

**Ávarp Jóns Atla Benediktssonar, rektors Háskóla Íslands, á
ráðstefnu um rannsóknarsamstarf Íslands og Bretlands á sviði
norðurslóðamála
23.3.2024**

Dear participants,

I am delighted to address this UK-Iceland Event on Arctic Marine Research and Innovation and comment on the contributions of the University of Iceland

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The impact of climate change has highlighted the importance of the Arctic as a region. The immense changes that are already taking place are impacting the environment as well as Arctic societies. Due to climate change, shipping routes have begun to change, with increased transport via the Arctic. Natural resources are bound to become more accessible as well. Although this creates economic opportunities, the fragile ecosystem of the Arctic is under threat. Moreover, these changes will have immense impact on small communities in the Arctic, especially indigenous communities.

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Therefore, it is now more important than ever to prevent the negative effects of these changes and to ensure that sustainability is the guiding principle for the utilization of natural resources. In this context, it is important to consider the balance between environmental, social and economic factors. This calls for a cross-disciplinary approach in both

science and research when addressing these urgent challenges that we face in the region and trans-Atlantic co-operation.

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The Arctic is a region that is especially interesting from the viewpoint of International Relations and geopolitics, as the region spans culturally diverse communities on different continents. Iceland is the only sovereign state that lies entirely within the Arctic, as defined internationally and by the Arctic Council. The challenges that face the Arctic are therefore of great importance to the interests of the Icelandic nation and influence the formulation of the country's foreign policy. The growing interest of great powers in the region, with the accompanying militarization, also means that our need for experts in this field is increasing.

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The University of Iceland is the largest university here in Iceland with about 16000 students and is also a leading research institution. The University is a research university and, as such, places great emphasis on the quality of research. Furthermore, the University of Iceland operates dozens of research institutions and centers, which are the venue for diverse research in various fields, including the Arctic. The University of Iceland has leading scholars in all the fields of study that directly relate to the challenges we face in the Arctic.

The strengths of the University of Iceland lie not least in a strong interdisciplinary research environment and the University's strong position when it comes to participation in international research

projects and international collaboration, for instance with scientists in the UK. Annually, more than 200 internationally peer reviewed Web of Science articles are jointly authored by UK and University of Iceland researchers. Furthermore, the University of Iceland has exchange agreements for students and staff with 35 UK universities and we very much welcome increasing the cooperation. Additionally, and importantly, many of our scientists are educated in the UK. A significant strength of the University of Iceland lies in the fact that most of our faculty members are educated abroad, mostly in North America and Europe.

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International research cooperation on Arctic issues is of vital importance for Iceland. One such collaboration is through UArctic - University of the Arctic, where one current board member is a professor of geophysics at the University of Iceland. UArctic is an important forum for cooperation in the field of Arctic studies. The University of Iceland is also an active partner in a multitude of conferences and events, such as the 2021 UArctic Congress which will take place in Reykjavik in May this year.

At the University of Iceland, the Institute of International Affairs operates a Centre for Arctic Studies, which is a forum for interdisciplinary collaboration in the field of Arctic research. The Centre for Arctic Studies supports and participates in Arctic research conducted by researchers at the University of Iceland and disseminates research results. In addition, the center contributes to education and

hosts lectures and events, often in collaboration with other domestic and foreign institutions. The Centre for Arctic Studies participates in many international projects, for example on SDGS in the Arctic, and also established Northgate, a new network on the sociocultural aspects of climate change in the North Atlantic Gateway to the Arctic. The Northgate network which is supported by the Joint Committee for Nordic research councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences, works on enhancing the understanding of the new challenges of climate, ecosystems and human mobility in the Arctic and strengthen local communities' resilience in the face of these challenges.

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Researchers at the University of Iceland have in recent years put increased emphasis on Arctic research and our ambition is to continue to do so. A testament to that is that out of the Arctic projects in Iceland that are funded by the competitive Icelandic Research Fund, 70% of allocations for Arctic research went to researchers within the University of Iceland in the years of 2009-2019.

The University is particularly strong when it comes to research in marine environment, biology, health, engineering, geology, glaciology, remote sensing, flora and fauna, but also emphasizes interdisciplinary studies between engineering and natural and social sciences.

The University of Iceland has already started to enhance such research, as demonstrated by a new diploma program in Arctic Studies, which falls under political science. Moreover, the interdisciplinary

Environment and Natural Resources graduate program at the University has for many years had an option for students to specialize in the Arctic, and students at the University of Iceland can now do Arctic tourism studies.

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The University of Iceland is willing and open to further collaboration with international partners to strengthen Arctic Research. International cooperation is not only important for the University of Iceland, but also the foundation for Iceland as an Arctic nation.

The environmental changes taking place in the Arctic are pushing academia, businesses, and governments to think in solutions and encourage innovation to find new solutions to sustainable use of natural resources on land and in the ocean.

In this light I welcome strengthening the cooperation between the UK and Iceland in arctic research and the field of higher education. I look forward to continuing the discussion on the topic.