

Final Project Report

Overall Status: **Complete**

Project Name: Needs-Assessment Proposal for Teaching Staff at The School of Humanities

March 19, 2023 / Author: Beth Rogers

Status Code Legend

- On Track and Achieved
- Attempted but Ultimately Dropped from Project
- Achieved with Difficulty
- Goals Which Became Incompatible with the Project in its Original Form

The project is Finished the week of MARCH 19, 2023, due to the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Worked with project supervisor to develop preliminary version of survey to determine staff needs● Introduced preliminary version of survey to staff and outside third parties in academia to receive feedback for improvement.● Translated survey clearly into both English and Icelandic for staff; implemented Google Forms for easy dissemination and use.● Released final version of survey to staff members at all levels in the School of Humanities on February 1, 2023
Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Did not achieve 20% Participation from staff, despite numerous attempts to reach them via different means both within and outside of the School of Humanities
Milestones accomplished for the project over the course of Academic Year (AY) 2022-2023:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Work Package 1: Selection and creation of elements to be included in the first draft of the survey for staff was developed in Fall 2022.● WP2: The results of WP1 will were evaluated and used to support the development of a more comprehensive needs-assessment for the Humanities staff.● WP3: The larger staff will be introduced to the needs assessment in Spring 2023, with support and encouragement that even small suggestions or short responses can have big impacts.● WP4: The results of the survey responses were analyzed and compiled for useful feedback on staff support needs at every level of the School of Humanities
Areas/questions for discussion:	How could we encourage more participation in similar projects in the future? What is the best way, going forward, to offer comprehensive training to all teaching staff, regardless of permanent or non-permanent status?
Is there any ongoing material for this project?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Though this report is finished, the survey is still accessible and open for staff.2. The project manager and supervisor will now begin analyzing results for publication.3. The project manager and supervisor will now begin organizing the results (see analysis below) into the framework outlined by Fabrice Hénard and Deborah Roseveare's work on how to foster quality teaching in order to design an ongoing teacher support program (Funding approved March 2023)

Contact Information

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Project Abstract

This project, accepted for funding in May 2022, created a needs-assessment survey for teaching and support staff in the School Humanities. With the goals set out by the Strategy of the University of Iceland, HÍ26, huge efforts have been made to increase teacher training and mentorship amongst primarily the contracted teaching staff at the university. Less attention, however, has been paid to the needs and training of more than 2,500 non-contracted part-time staff. As such, this project was designed for a needs analysis of the pedagogical and technological demands of our teaching staff at all levels, beginning with the School of Humanities. Drawing on a range of evidence gathered from staff feedback, results will be arranged according to Fabrice Hénard and Deborah Roseveare's work on how to foster quality teaching. In doing so, underlying continuity may be found in the needs of all teaching staff, which can then be met with more targeted and useful recommendations for future staff tools and mentoring. The results of this analysis will communicate what the staff themselves want more of, allowing for a tailored training and support program to be implemented. The program will be inclusive, offering a much more specialized scope and thereby gaining higher engagement than current offerings. As such, it will support Goals 3 (Strength Based on Quality) and Goal 4 (A Good Place to Work) as defined and laid out by the HÍ26 plan.

Introduction

This project was designed to increase both the amount and quality of teaching staff support at the University of Iceland, beginning with a pilot project in the School of Humanities. To better understand what teaching staff, need, the project was designed as a 15-question survey which explored everything from staff perceptions of existing support to the value of a mentoring program which could be implemented in the future. The needs-assessment survey was chosen as the focus of the project because previous projects have offered a wide variety of teaching seminars and training on a variety of topics; however, attendance can be as many as 2 dozen or as small as 1 or 2, depending on interest and time available to staff. The needs-assessment would allow staff who spearhead teaching support materials to prepare and deliver more targeted and useful support, increasing staff and student satisfaction.

The experience of teaching and learning at the University of Iceland has been deeply impacted by recent events, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic. Like so many educational institutions around the world, HÍ is now looking at its

structures and procedures with a critical eye. Rather than return to the teaching strategies and practices that have worked well in the past without analysis or critical thought, a flood of exhortations in the media have appeared, pleading with those in power of every sector, from private to public, from financial to educational, not to return to “business as usual” in the aftermath of the pandemic. The main research questions of this study are:

1. What do the staff at the School of Humanities really need to know about in order to do their jobs effectively?
2. Which areas where development is needed for the teaching staff of the School of Humanities are *most* important (in their own eyes)?
3. In what specific ways can we support sessional and non-permanent teaching staff, who are in a different position to permanent staff?
4. How can we create plan for future professional developments containing specific recommendations to improve education in accordance with the stated goals of the Strategy of the University of Iceland, [HÍ26](#)?

Specifically, this project supports **Goals 3 and 4** within the Strategy of the University of Iceland, [HÍ26](#). Goal 3 is defined as Strength Based on Quality and Goal 4 is A Good Place to Work. This project was designed to enhance our understanding of the following **Project Objectives** in particular:

- ✓ **3.1 USER-CENTRED SERVICES** – User-centered services based on the needs of students, faculty and administrators will be prioritized at the University through digital transformation.
- ✓ **3.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING PRIORITISED** – Teaching methods and program offerings will be continuously developed and form the foundation of the University's quality assurance work, with student satisfaction and quality serving as guiding principles. The development of digital teaching methods, distance learning and open online courses will be prioritized.
- ✓ **4.1 HUMAN RESOURCES AND JOB SATISFACTION** – The University will promote a motivating work environment, with a focus on student and staff well-being, which will attract ambitious individuals from diverse backgrounds. Support services and administration will be improved through stronger frameworks, education, and training.
- ✓ **4.2 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING** – Research infrastructure, facilities and buildings support the advancement of research and teaching, as well as interdisciplinary cooperation and quality of operations.

Methods

After several months' worth of revision and feedback from teaching staff at various levels, and a consultation with a third-party specialist in academic funding, research, and staff training, the survey questions were finalized. All staff members in the School of Humanities were notified of the survey when it went live on February 1, 2023, via the Hugskot mailing list and the author's social media, along with reminder e-mails to the heads of department throughout the School of Humanities both Beth Rogers and Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, to inspire participation. As of March 19, 2023, 41 members of staff have responded to the survey, which remains open and accessible to any future respondents.

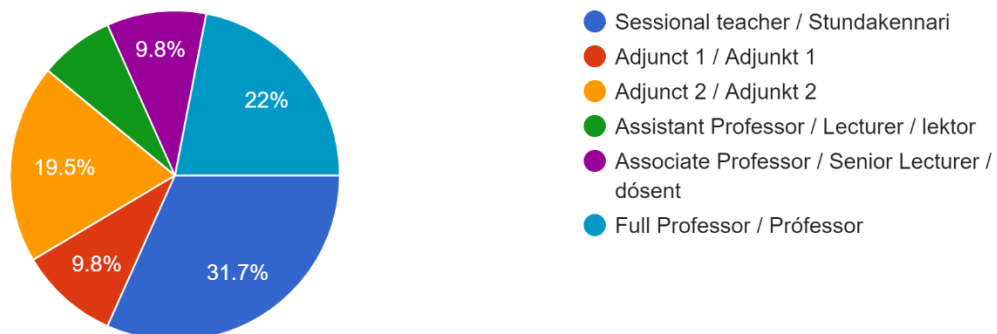
Results

The four work packages and their corresponding project objectives were conducted in full. The understanding of professional support for current teachers was strengthened overall, especially in the case of new, inexperienced, part-time, and/or foreign teaching staff. Even considering issues with low participation from teaching and support staff, the survey results nonetheless illuminated common struggles of HÍ teachers, popular discussions in the field of education and feedback from staff at the School of Humanities:

First, most respondents are *stundakennarar* (sessional instructors) at Háskóli Íslands. The second largest group, with 22% of responses, was full professor, so in this way the survey has captured the top and bottom levels of the teaching staff in similar measure.

Which of the following titles best describes your teaching position at the university? / Hvaða titill lýsir best kennslustöðu þinni við háskólann?

41 responses



Staff Level	Number of Survey Respondents	Total Number Employed at Hugvísindasvið (2021)
Sessional Teacher / Stundakennarar	13	229
Adjunct 1 / Adjunkt 1	4	13
Adjunct 2 / Adjunkt 2	8	19
Assistant Professor / Lecturer / Lektor	3	13
Assoc. Professor / Senior Lektor / Dósent	4	15
Full Professor / Próffessor	9	57

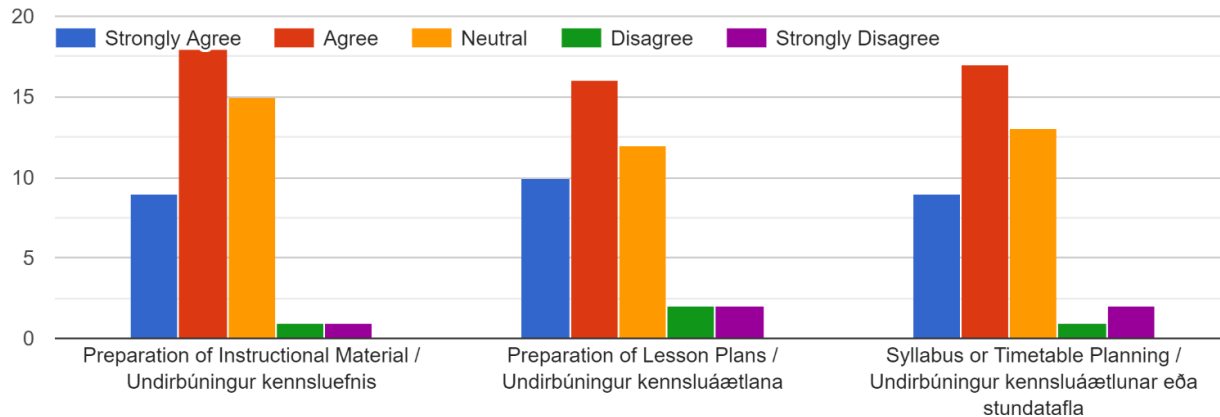
While the overall lack of survey results (41 of an estimated 346 total teaching employees in the School of Humanities across all four faculties),¹ there are enough responses to make some useful recommendations. It is important to note that while the relatively few responses do result in less surety over the results; however, the breakdown of the number of respondents at each level of staff may provide better and more representative insight into what that level of staff wants. Generally, the research survey is exploratory in nature – and one of the first of its kind that asks for input from all levels of staff – and does not require a high level of precision, a sample of 41 may be adequate. In any case, this research remains valuable for what it illuminates about the uncontracted teaching staff and their needs, as most support and resources are designed and delivered for contracted teaching employees. As such, any information on the needs of the sessional staff and Adjunkt 2 level is useful regardless of any issues with the small representative sampling size.

The first question asks for their general impression of how the university is serving its teaching staff, and responses appear to clearly show a desire for more support, with a majority of responses **Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing** that

¹ According to employment data for 2021, the last year in which data is available, the School of Humanities has approximately 117 contracted teaching employees and 229 part-time, uncontracted teachers across all departments. See: Haskóli Íslands. “Haskóli Íslands - Starfsmenn.” University of Iceland Official Site, April 29, 2023. <https://www.hi.is/kynningarefni/starfsmenn?fbclid=IwAR2OpKCKVHraQRYd4G1O72l2emHF7SHPPDOrA444v2UgYvsw9y-ijfBrwC3A>.

ongoing professional training is both important and currently lacking at the School of Humanities.

Academic staff in the School of Humanities should receive more training in ... / Akadémískir starfsmenn Hugvísindasviðs ættu að fá aukna þjálfun í...



Starting a trend in the survey responses, the above question about three general teaching duties (Preparation, Lesson Plan Design, and Syllabus Creation) garnered an **Agree or Strongly Agree** by the majority of participants. While it is true that a comparable number of responses were **Neutral** to these three common areas of teacher work, very few disagreed with the idea of more training outright. This is heartening, as it suggests that the current efforts of Kennslumálastöð and other departments and individuals working to help staff meet the demands of their jobs is acknowledged and appreciated.

The next question asks, “Specific Areas of Training: Academic staff in the School of Humanities should receive more training in ... / Sérstök þjálfunarsvið: Akadémískir starfsmenn Hugvísindasviðs ættu að fá aukna þjálfun í...” with the options (in order from left to right:

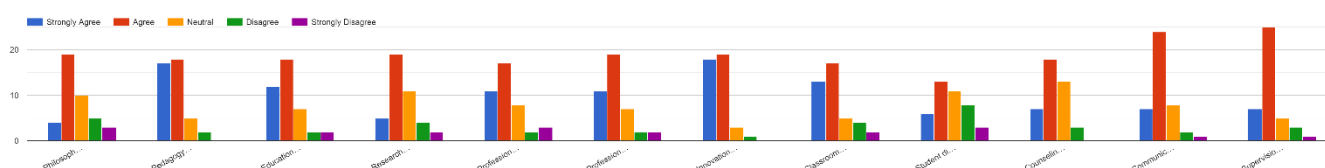
1. Philosophy of Education (e.g., the nature of education as well as its aims and problems) / Heimspeki menntunar (t.d. eðli menntunar sem og markmið þess og vandamál)
2. Pedagogy (e.g., practical approaches for use in the classroom) / Kennslufræði (t.d. hagnýtar aðferðir til notkunar í kennslustofunni)
3. Educational psychology (e.g., how students learn, and how these can be leveraged by instructors) / Fræðslusálfræði (t.d. hvernig nemendur læra og hvernig kennarar geta nýtt sér þetta)
4. Research techniques / Rannsóknartækni
5. Professional trends in teaching / Faglegar stefnur í kennslu
6. Professional attitude and ethics / Faglegt viðhorf og siðferði

7. Innovations in teaching strategies / Nýjungar í kennsluáðferðum
8. Classroom management / Hópstjórnun
9. Student discipline / Agi nemenda
10. Counseling and guidance / Ráðgjöf og leiðsögn
11. Communication skills / Samskiptahæfni
12. Supervision of student research / Umsjón með rannsóknum nemenda

As you can see from the criteria assembled above, those surveyed **Agree (red)** or **Strongly Agree (blue)** with all of them, especially the following (in random order):

1. Communication skills
2. Supervision of student research
3. Professional attitude and ethics
4. Innovation in teaching strategy
5. Classroom management
6. Pedagogy

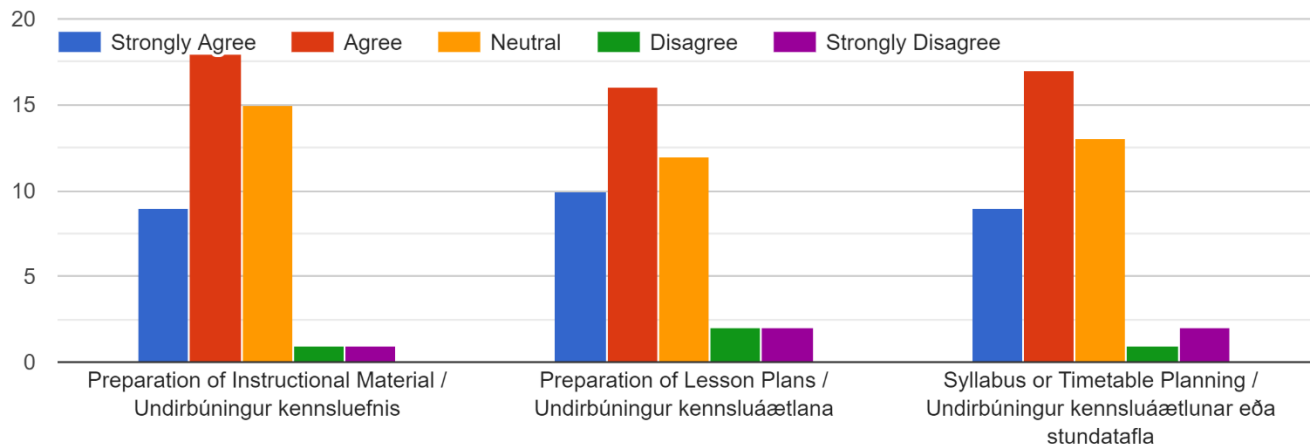
Specific Areas of Training: Academic staff in the School of Humanities should receive more training in ... / Sérstök þjálfunarsvið: Akademið starfsmenn Hugvísindasviðs ættu að fá aukna þjálfun í



The next question narrowed these ideas to a more specific teaching milieu of common issues for university or tertiary-level staff. Likewise, those surveyed expressed a majority of **Agree (red)** or **Strongly Agree (blue)** responses for more training in the following skills:

1. Preparation of instructional materials (e.g., PPT slides)
2. Preparation of Lesson Plans
3. Syllabus or Timetable Planning

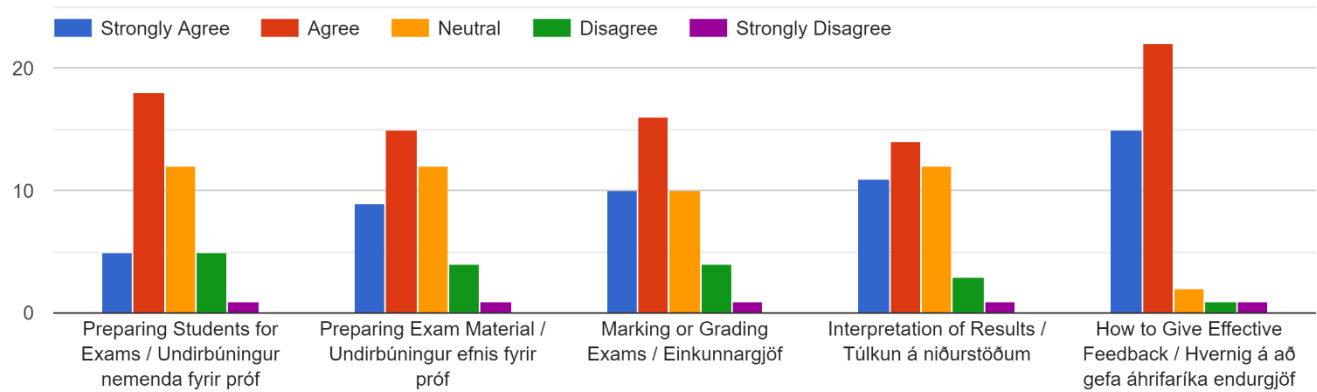
Academic staff in the School of Humanities should receive more training in ... / Akademískir starfsmenn Hugvísindasviðs ættu að fá aukna þjálfun í...



The next question deals with specifics regarding student work, and again highlights staff concerns over proper evaluation of deliverables and feedback to students. The next question asked participants to rank categories of professional development for further improvement from the following options relating to students: Preparing Students for Exams, Preparing Exam Material, Marking or Grading, Interpretation of Results, How to Give Effective Feedback. Interestingly, giving effective feedback received the strongest response overall, something which I had not considered in any of the teaching seminars I have done for Guðrún Geirsdóttir or Matthew James Whelpton. It is possible that teaching support options for staff are making an assumption about the ease of communication between students and instructors and missing a critical opportunity to build professional confidence in our staff. In addition, all

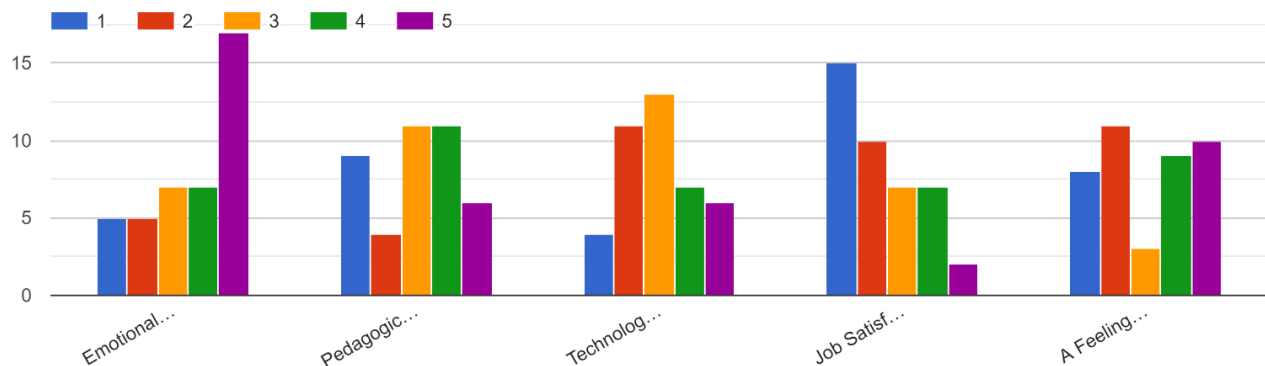
other issues received high interest from participants, garnering either an **Agree** or **Strongly Agree** response.

When assessing student work, academic staff in the School of Humanities should receive more training in ... / Við mat á vinnu nemenda ættu akademískir starfsmenn Hugvísindasviðs að fá aukna þjálfun í ...



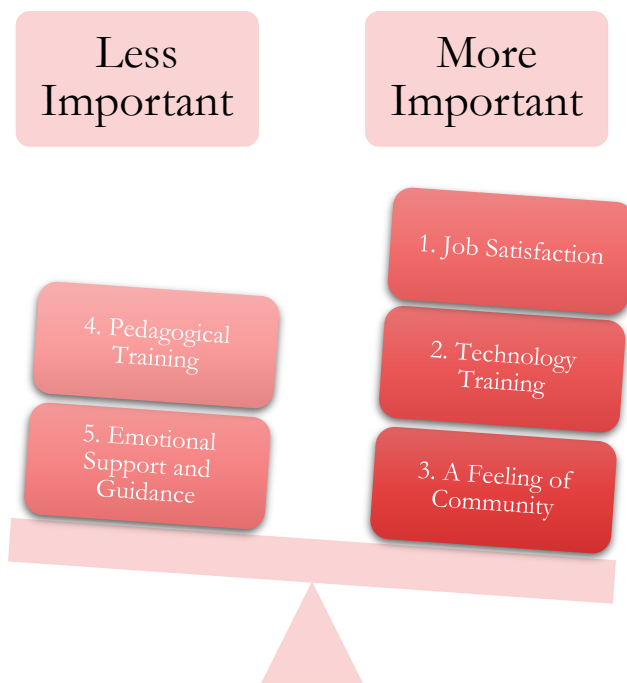
As the final section of the survey delved more deeply into personal thoughts and opinions, it began with a ranking question, asking respondents to rank the following criteria from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important). Ranking questions calculate the average ranking for each answer choice so you can determine which answer choice was most preferred overall. The answer choice with the largest average ranking is the most preferred choice.

Rank the following in order of preference, 1 being the most important to you as an instructor and 5 being the least important to you as an instructor: / Raðaðu eftirfar...nanda og 5 er minnst mikilvægt fyrir þig sem leiðbeinanda:



The responses here show that most staff who took the survey count Job Satisfaction as most important, then Technology Training and A Feeling of Community tie for second place, with A Feeling of Community falling to third

place, Pedagogical Training taking fourth and Emotional Support and Guidance for Teachers being rated least important by respondents.



According to the popular author Malcolm Gladwell, there are three requirements for satisfying work:

1. Autonomy: being responsible for your own decisions and direction
2. Complexity: work that engages your mind and your imagination
3. Reward: a direct relationship to the amount of effort you exert and the rewards you reap²

Interestingly, Robert N. Stavig and Alissa R. Stavig's 2022 book, *Retaining Women in Engineering: The Empowerment of Lean Development* explains that knowledge availability is the factor which has the potential to create the most problems for teaching staff at HÍ to attain these 3 desired qualities. As the authors outline, "A lack of access to reusable knowledge results in a higher level of dependence on others, leading to a lack of autonomy. The lack of autonomy reduces the complexity of the work an individual can do, and their lack of independence causes an inability to separate the complex from the trivial, resulting in someone becoming bogged down by both." Therefore, what these survey results show and research on education and decision-making shows is that teaching staff at all levels are hungry for more support regardless of what form it takes. There are no bad choices, and increasing teaching staff's access to knowledge and resources will only positively affect job satisfaction.

² Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 2008), p. 149.

In response to a question regarding additional resources and support, respondents had the following thoughts:

What format could more resources and support for teachers take? (Check all that you would be interested in) / Hvaða sniði gætu fleiri úrræði og st...ennara fylgt? (Merktu í allt sem þú hefur áhuga á)

31 responses



Once again, these responses show that more than half of survey takers are interested in any of these options, with the side benefit of confirming the necessity and popularity of various piecemeal attempts at teacher support available throughout the School of Humanities, such as the *rabbfundur um kennslu* (“Teacher Chats”) monthly meetings led by Matthew James Whelpton.

Discussion

Did you accomplish the purpose of the project?

In general, the purpose of the project, to gather information about the support and mentoring needs of the teaching staff in the School of Humanities, was accomplished. As I said in the original project description, the experience of teaching and learning at the University of Iceland has been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Like so many educational institutions around the world, HÍ is now looking at its structures and procedures with a critical eye. Rather than return to the teaching strategies and practices that have worked well in the past without analysis or critical thought, a flood of exhortations in the media have appeared, pleading with those in power of every sector, from private to public, from financial to educational, not to return to “business as usual” in the aftermath of the pandemic. Now that teaching at HÍ has developed the new HÍ26 strategy, it is a good time to make sure all our efforts to support instructional staff reflect our current, post-pandemic needs.

Did anything interesting come to light that was not related to the original project?

Due to the issue of low participation, it is difficult to show that patterns and trends among the responses offered by the teaching staff of the School of Humanities represent a large-scale need for change, as I had hoped to do.

However, the consensus seen in these relatively few participants is still undeniable in certain questions and when thinking about certain issues (see **Results** for full analysis). There was interest in developing more communication for teachers and about teaching. There was interest in creating mentorship for instructors both new and experienced, to share ideas and problem solve.

What conclusions can be drawn from the results?

Considering the above, flexible access to training and information is more likely to be successful. This allows staff to "dip into" events and access resources as they need them (Asking if teaching staff would like mandatory participation was met with a resounding 43,9% No, though a majority of respondents (53.7%) said they would indeed participate. In addition, when polled on whether staff believes the School of Humanities needs an on-going, formalized training program, 51.2% responded Yes and 36.6% said Maybe, far outweighing other responses. The university continues to develop incentives, but, as always, teaching staff at any university always have ongoing research and administrative pressures in addition to other work/time commitments for both permanent and sessional staff which make it difficult to attend regularly scheduled training seminars like these.

In addition, discussions and reactions gleaned from this research revealed that teaching staff are interested in any kind of support, resources, or information they can get to aid their work. Enthusiasm and a desire to do their best is universally observed. There are resources meant to help encourage *some* teaching staff to innovate, but they are few and closed to non-permanent staff and especially non-permanent and non-Icelandic staff whose Icelandic language proficiency is still developing.