

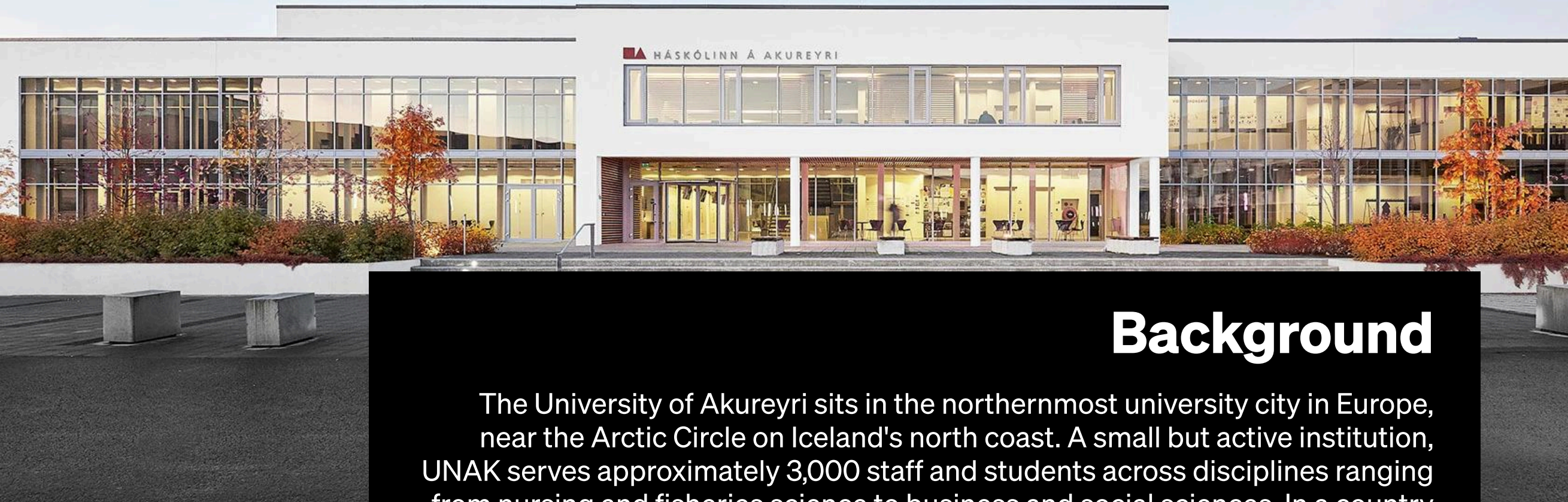
Academic Case Study



How The University Of Akureyri Built AI Infrastructure Its Researchers Could Trust



Photo Source: <https://www.unak.is>



Background

The University of Akureyri sits in the northernmost university city in Europe, near the Arctic Circle on Iceland's north coast. A small but active institution, UNAK serves approximately 3,000 staff and students across disciplines ranging from nursing and fisheries science to business and social sciences. In a country with a small but established higher education sector, the university is expected to deliver internationally competitive research output with a comparatively lean research team and without the scale of larger research institutions.

In 2025, UNAK created a new role: AI Project Manager. Magnús Smári Smáráson stepped into the role, bringing 16 years of emergency services experience and a master's degree in sociology with a focus on AI governance. The mandate for this role was both practical and institutional: build an AI infrastructure that would work for UNAK's specific operating context, not merely replicate what larger universities were doing.

Challenge

Upon Smáráson's arrival, the university faced a challenge familiar to institutions of any size: AI tools were arriving faster than the governance structures necessary for their responsible use. Faculty expressed uncertainty regarding academic integrity, while students adopted available tools without clear guidance. Furthermore, policy documents, even well-written ones, lacked efficacy in the absence of supporting technical infrastructure.

The scale of the challenge was measurable. An institution-wide staff AI survey (March to April 2025) found that 89 percent of staff were already using AI tools, with a strong appetite to use them more (4.2 of 5). Yet self-rated understanding of AI concepts was more modest (3.4 of 5), the need for more training was clearly acknowledged (4.1 of 5), and agreement that the university should provide structured support and education was near-unanimous (4.5 of 5). Most telling: trust that AI returns reliable information on its own was low (3.2 of 5). Staff were using the tools. They did not trust them.

An additional constraint significantly influenced UNAK's decision-making. The institution's equity and access principle required that no AI deployment could privilege English-speaking users over Icelandic-speaking users. This condition excluded several commercial solutions and pushed the team toward the development of a custom system.

Concurrently, Smáráson identified a recurring issue observed in both emergency medicine and academic research: the risk of over-reliance on systems that present outputs with equal confidence, regardless of accuracy. He recounted testing a frontier AI model on his own golf swing data, feeding in 300 shots of Trackman data points and video for analysis. The model generated six authoritative diagnoses. All six were wrong (the actual issue was a blister on his right thumb).

Smáráson's framing was direct: the diagnostic lens should be to treat the patient, not the monitor.

This applies in UNAK's research context as well: how do you give researchers a tool that expands their judgment rather than displacing it? And how do you know that citations and claims can be reliably verified at scale?

Solution

UNAK's approach rested on three interdependent components:

Policy With Technical Teeth

The university developed a formal AI governance document structured around five principles: equity and access; well-being and human-centered design; transparency and trust; ethics; and academic integrity and innovation. According to Smáráson,

the statement "The ultimate responsibility for the work remains with the human" is particularly significant. The document explicitly assigns accountability, providing IT personnel, teaching staff, and students with a clear guiding rule.

UNAK's governance approach is grounded in the VALOR framework (Verification, Alignment, Legitimacy, Oversight, Responsibility), developed in Smárason's MA thesis *Beyond Fragmentation: A Life-Value Alternative for AI Governance*¹. The statement above, that responsibility remains with the human, is the Responsibility pillar in practice, and Scite's verify-before-you-build role is Verification.

Infrastructure Built For Institutional Control

UNAK built its own AI infrastructure, called BORG (the Icelandic word for "city"), hosted on Icelandic servers powered by renewable energy and designed to avoid vendor lock-in. The transition from prototype to production was completed in four months by a core team of two. Scite is licensed and rolled out as the specialist research and citation layer of UNAK's environment, alongside BORG. The two run as separate systems. What BORG and UNAK's AI literacy support add is guidance on how to prompt and use Scite well, not a technical integration.

The University Library (Bókasafn HA) has been a key partner throughout the rollout, on research support, information literacy, and engaging faculty and students. Astrid Margrét Hoddevik Magnúsdóttir, Director of Library and Information Services, together with Linda Sólveig Magnúsdóttir and

Pia Susanna Sigurlína Viinikka, carried the work that made the access model function in practice, co-shaping how AI tools reach researchers at UNAK.

Scite As The Research Layer

UNAK holds an enterprise license for Scite covering all staff and students, approximately 3,000 individuals. Access began literacy-first: the way into Scite was the Library's onboarding course in Canvas, ensuring foundational knowledge preceded tool usage. As the librarians built fluency with the platform, that course is no longer a hard prerequisite. The Library now grants access directly and teaches Scite hands-on inside first-year courses. The literacy requirement did not disappear; it moved into the classroom and into the Library's everyday support. When researchers ask about best practices for using Scite, BORG emphasizes: read the papers it surfaces, verify citations, and maintain independent critical judgment.

Scite's role in the stack is precise. Where general-purpose AI tools produce often unverifiable outputs, Scite's Smart Citations indicate how a paper has been cited in the literature, distinguishing between supporting, contrasting, or mentioning claims. This verification layer is particularly valuable for researchers at smaller institutions who may lack extensive peer networks for literature review validation. Smárason utilized the Scite MCP server to conduct parallel agentic workflows for research synthesis, deploying up to 11 agents simultaneously. This process helped produce publishable, peer-ready research in a fraction of the time traditional literature review methods would require.

Results

418 distinct users

have actively engaged with Scite, drawn from UNAK's enterprise license population of approximately 3,000 staff and students.

7,721 distinct sessions

and **7,776 Assistant queries**, evidence of sustained, repeated engagement rather than one-time trial use.

358 people

have completed the Library's Scite onboarding course.

"As a nursing researcher, Scite let me see how a topic is defined and supported across the literature far faster than before, and just as important, I could see and verify the sources behind each claim. That verification step is what makes it something I can actually build research on."

Thorbjorg Jónsdóttir
Associate Professor, Faculty of Nursing,
University of Akureyri



Outcomes

One-on-one AI coaching has been formalized as an institutional program at UNAK after the university identified a key limitation of group training: it creates awareness, but not lasting fluency. By investing in individual coaching alongside tool access, UNAK acknowledges that providing a license is not the same as enabling effective use.

UNAK's governance policy was implemented before Iceland released its first national AI action plan. This timeline matters as it demonstrates that the university's approach was shaped by an internal commitment to responsible AI use rather than by external mandate or regulatory pressure. For institutions awaiting national or sector-wide guidance before acting, UNAK's experience suggests that inaction is itself a governance decision.

"At a small institution, you cannot afford to build an argument on a foundation you cannot verify," shares Magnús Smári Smárason, AI Project Manager, University of Akureyri. "Scite lets our staff and students see how a claim has been received in the literature before they build on it, and our job around it is to keep the human judgment in the loop. That is not a convenience, it is a condition for honest research."

About the University of Akureyri



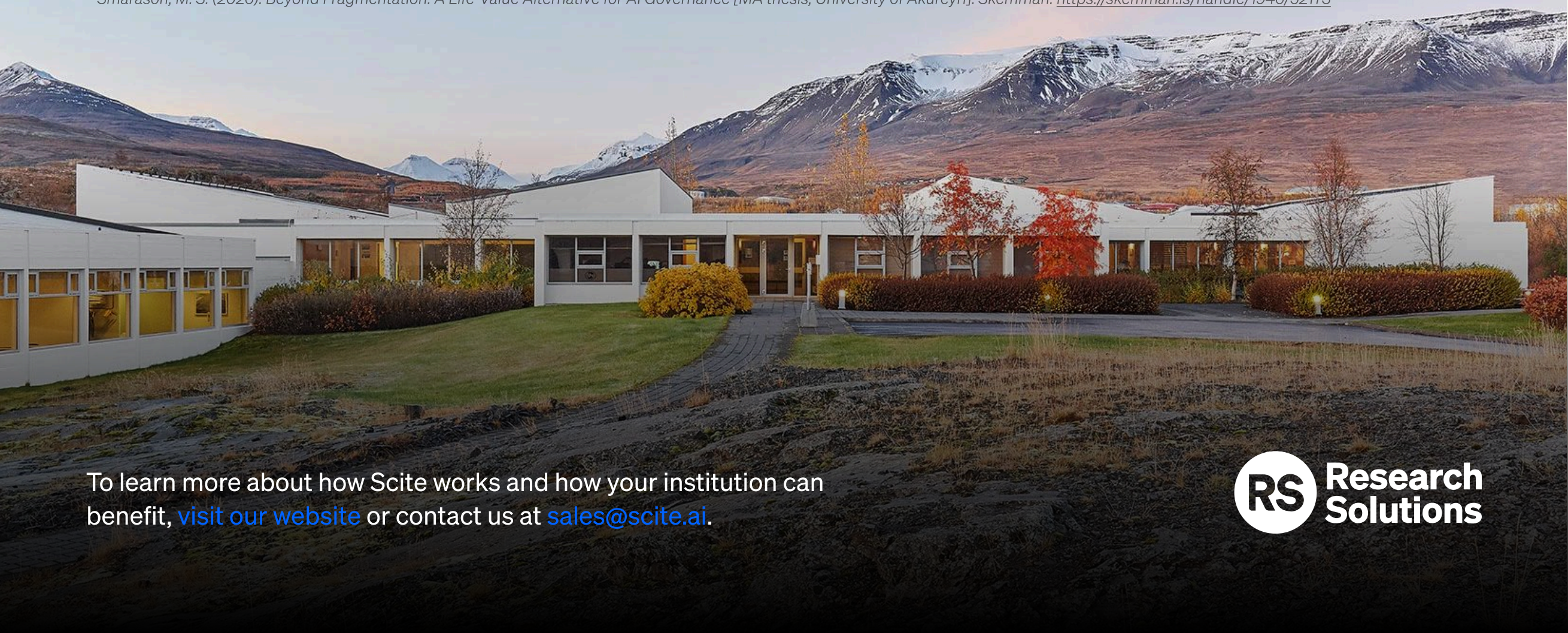
Háskólinn
á Akureyri

The University of Akureyri (Háskólinn á Akureyri) is Iceland's northernmost university and the largest university outside the capital, located in Akureyri on the country's north coast. Founded in 1987, it is a scientific and academic institution that conducts teaching and research across two schools: the School of Health, Business and Natural Sciences and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The university serves approximately 2,900 students and 250 staff, with a varied offering of on-campus and distance learning programs. It maintains strong ties to industries and institutions across Icelandic society, with a focus on applied research connected to regional needs. The university is a founding member of the University of the Arctic network.



Magnús Smári Smárason is AI Project Manager at the University of Akureyri (UNAK), where his work spans the research, development, and governance of the university's digital infrastructure. More at [smarason.is](https://skemman.is).

¹ Smárason, M. S. (2026). *Beyond Fragmentation: A Life-Value Alternative for AI Governance* [MA thesis, University of Akureyri]. Skemman. <https://skemman.is/handle/1946/52173>



To learn more about how Scite works and how your institution can benefit, [visit our website](https://scite.ai) or contact us at sales@scite.ai.