

# Response to UArctic External Evaluation 2023

[External Evaluation Report](#)

[Comments and initial recommendations for actions](#)

[Task Force on External Evaluation Follow-up – Terms of Reference](#)

## 1. Fundraising

The main recommendations were the appointment of a Director of Development, and establishing a comprehensive fundraising strategy. Both of these processes were in progress at the time of the evaluation, and have now been implemented with the hiring of an Executive Director of Development, and the drafting of a strategic Philanthropy Plan. Additionally, additional staffing capacity has been secured to support this role and work. We judge these as very satisfactory responsive actions to the evaluation recommendations.

[Philanthropy Plan 2024 - 2026](#)

This Philanthropy plan is reviewed by management and the Board. The evaluation made some suggestions about certain priorities, and the possibility of involving members and Thematic Networks and Chairs more in setting these priorities. The list of Gift options / Funding opportunities should be revisited, to include specific UArctic concepts for summer schools (to organise, and stipends for participation), post doc, PhD, Fellows connected to the work of Networks and Chairs, to complement concepts like High Level Seminars etc. The feedback is noted, but caution is warranted regarding involving members and Thematic Networks (potential conflicts of interest and too many competing ideas).

National government funding was not a priority in the External Evaluation, but is still the largest source of funding for UArctic activities. The initiative by UArctic Board member [Aaja Chemnitz](#) to argue for 1 mill Euro annually from each of the Arctic Countries for UArctic participation must remain a priority for the leadership. This should however not be the priority of the Executive Director of Development.

## Implemented actions

- Exec. Director of Development in place
- Comprehensive fundraising strategy in place
- The 1 Mill strategy, in good progress for DK and some early work in place for USA.

## Further actions

### High

- Be transparent about success of fundraising towards 1M target (X)
- Process to further engage Thematic Networks and Chairs can be improved
- List of gift opportunities should be updated (ongoing)

### Med

- Use Mimir and Indigenous Advisory Board in fundraising concept development.

### Low

- 

### Not Implementing

- 

## 2. Indigenous Perspectives and Northern Community Engagement

The main recommendations concerned the leadership of the VP Indigenous role and how the roles and responsibilities of the Avatitsinni (formerly Indigenous Peoples Committee). These concerns were addressed primarily through the work of interim VP Indigenous Robin Bradasch (Yukon University), who developed a comprehensive plan for reorganizing the roles and responsibilities of the Avatitsinni as well as how the VP Indigenous works with that body. UArctic has since implemented these recommendations, with Avatitsinni no longer an Assembly committee, but rather an advisory board parallel to the Academic Advisory Board *Mimir*. Nominations for members of this new board are now being collected from the Indigenous Permanent Participant Organizations (PPOs). Additionally, the VP Indigenous has new terms of reference and additional support capacity provided by Yukon University.

Similarly, the External Evaluation noted the need for additional activities oriented towards smaller northern institutions and communities. UArctic has since appointed a UArctic VP Northern Community Engagement, with a mandate to develop such initiatives and engagement. It should be noted that success in this area is just a matter of effort and resources, but careful planning and relationship building must take place to establish reciprocal trust with rights holders in northern areas. The VP Northern Community Engagement is developing a series of online townhall meetings with northern communities to develop a dialogue between northerners and members of the UArctic research community. These form an important element of the northern community engagement strategy.

UArctic is also undertaking several studies into the reach and impact of Arctic research (Arctic Research Impact and “Power” 2023). We also maintain a collection of resources to benefit members and the Arctic research and higher education community at large, which is overseen by the VP Indigenous.

## Implemented actions

- New VP Indigenous, with a support person in place at Yukon University
- Arctic Indigenous Peoples Organisations have been asked to nominate candidates for the Indigenous Advisory board (change in Bylaws)
- New VP Northern Community Engagement (Labrador, Memorial University) in place
- UArctic Indigenisation website soon operational, will be a support tool for all working with Indigenous communities.

## Further actions

### High

- VP indigenous will revisit UArctic Indigenous engagement and present a strategy in a future board meeting

### Med

- Develop functional trust and partnership between education and research parts of UArctic and the Indigenous Advisory Board and leadership as well as the new community initiative.

### Low

- 

### Not Implementing

- 

## 3. Education and Training

The recommendations include useful advice for refocusing and further developing undergraduate offerings, particularly the Circumpolar Studies curriculum. We also note the expectation that Thematic Networks develop undergraduate education programs. However there are numerous challenges to such efforts, such as local language of delivery, academic structures and legal frameworks, and registrarial constraints, like admission rules and tuition.

It should be noted that earlier undergraduate delivery models, where UArctic has played a strong role in organizing course delivery, are not seen as viable as they overlap with the role of our members to deliver education programs. Nevertheless, we agree that innovative models for collaborative network delivery should be stimulated.

Development of joint curriculum, shared learning resources, and collective learning opportunities for students are seen as the main focus for educational development. UArctic Chairs and Thematic Networks, , and in particular the UArctic Laera Institute for Circumpolar Education, will play an important role in such developments.

The External Evaluation does not focus much on graduate and doctoral degree education at all. This is perhaps as it is already well established through PhD courses and summer and winter

schools developed through Thematic Networks. These address most topical challenges faced by the Arctic, bringing students and researchers together for an open dialogue.

Another education area not specifically addressed in the recommendations is the need to tailor made skills training and further (continued) education for individuals in northern communities. UArctic should find ways to use the network to ensure adapted targeted such education on a person to person level for the smaller communities in the Arctic. The collective capacity of UArctic members has a great potential to serve such needs.

We recognize that sharing information about available educational opportunities across the UArctic membership, particularly for specialized courses about Arctic issues, is an important role for the organization. UArctic already recognized that the existing Catalogue model was no longer working for members, those seeking course information, nor UArctic's administration. UArctic is now focusing efforts on examining how data models that support sharing information about research outputs that support a general Open Science/Open Data strategy, and which can also be applied to education opportunities and learning resources.

Another recommendation was to add an additional Associate VP role for undergraduate education. While we agree that securing sufficient resources to support education development in UArctic is critical, this recommendation seems at odds with the later suggestions to simplify and streamline, and even reduce, our organizational and leadership structure.

## Implemented actions

- New approached to Catalogue initiated - but far from completed
- 

## Further actions

High

- 

Med

- Establish a set of Associate Vice Presidents for specific categories of education cooperation(funded by hosting institutions)
- Further the development of a solution for a Arctic Studies Catalogue - possibly using AI to (semi automatic) extract information from member institutions
- Regular Best Practices reports promoting solution sharing among UArctic members

Low

- 

Not Implementing

-

## 4. Mobility/Exchanges

### NARRATIVE

Solutions for “mobility that are tailored to Northern Indigenous student needs” already exist within north2north and other frameworks in UArctic. The perceived underrepresentation of Indigenous students in these programs is more due to low numbers of those seeking such opportunities, rather than the lack of available mechanisms or resources.

A program that is not mentioned, but where a need exists, is a combined mobility and learning from home community program that can be tailored to individual students. Most UArctic member institutions are not set up to deliver this (they expect students to be at campus or they admit distant students only from their own region), while others manage to deliver well in specific subject areas (eg teacher training) but not other needs (eg engineering training, business). A combined initiative of mobility and education tailoring training opportunities utilizing the broad UArctic institution network could address the concerns raised by the committee (see Education).

Recommendations around the concept of “virtual mobility” have proven somewhat problematic. Much of what this concept entails is already happening through Thematic Network collaboration. While students at smaller northern institutions face other barriers, including connectivity and registration/credit transfer, that are beyond the scope of what UArctic can realistically influence.

UArctic recognizes the demand for exchange programs with non-Arctic members and regions. We are exploring how such models might work, without eroding the circumpolar focus of the north2north program.

### Implemented actions

- north2north is already wide open for short term mobility and have specific priorities for indigenous and northern students
- Non-Arctic states are already partly in the north2north program.

### Further actions

#### High

- Ensure that north2north partners accept n2n as a multilateral mobility agreement, equal to bilateral agreements (this may take some effort in some regions).
- Further develop the non Arctic to Arctic mobility program

#### Med

- A concept for an Indigenous specific north2south program
- A combined initiative of mobility and education tailoring training opportunities in specific skills utilizing the broad UArctic institution network.

#### Low

- Develop further the virtual mobility
- Not Implementing

- 

## 5. Thematic Networks

The findings of the External Evaluation seem to perceive a lack of collaboration between different Thematic Networks, whereas in fact there is significant cross-cutting exchange of information and cooperation going on. The visibility of these collaborations can be hidden in the member contacts and activity reports and therefore visualization of these collaborations between different Thematic Networks will be planned and implemented. This said, in spite of several opportunities, such as annual joint online and onsite meetings, where Thematic Networks leaders meet, present and plan joint activities, there are always those leaders who don't participate in these events and thus can feel that they do not get the cross network benefits.

The recommendations focussing on the needs of northern communities are addressed earlier in relation to the work of the VP Northern Community Engagement and VP Indigenous, who are working with Thematic Networks to these ends.

The expectation that Thematic Networks develop undergraduate education programs is addressed in the Education section. Developments focussed on the undergraduate level are highlighted in section 3 above which describe a set of networks focussing specifically on the development of shared undergraduate curriculum.

### Implemented actions

- VP Networks have now full time support person

### Further actions

#### High

- Visualization of collaborations between different Thematic Networks at UArctic website has to be planned and implemented
- Establish practices with VP Northern Community Engagement and VP Indigenous on how to support thematic networks to establish connections with Northern communities for co-creating activities

#### Med

- Establish a set of Associate Vice Presidents for specific categories of education cooperation(funded by hosting institutions)
- Further the development of a solution for a Arctic Studies Catalogue - possibly using AI to (semi automatic) extract information from member institutions
- Regular Best Practices reports promoting solution sharing among UArctic members

- Further improvements on the integration between VP Networks, Education, Research, Communities, and Indigenous.
- Strengthen fundraising that supports Thematic Networks and Chairs
- Establish new networks to meet the opportunity for funding of large strategic research projects is not needed - existing networks collaborate or act alone on this already.

Low

- 

Not Implementing

- 

## 6. UArctic Chairs

The recommendation regarding UArctic Chairs focussed on opportunities for Chairs to interact with each other, as well as with Thematic Networks. Such structures are already in place through regular meetings of UArctic Chairs, as well as at other Arctic conferences and events.

The suggestion to involve Chairs more in prioritizing fundraising is largely handled through the Academic Advisory Body Mimir, which is made up of a subset of UArctic Chairs. The Executive Director of Development regularly consults with both Chairs and Thematic Network leads on where to focus fundraising efforts.

The newly appointed VP Research has additional support capacity provided by the University of Iceland to be able to effectively coordinate activities of the Chairs, promote their work, and find new opportunities for collaboration. The suggestion for introductory videos is being developed by the VP Research's office.

### Implemented actions

- Call for more UArctic Chairs spring 2024
- Renew Mimir membership spring 2024
- New location UI) and increased capacity for the VP research function
- Chairs are regularly engaged in evaluation of national UArctic grant applications.

### Further actions

High

- Make introductory videos for each Chair which describes challenges and work done/to be done
- Make these videos available for fundraising purposes
- 
- Use Mimir and Indigenous Advisory Board in fundraising concept development.

Med

- Support session proposals done by Chairs, e.g. on Arctic Circle Ass., General congress, ASSW, etc.
- Provide funding for PhD candidates connected to each Chair

Low

- 

Not Implementing

- 

## 7. Membership

Over past years UArctic's administration has made significant efforts to improve member engagement. The importance of doing this is clearly supported in the recommendations of the task force. This includes a full-time Member Engagement Coordinator (Secretariat, University of Lapland), as well as another coordinator that focuses on Canadian and smaller northern institutions as part of the Global Affairs Canada funding (based at Memorial University). Additional engagement opportunities for members include a new monthly newsletter focussed on information useful to members, monthly "Meet UArctic" sessions for members (on various issues such as promotion, participation in Assembly, Thematic Networks, north2north mobility), and the option to easily schedule one-on-one meetings with the member engagement team. These all form part of UArctic's still-developing Member Engagement Strategy due to be finalized in 2024.

Specific recommendations included a focus on Indigenous organizations and smaller northern institutions, which is addressed by the new efforts and strategy, as well as coordination with the VPs Indigenous and Northern Community Engagement. The suggestion of a dedicated VP Membership is largely addressed by the increased focus towards member engagement activities, as well as the additional capacity already noted.

UArctic Regional Centres are perhaps used to their full potential. Currently two such Centres exist (one in China and one in Scotland), and a third one will be approved in Spring 24 by the Board (the Arctic Five in the Nordics).

The issue of membership also includes the overall composition of UArctic members - its representativeness, regional coverage and key constituents. Together with the Board, UArctic is engaged in an overall membership and recruitment strategy, that will focus on key nations where bolstering membership is needed (continental USA, Scotland, Canada, etc).

### Implemented actions

- Member engagement online meetings
- USA lower 48 recruitment action.
- Arctic Five Regional Centre
- Use of large annual conferences for member recruitment and engagement



## Further actions

### High

- Data visualizations on research outputs/profiles of members
- Expanding member services, opportunities (including offers)
- Member Engagement Strategy:
  - Increased engagement opportunities - open engagement sessions bookable directly by members
  - Customized monthly “Member Bulletin” for Assembly reps and institutional leaders
  - Regular online “Meet UArctic” sessions for members on various topics

### Med

- Member Recruitment strategy (where to focus - regions/types/profiles)
- Expansion of new Regional Centres (Europe/North America)
- Guidelines for institutional visits

### Low

- UArctic Fellows

### Not Implementing

- 

## 8. External Partnerships

UArctic leadership supports most of the recommendations, noting for example that we already have partnerships with the Arctic Mayors Forum and Arctic Economic Council, in addition to the Arctic Council (observer status). In addition, UArctic is a member of the International Science Council and the International Association of Universities, and has formal partner status in UNESCO. Further, UArctic has a formal partnership agreement with IASC and IASSA. The long-term partnership with the Prince Albert II Foundation has yielded many collaborative programs with the Foundation as well as strong and visible support from Prince Albert II of Monaco himself.

The idea of a certificate program is interesting, and will be considered. The issues with the promotion of the Arctic Academic Action Award have been addressed both internally and with Arctic Circle.

External partnerships are already announced broadly when they are established. We agree that UArctic also needs an external partnerships strategy for proactive engagement with external partners. Further, the strategy will also consider how partnerships can be closed when necessary.

## Implemented actions

- We have a system of formal agreements with relevant partners

## Further actions

### High

- Develop a partnership strategy with procedures and protocols x
- A strategy on partners in fundraising efforts should be a section in the fundraising strategy x
- Improve visual presentation of who are partners, who represent UArctic there etc.
- Implementation of shared communications outlined in each MOU

### Med

- Re-establishment of relations with UNESCO
- Further improvement of relevant UArctic calls to external partners

### Low

- UArctic Certificate program

### Not Implementing

- 

## 9. Governance, Structure, Management and Finances

The External evaluation does not really address UArctic Governance a lot, most comments are on structure and management. The present structure is recent and implemented from 2020 after the transformation to a legal entity. We assume this indicates there is no need to address the governance structure as such. The practical implementation of the governance has improved with the new full time combined Director of Governance and Finance Support (based at the UArctic International Secretariat at the University of Lapland, Finland).

UArctic leadership agrees that it would be helpful to be able to streamline the management structure. This is however not trivial. Most leadership positions are a combination of UArctic duties (typically 50%, but sometimes 25%) and home institution responsibilities. Recently several VP's have received in addition full time support persons. This has dramatically improved the capacity of several VP's. The President, Secretary General, the Chief Communications Officer, the Executive Director of Development, and most staff at the Secretariat are also full time.

It is critical for the organization to have circumpolar representation also in senior management, and thus the typical 50% combined with full-time support ensures we have leaders rooted in national academic systems which provide critical insight for UArctic. This distributed leadership is also an important tool for member engagement, and a huge financial contribution to UArctic.

From the outset it was recommended that UArctic should not be an organization that mirrored existing university structures or traditions, but rather develop its own innovative models and structures. The distributed operations, combined with leadership titles and roles that more reflects the networking tool UArctic is essential to show that we are a network of members rather than a degree-granting university. Borrowing terms from traditional academic institutions may communicate the wrong idea about UArctic as an organization.

Restructuring UArctic on top level is a possibility, but will likely not eventually reduce the number of roles needed. The title changes suggested by the External Review team will not reduce, nor make roles more clear and are therefore not recommended. A more drastic top level change would be to add one level in the operational part of UArctic - adding a leader that combines all operational and academic sides of UArctic (leading the roles of VP Research, Academic, Networks, Community, Mobility and adding the project management role of secretariat). The Secretary General then is responsible for governance, finance, and communications, but no daily implementation. Philanthropy manager and VP Indigenous could be independent. Changes like this will however not reduce, but rather add to the structure without any obvious coordination benefit.

We note the observation that UArctic may sometimes be seen *ad hoc*, opportunistic and reactive to new initiatives and partnerships. To avoid this the leadership together with the Board, will develop clearer processes to ensure that new initiatives are reviewed and approved by senior management, in consultation with the Advisory Boards, in a methodical manner. This will also mean that these decisions are clearly documented and communicated.

On finances, finance reporting has been largely improved. This also includes in kind via the “pyramid concept”. Even if not recommended, or discussed, the leadership recommends further action to increase our ability to quantitatively document the value of the UArctic network.

## Implemented actions

- VP Indigenous, Research, and Networks have all full time support persons.

## Further actions

### High

- Further improve the thematic collaboration between UArctic offices through collaboration Teams (Communication, Giving, Academic etc)
- Establish associate VP structure at least for VP Academic responsibility area.
- Appoint a small task force that can recommend actions to improve UArctic reporting on impact and the base value in the UArctic finance pyramid
- Ensure that UArctic ry has sufficient capacity for handling the financial and legal processes related to increased project and philanthropic activity

Med

- Improve internal communication among UArctic staff and among Senior Management for an efficient distributed management and improved sense of community
- Improved tracking and reporting of priorities, task management, and follow-ups to regular processes, new initiatives
- Ensure annual face to face meetings for all UArctic staff

Low

- 

Not Implementing

- 

## 10. Succession of Leadership

In their meeting in October 2022, the Board discussed preparing for the future and planning the succession for some central positions in UArctic leadership. As background, the current President Lars Kullerud was evaluated in 2018. Following the evaluation, in their meeting in December 2018, the Board decided to renew his appointment as President of UArctic for a new term 2020-2026.

In their meeting in October 2022 the Board decided the following succession plan for UArctic leadership:

- Lars Kullerud is on his final term as President of UArctic (ending at the end of 2026)
- Secretary General will continue, if relevant, until the new President is in place in 2027
- The new President will organize the search for the next Secretary General

UArctic ry and University of Lapland signed a cooperation agreement in 2021. In the agreement, University of Lapland committed to host UArctic International Secretariat, including the Secretary General. The agreement is continuing in force until the end of 2032, after which it will be automatically renewed for four years at the time, if either party doesn't terminate the agreement.

### Implemented actions

- The board has discussed succession and decided a way forward for recruitment of a new President by the end of Lars Kullerud's term at the end of 2026.

### Further actions

High

- The Secretary General proposes a recruitment plan for UArctic President in the Board meeting in April 2025

- Establish a leadership development process to ensure that institutional knowledge is retained when there is a staff and leadership turnover throughout UArctic
- Broaden the engagement of UArctic staff in member and external partner engagement to ensure longevity

#### Med

- Appointment of President Search Committee Oct 2025
- New President starts Jan 1, 2027

#### Low

- After appointment of new President, they will commence search for new Secretary General in collaboration with the University of Lapland

#### Not Implementing

- 

## 11. Enhancing UArctic's Influence

UArctic's leadership questions the perception of the External Evaluation that Thematic Networks are mainly (or exclusively) focussed on research. To the contrary, many if not most are heavily involved in organizing graduate education courses and programs, educational resources, outreach programs, and the like. As noted above, due to the nature of undergraduate education the focus of Thematic Network is most effective at the graduate level.

We agree that UArctic communications needs to clearly communicate our goals, values and mission, and the most effective means to do that is through our members -institutional leadership, assembly representatives, international offices, and researchers (Thematic Networks/Chairs). Our website and other communications tools also convey these messages to our external partners, funders, and other stakeholders. As noted earlier, these and other elements are clearly defined in UArctic's communications strategy, which follows from our Strategic Plan. Further elements of this strategy, such as the Member Engagement Strategy, are being developed as noted earlier. The suggestion of regular updates to members has already been implemented through the monthly Member Bulletin. Adapting the public newsletter to this model is also planned.

The science blog suggestion has been considered, and continues to be explored. This should be evaluated among the UArctic Chairs - who would be the most logical to contribute content - but editorial capacity would need to be secured.

Assembly, Board and Rectors (as well as Thematic Networks, Chairs, north2north representatives) already convene together every second year at the UArctic Congress.

## Implemented actions

### Further actions

#### High

- Member Engagement Strategy (revising) and other member actions (see 7)

#### Med

- Add communication strategy to the website
- Expanded presence in Arctic conferences (ASSW, Frontiers, Encounters etc)
- Continue bringing various UArctic bodies together during these events

#### Low

- Science Blog

## 12. Dynamics of the Geopolitical Arena

UArctic leadership and the Board have already addressed how the question of Russian institutions and individual researchers within Thematic Networks are handled within UArctic. The organization regularly reviews these policies, in consultation with members as well as national governments of the other seven Arctic states.

We support the idea of developing a conflict resolution procedure.

UArctic's focus continues to be on the Circumpolar North, despite the growth in non-Arctic members of the organization. The Arctic remains a global arena and involving those institutions and countries with strong Arctic interests is essential to meet the organization's goals.

## Implemented actions

- Board approved policy on engagement with Russia

### Further actions

#### High

- 

#### Med

- Development of a conflict resolution procedure.

#### Low

- 

#### Not Implementing

-