Legal education at the University of Akureyri (UNAK) began in 2003. At that time, it must have seemed a rather far-fetched and, in some opinions, crazy idea. Nevertheless, the studies began in the joint Faculty of Social Sciences and law. Credit for that work goes to the progressive and considerate individuals who will be thanked in due course. It is safe to say that since then, the department has flourished, both in teaching and research, and has now become one of the most specialized in the country in the fields of international law and polar law.

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, the Faculty of Law held a symposium in March 2023. Speakers were recruited, primarily from the strong body of the faculty's own graduates, to showcase the various paths available to students graduating from UNAK's law programmes and to discuss how the degrees prepared them for their careers. The faculty had the honour of hosting a keynote speech by the President of Iceland, Guðni Th Jóhannesson, who gave a talk on the role of the Head of State under the Constitution. This was followed by presentations on the status of Members of Parliament, the rights of victims in the criminal justice system, the legal environment for journalists, Protocol 35 to the EEA Agreement, the status of polar law following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, land rights of Indigenous Peoples in the context of environmental law and last but not least the experiences of students at the Faculty of Law today.

Participants at the 20th Anniversary Symposium of the Faculty of Law
The Social Impact of Legal Education in Akureyri

Programme
Full recording

Alongside the symposium, the Faculty worked with Nordicum-Mediterraneum to develop this special issue dedicated to the 20th anniversary celebrations. The first contribution contains the personal reflections of three of those who played a key role in the preparation and early days of legal education at the University of Akureyri. Professors Emeriti Guðmundur H. Frímansson and Mikael M. Karlsson and Professor Rachael Lorna Johnstone discuss challenges that they faced and overcame to deliver the education and research for which the Faculty is known today. Four double-blind peer-reviewed articles follow. Júlí Ósk Antonsdóttir, adjunct and district court lawyer, writes about the rights of the non-custodial parent in cases where the custodial parent relinquishes custody of the child to child protection services. Then Rachael Lorna Johnstone, professor, talks about the importance of international law, and of applying international approaches, when it comes to solving challenges and disputes in the polar regions. An article by Sara Fusco, PhD student and graduate of the polar law programme, follows, tracing how environmental law is influencing modern constitutionalism and how this is reflected in interpretation and application of Indigenous rights to land. The final peer-reviewed paper is by another polar law graduate, Eleni Kontostathi, and Polina Ananina, graduate of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. It discusses how global warming is affecting the Arctic and its legal environment. The authors place special emphasis on discussing the Russian government's emphasis on its cooperation with the Chinese government and the potential for new ports and infrastructure by making use of the North Sea Route. The special issues concludes with a tribute to Ágúst Þór Árnason, former colleague and friend at the Faculty of Law, written by lecturer Ragnheiður Elfa Þorsteinsdóttir. Ágúst Þór played a major role in the establishment and delivery of legal studies at the University of Akureyri, as well as contributing to constitutional law and human rights in Iceland, and holds a great place in the hearts of the many who knew him. He is fondly remembered.

The Faculty of Law would like to express its thanks to all those who participated in celebrating the Faculty's anniversary this year. It is our hope that the Faculty of Law at UNAK will continue to bloom and be a leader in teaching and research in various fields of law in the years to come.