

Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, at the opening of the Frændafundur conference, a collaborative forum for the University of Iceland and the University of the Faroe Islands.

Held in Oddi 201 on Tuesday 16 August 2022, 10 am

Chik Collins, Rector of the University of the Faroe Islands, Halla Nølsoe Poulsen, Faroese ambassador to Iceland, dear guests.

This is the 11th Frændafundur conference since it was first held in Reykjavík 1992. Since then, the conference has been held every three years, alternating between Reykjavík and Tórshavn. From now on, the plan is to hold Frændafundur every two years, which means that the next conference will be held in Tórshavn 2024.

Frændafundur provides a rare opportunity for scholars from Iceland and the Faroe Islands to come together and discuss various scientific topics that concern both countries or at least one of them. Scholars from other nations have also attended this conference in the past and will hopefully continue to do so.

At the first 10 Frændafundur conferences, the main languages were Icelandic and Faroese, with some exceptions for speakers from other countries. The language guidelines have been changed now so that English has in effect become the main language of the conference. It is mainly in the humanities that we will have talks in Icelandic or Faroese this time. The reason for this change is simply that very few can understand both spoken Icelandic and spoken Faroese. Thus, the use of Icelandic and Faroese may become counterproductive and hinder cooperation rather than promote it. Still, we think it is important to keep both languages as options at Frændafundur and there are no plans to turn Frændafundur into an English-only event.

In part as a result of the new language guidelines for Frændafundur, more abstracts were submitted for this conference than ever before. All in all, there will be more than 60 talks this year, including 5 invited talks. The 5 invited speakers (3 from HÍ and 2 from FF) reflect the research areas of the five different schools at the University of Iceland. This has never been done before and hopefully sends a very strong message that

Frændafundur is a truly cross-disciplinary conference. As at previous conferences, there are more talks in the humanities than in other fields but the overall ratio of humanities talks is below 50% for the first time in the history of Frændafundur. Thus, I can safely say that this Frændafundur conference is not only bigger but also more diverse than ever and I sincerely hope that this trend continues in the years to come.

Of course, one may ask: Why is it important to hold a conference like Frændafundur to enhance research cooperation between the University of Iceland and the University of the Faroe Islands? One can give a very general answer to this question by saying that international cooperation is vital for every university, big or small, that wants to make a difference in the world of science. However, there is also a more specific answer relating to the fact that Iceland and the Faroe Islands have a special bond as two sparsely populated islands in the North Atlantic, nations that have learned to live with the forces of nature and have had to fight for their independence. For this reason, it is easier for these two nations to cooperate on an equal standing than it is for Iceland or the Faroe Islands to cooperate e.g. with the bigger Nordic countries. Moreover, due to the similarities between the two nations with respect to language, history, culture, nature and economy, there is an endless array of topics for scholars in both countries to explore on a comparative basis and for the mutual benefit of both countries. And if you look at the program for the conference, you will see a lot of talks that could plant the seeds of exactly this kind of research cooperation.

Dear guests. I would like to finish by thanking everyone involved in organising Frændafundur this year and I wish you all an enlightening and enjoyable conference.

Thank you.