalgamation with another University to enhance the programmes and reputation of both.
- Develop more depth rather than breadth in research and teaching.

5. Personnel qualification requirements

Hiring and promotion criteria for academic positions are stipulated for Assistant, Associate and Full Professors, and separately for adjunct and temporary instructors. Criteria are based on Act 70/1996 stipulating the rights and duties of state employees, Universities Act 63/2006 and articles 33-34 of Act 173/2006 on agricultural education regarding instructor competence and the operation of assessment committees, as well as current procedures at Hólar University College. Regulations also apply to employees of collaborating institutions with teaching duties at the University.

Applicants are reviewed based on the quality of scientific work, writings, development projects, creative work and research record, as well as certification of educational and employment records. Furthermore, it is expected that applicants include evaluations of instruction and administrative work, as relevant.

Minimum standards for hiring and promotion are identified for various Professorial ranks and the role of the assessment committee and upper administration is clearly identified to help provide quality assurance. In addition, the role of the point system (with minimum performance points identified for academic grades), incentives, and self initiative are identified as drivers of the process.

The assessment committee consists of 3 members appointed by the Rector for a 2-year term, according to article 34 of Act 173/2006 and article 18 of Act 63/2006, and judges the qualifications of persons serving in a particular position. In assessment of administration, emphasis is placed on initiative, leadership ability, and organizational, planning, as well as interpersonal skills.

Conclusions:

Hólar University College is in compliance with the requirements of personnel qualification as defined by relevant laws, regulations and any obligations therein.

Interviews indicate a strong sense of collegiality among academic staff, a high level of administrative support, loyalty and general support by the local community.

Recommendations:

Positions for academic employees should always be advertised both nationally and internationally, and in relevant professional journals.

For all positions of the Professorial ranks, a PhD should be a minimum requirement for hiring, while minimum years of additional practical experience should be identified for Associate and Full Professors.

More detailed strategic planning is needed to provide clear guidelines and priorities for future program expansion, concentration and academic position management among departments.

A clear prioritization of programmatic needs and staffing plan will help address the perception that the teaching loads in, for instance, equine instruction are high per FTE, with little time for research..

To improve the quality of applicants, competitive salaries, relocation allowances and on-site incentives should be offered.

It is suggested to consider the establishment of a college development initiative to help establish an endowment fund for staff recruitment and financial support.

6. Admission requirements and student rights and obligations

The admission of students to Higher Education Institutions is regulated by Article 19, Higher Education Institution Act (63/2006). Hólar University College has formulated rules for admission requirements and procedures separately for the three study levels: Diploma, Bachelors and Masters studies. The admission rules and rights and responsibilities of students are summarised in the application document.

Admission rules for students in Diploma and BA/BSc programmes state that a candidate must have completed an upper secondary matriculation examination or other preparation considered comparable by the Board of Directors (cf. Act no. 63/2006). In the Department of Equine Science, students who commence Diploma studies in Young Horse Training must have completed Horse Studies and Basic Instruction Studies at the College. Applications from candidates who have not completed an upper secondary matriculation examination must be referred to the academic affairs committee for formal consideration. The committee operates in accordance with special rules concerning the handling of these applications and is authorized to call applicants for interviews and entrance examinations.

To qualify for the MSc Programme, the applicant must have completed a BSc, BA or BEd degree with a minimum grade of 6.5, or a comparable degree approved by the graduate studies committee. It is permitted to deviate from these rules if “*sound reasons exist for doing so*”. Rules of the college explicitly provide for students’ right of recourse. Details of the appeal process were identified.

This regulation is in full agreement with Article 19 of the HEI Act (63/2006).

Hólar University College is a small institution, established 1882, with specialized programs after 1980, and still at the initial phase of development. The total number of BSc and MSc students at present is about two hundred. This number is expected to grow to 300 in 2010. This number is quite small and poses significant challenges in maintaining sustainable student numbers, the cost-effective delivery of instructional services, adhering to fundamental academic admission standards and retaining, at the same time, a qualitatively acceptable level of academic education.

Existing regulations provide evidence that the admission criteria and procedures have been given thorough consideration. This gives the EC confidence that the University leadership understands the primary importance of the student recruitment process for the successful and continued academic development of the institution.

While a detailed policy for the development of academic programs was not presented, the EC believes that the leadership is aware of the significant challenges facing the institution in maintaining a viable academic program. Special challenges include the need for more detailed strategic planning vis-à-vis the needs of specialized education in Iceland, the potential for expanded collaboration with other academic institutions, and the required specialization, complementarities, and redundancy of academic programs.

Lacking seems to be a final formally adapted statement on the principles and policies on the Code of Conduct for students, including sanctions associated with violations, such as plagiarism and the potential role of an Ethics Committee. A draft policy statement based on the Code of Conduct from the University of Iceland (dated May 30, 2007) was provided.

Conclusions:

- The Expert Committee perceives that in principle the rules and procedures governing student admission are in agreement with Article 19 of the HEI Act (63/2006). These rules and procedures are formulated in a detailed and clear fashion covering all levels of academic study.

Recommendations:

- It is recommended that a more detailed strategic education plan be developed and adapted. This plan should reflect the needs of Icelandic's society for academic education in the three academic specializations offered, the associated sustainable students numbers linked with instructional, research and staffing needs.
- It is recommended to conduct a systematic identification of the complementarities of educational programs with those at other academic

institutions with the objective to develop additional cooperation, including joint and complementary course offerings, promote academic programs and admission standards that improve program quality, improve cost-effective delivery of instruction and the provision of more applied research opportunities. This process will also help address one of the concerns identified, namely the lack of courses and depth to suit individual needs – an obvious challenge for a small institution.

- Student concerns were identified with respect to the organization of course schedule changes and timing conflicts. It is suggested to make course registration and scheduling more transparent.
- It is suggested to develop more (internal) applied research funding to create research opportunities for graduate students.
- Special consideration should be given to rewarding faculty members for successful research proposals in priority areas, especially those that address important societal needs and those that could lead to processes and outcomes that can be patented and provide a future revenue stream.
- Adapt a final statement on the principles and policies on the Code of Conduct for students, including sanctions associated with violations, such as plagiarism and the potential role of an Ethics Committee.

7. Facilities for Teachers and Students and Services Provided

The EC viewed the generally up-to-date instructional and research facilities. It is clear that the college is in a period of transition, in terms of instruction and research. In the fisheries research facility constraints were identified such as limited fish tanks and freezer capacity and equipment for molecular biology. Capacity and staff support constraints were also identified in general terms – such as the shortage of staff support mandating a higher non-academic work load for academic staff such as effectively wasting time on routine clerical tasks, and the shortage of laboratory funding, and in more specific terms, the use of library facilities. The latter has recently been addressed by hiring a full-time librarian and improving access to on-line reference materials.

Generally, staff and students are enthusiastic about both facilities and work environment. The isolation at the Hólar location is considered somewhat detrimental by some, while others see it as an asset.

Conclusions:

- The working conditions for teachers and students and associated support infrastructure is overall adequate to qualify for accreditation of the listed courses and academic programs.

Recommendations:

- Improve clerical and technical staff support to create efficiencies in the operation of a more *research-intensive* institution that can compete at the international level.
- Provide more targeted funding for research by improving research facilities and provide incentives for research funding procurement such as international travel and publication support.
- Seek intensive research collaboration with foreign research institutions that may collaborate and cost-share in research and use the unique location and facilities as a science laboratory.
- Incorporate overhead charges in proposal procurement to help off-set laboratory cost and improvement, and personnel support.

8. Internal quality system

The description of the Internal Quality Management in Part 7 of the Application from HUC is detailed and addresses the issues mentioned in Articles 11 and 12 of the HEI Act No. 63/2006 in a proper way. The quality control is carried out in the three departments and in interdepartmental divisions. Within the academic division, an academic affairs committee consisting of the Director, one representative from each of the departments and two student representatives is responsible for the quality management of the study programs. Together with senior administrators of HUC, the committee ensures that necessary improvements are made. The anonymous course evaluations from the students are handled by the committee. The merits and shortcomings of the courses are also said to be discussed in meetings with the students. As pointed out in the application (point 10), the small size of the university creates conditions where quality issues can be addressed and followed on a personal level very closely. The visit to Hólar on October 1st and the discussions with students from the departments clearly confirmed that the contacts between the students and staff are excellent and that the students are generally very happy with the quality of the teaching.

The graduate studies division at HUC has the responsibility to develop graduate studies. A committee made up of one representative from each department, one external expert, one graduate student and the Director of the division makes sure that necessary connections and cooperation within the University and with other educational institutions are implemented such that the graduate programs are of high standards. Because HUC is a very small institution, this committee is of particular importance since MSc students would in many cases clearly benefit from taking some of their courses in the study program elsewhere. In some cases joint supervision from external scientists may also be beneficial. Extended cooperation with other institutions is also necessary in BSc programs. The BSc programs in equine science and in aquatic biology are offered in cooperation with the Agricultural University of Iceland and the University of Iceland, respectively.

In the research division, the research committee which consists of one representative from each department, one representative of the graduate student, the Director of operations and the divisional Director, assists in formulating research policy and in enhancing research by adapting an incentive-based payment system. It is also formulated (point 4) that the committee should administer the HUC Research Fund and carry out quality monitoring of the research. During the visit the EC was told by management that a Research Fund was not available at HUC. Such a fund would be beneficial to help prioritize research initiatives and leverage outside funding. Research quality monitoring is best done by external referees during publication reviews or when applying for research grants during outside proposal evaluations.

Once a year, each department head has a confidential meeting with each member of the staff where they discuss the quality of the professional work and how improvements can be made. It is important to evaluate how previous year's goals have been achieved and at the same time set new goals. It is also important to find how the individual research and teaching qualifications can be further developed through a continuous quality improvement program. HUC supports re-education of the departmental members in pedagogy.

It is not easy to predict how this young and very small university college will develop its international competitiveness and reputation. Although the University's educational and research program addresses fairly specific areas, all three departments have research programs which are of national and even international interests.

Conclusions:

- The EC perceives that a sound foundation exists for a functioning internal quality assurance system. The EC identified competence in leadership and an atmosphere of genuine openness and trust, vital components in the emerging internal quality assurance system.

Recommendations:

- It is important to establish a research fund and financial resources to be used to strengthen research activities to increase the competitiveness and focus on strategically important areas of research.

9. Description of study according to learning outcomes

Part 8 of the HUC Accreditation Application lists the undergraduate diploma studies (level 1) and undergraduate and masters degrees. These include two diploma courses within the Department of Equine Science (30 and 60 ECTS), one within the Department of Rural Tourism (90 ECTS) and one within the Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology (84 ECTS). One degree from each department is on level 2 while one program is an MSc (level 4) in aquatic biology (120 ECTS). All programs are satisfactorily described in the annexes 12 to 19 of the application.

Conclusions:

- Details of degree programmes and intended learning outcomes of each programme are included as required by Chapter II of the Act on HEIs No 63/2006.

10. Finances

In the application, general budget numbers for the HUC are given for the years 2005 and 2006 together with an overview for the years 2002-06. In this period there were fluctuations from a 71 mill. ISK loss (19% deficit) in 2004 to a 53 mill. ISK (15%) surplus in 2005. In 2006, the deficit was approximately 2 % (9 mill.). The income (grants, contributions, contract services and tuition fees) increased from approximately 40 % in 2005 to 45% in 2006, compared to 20% in 2002. This is regarded as a positive development.

In general, it could be considered that the major weakness of HUC is the small size which means that the limited numbers of scientific staff have to engage in administration duties and teaching in relatively broad scientific fields. The EC had the clear impression that more support staff at administration and technical level is required. This can undoubtedly release scientific personnel for research tasks and research-based teaching. The plans to engage in more summer courses with emphasis also on foreign students may increase the income for the University, but will also decrease the time available for research.

Conclusions:

- Present funding is barely adequate for existing workload. The research capacities of existing staff can surely be used more efficiently if more administrative and technical support staff was available.

Recommendations:

- Establish a Hólar University College Research Fund for use in developing research focus, priorities and obtaining strategic goals.
- Increase income to increase the number of support staff.

11. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The main findings of the EC are summarised as conclusions and recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Hólar University College authorities and staff. More detailed recommendations are at the end of the sections.

The EC unanimously recommends accreditation of the Programmes in Rural Tourism, Equine Science and Aquaculture and Fish Biology, in accordance with the Higher Education Act No. 63/2006 and the Rules of Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions No. 1067/2006. Hólar University College needs to develop a more detailed strategic development plan to construct a roadmap to ensure long-term viability, quality and focus of teaching and research programs.

It is the opinion of the EC that such a plan is necessary not only to define the needs of the Icelandic society for education, research, innovation and knowledge transfer, but also to strengthen the teaching and research and to make the programmes more competitive nationally and internationally. To this end, Hólar University College must seriously consider strategic alliances/amalgamation that will enhance the viability of all organizations concerned. The development of such a plan could set the basis for the establishment of a multi-annual budget process to allow for easier planning of staff and postgraduate student growth together with the development of new areas of scientific discovery in the selected areas of specialization. It is the view of the EC that the Hólar University College is currently spread too thinly and should attempt to gain depth at the expense of breadth. It has good programmes and they should be strengthened further.

Recommendations to the Ministry:

- It is recommended that the Ministry asks Hólar University College to develop a strategic plan for the development of fields of study and research programmes in areas of specialization. This plan should show clearly how it will take advantage of strategic alliances/amalgamations with other Higher Education Institutions that are complementary in nature.
- For future accreditation reviews, the Higher Education Institution should submit a single document and a CD containing all of the relevant material for the EC.
- Consider the provision of multi-annual budgets for the University to facilitate planning and development.

Recommendations to Hólar University College:

- More detailed operational planning is required to provide clear guidelines and priorities for future programmes.
- Establish a strategic Development fund so that the Rector can support strategically important initiatives.
- Consider carefully alliances/amalgamation with other Higher Education Institutions.
- Ensure that there is adequate administrative and technical support.
- Develop further the international research collaboration.

Appendix 1

Agenda for the Expert Committee.

Site visit to Hólar University College (HUC) at Sauðárkrókur and Hjaltadalur.

Monday 1st October 2007.

Expert Committee:

Prof. Maurice Boland (Chairman of the Expert Committee).

Prof. Gerhardus Schultink.

Prof. Ragnar Ludvig Olsen.

Liaison officer of the Expert Committee:

Dr. Anna Kristín Danfelsdóttir, RANNIS.

Hólar University College (HUC) Liaison officer:

Prof. Helgi Thorarensen, HUC, Iceland.

09:00 – 10:00

Introduction to Hólar University College. Presentations by Skúli Skúlason Rector, Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir Head of Department of Rural Tourism, Víkingur Gunnarsson Head of Department of Equine Science and Helgi Thorarensen Head of Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology.

Verið Science Park, Sauðárkrókur.

Present: Skúli Skúlason Rector, Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir Head of Department of Rural Tourism, Víkingur Gunnarsson Head of Department of Equine Science and Helgi Thorarensen Head of Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, Guðrún Helgadóttir Professor of Rural Tourism, Guðrún J. Stefánsdóttir Assistant Professor of Equine Science, Bjarni K. Kristjánsson Associate Professor of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, Gísli Svan Einarsson Director of Verið Science Park.

10:00 – 10:30

Introduction and site visit to Verið Science Park research facilities.

Verið Science Park, Sauðárkrókur.

Present: Skúli Skúlason Rector, Helgi Thorarnesen Head of Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, Gísli Svan Einarsson Director of Verið Science Park.

10:30 – 11:00

Drive to Hólar, Hjaltadalur.

11:00 – 12:00

Introduction and site visit to teaching and research facilities at Hólar.

Hólar, Hjaltadalur.

- Present:** Skúli Skúlason Rektor, Víkingur Gunnarsson Head of Department of Equine Science and Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir Head of Department of Rural Tourism, Ragnheiður Traustadóttir Adjunct Professor of Rural Tourism and DiRector of Hólar Archeological Project.
- 12:00 – 13:00 **Lunch invitation.**
School dining area, Hólar, Hjaltadalur.
Present: Skúli Skúlason Rektor, Sigríður Magnúsdóttir Administrative Manager, Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir Head of Department of Rural Tourism, Víkingur Gunnarsson Head of Department of Equine Science and Helgi Thorarensen Head of Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology.
- 13:00 – 13:45 **Meeting with students.**
Theodórsstofa, Hólar, Hjaltadalur.
Present: Barbara Wenzl 3rd year Equine studies Trainer and Riding Teacher Diploma Course, Sonja Línal Þórisdóttir 2nd year Equine studies Trainer Diploma Course, Herdís Reynisdóttir 2nd year PhD student affiliated with the Department of Equine Science, Hermann Einarsson 1st year Rural Tourism Diploma Course, Claudia Lobindzus 2nd year B.A. in Rural Tourism 2nd year, Margrét Valsdóttir 1st year Distance Education Rural Tourism Diploma Course, Eva Kuettna 1st year PhD student affiliated with the Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology.
- 13:45 – 14:15 **Meeting with recent graduates from HUC**
Theodórsstofa, Hólar, Hjaltadalur.
Present: Margrét Björnsdóttir, B.A. Rural Tourism, Rósa Vésteinsdóttir, Diploma Rural Tourism, Arnþór Gústavsson Diploma Aquaculture, Ísólfur Þórisson Equine Science.
- 14:15 – 14:30 **Meeting with employers of recent graduates, 3-5 years from graduating.**
Phone meeting: Hlífkar Karlsson Diploma Aquaculture and employer of two recent graduates at Rifós hf laxeldistöð, Lóni, Kópasker and Áskell Heiðar Ásgeirsson B.A. and Diploma in Tourism and employer of two recent graduates, Sveitarfélagið Skagafjörður, Sauðárkrókur.
- 14:30 – 15:15 **Meeting with staff (Professors, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, Adjunct Professors).**
Theodórsstofa, Hólar, Hjaltadalur.
Present: Guðrún Helgadóttir Professor of Rural Tourism, Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir Assistant Professor of Rural Tourism, Þórarinn Eymundsson Assistant Professors of Equine Science, Guðrún J. Stefánsdóttir Assistant

- Professors of Equine Science, Bjarni K. Kristjánsson Associate Professor of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, Stefán Óli Steingrímsson Associate Professor of Aquaculture and Fish Biology, Ragnheiður Traustadóttir Adjunct Professor of Rural Tourism and Director of Hólar Archeological Project.
- 15:15 – 16:15 **Meeting with the management team.**
Theodórsstofa, Hólar, Hjaltadalur.
- Present:** Skúli Skúlason Rector, Sigríður Magnúsdóttir Administrative Manager, Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir Head of Department of Rural Tourism, Víkingur Gunnarsson Head of Department of Equine Science and Helgi Thorarensen Head of Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology.
- 16:30 – 18:00 **Drive** from Hjaltadalur to Hótel KEA, Akureyri.
- 18:00 – 19:00 **Accreditation Expert Committee Meeting to crystallize thoughts from visit at HUC.**
Múlberg Meeting Room at hotel KEA.
- Present:** Prof. Maurice Boland (Chairman of the Expert Committee), Prof. Gerhardus Schultink (Member of the Expert Committee), Prof. Ragnar Ludvig Olsen (Member of the Expert Committee) and Dr. Anna Kristín Daníelsdóttir, RANNIS (Liaison officer).

Appendix 2

List of documents received

Higher Education Institution Act No. 63/2006 (Draft translation).

National Qualification Framework for Iceland (Draft translation).

Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions according to Article 3 of Higher Education Act, No. 63/2006, No. 1067/2006 (Draft translation).

Application for Accreditation of Agricultural Science in Hólar University College in the categories of tourism, equine sciences, aquaculture, fish biology and aquatic sciences.

Annex 01 Act on Agricultural Education.

Annex 02 Procedural regulations.

Annex 03 Regulations for study.

Annex 04 Report on agreements.

Annex 05 Report on research and development.

Annex 06 Assessment committee guidelines.

Annex 07 List of staff.

Annex 08 Environmental Policy.

Annex 09 Code of conducts.

Annex 10 Equal rights policy.

Annex 11 Employee Policy 2007.

Annex 12 Diploma-young horse trainer, programme description.

Annex 13 Diploma-trainer and riding teacher, program description.

Annex 14 Diploma in rural tourism programme description.

Annex 15 Diploma in Aquaculture programme description.

Annex 16 BS in Aquatic Biology programme description.

Annex 17 BS in Equine science programme description.

Annex 18 BA programme in rural tourism, programme description.

Annex 19 MS in Aquatic Biology programme description.

Annex 20 Annual Financial Statement 2006.

Additional documents received

1. Introductionary slides from presentations.
 - a. Skúli Skúlason Rector.
 - b. Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir Head of Department of Rural Tourism.
 - c. Víkingur Gunnarsson Head of Department of Equine Science.
 - d. Helgi Thorarensen Head of Department of Aquaculture and Fish Biology.
2. Employment of graduates from HUC.

