



Structures of Education and Training Systems in Europe

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STRUCTURES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

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Prepared by

The Icelandic Eurydice Unit

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INTRODUCTION: GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

Iceland is a representative democracy with a president. The current constitution came into effect on 17 June 1944, when Iceland achieved its independence from Denmark. The Icelandic system of government is based on the principle of three-way separation of power. According to the Constitution of Iceland, the Parliament and the President jointly exercise legislative power. Judges exercise judicial power. The present political parties in Parliament are: The Social Democratic-Alliance, the Independence Party, the Left-Green Movement, the Progressive Party and the Civic Movement

The President is the constitutional head of state, and is elected by popular vote for a four-year term. The office is non-political, and the President exercises his/her powers through the ministers. The powers of the President lie in having the authority to commission the leader of one of the political parties to form a government. In case of failure, the mandate is given to another party leader.

The Icelandic parliament is legally and politically responsible for the education system. It determines its basic objectives and administrative framework. All education is under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Parliamentary elections, which are held every four years, were last held in April 2009. Of the 63 seats in Parliament, the Independence Party gained 16 seats with 25 % of the vote, the Progressive Party 9 seats with 14 %, the Social Democratic-Alliance 20 seats with 32 %, the Left-Green movement 14 seats with 22 %, the Civic Movement 4 seats with 6 %. Women constitute 42.8 % of members of Parliament. After the parliamentary elections of 2009 a coalition between the Social Democratic-Alliance and the Left-Green movement was formed.

Executive power lies with the cabinet, formed by the political parties following parliamentary elections. The Government must have the support, direct or indirect, of the majority of the Parliament. Icelandic electoral law is based on the principle of proportional representation, and since 1944 all governments have been coalition governments. The present government is composed of twelve ministers, responsible for fifteen ministries. Six of the ministers are women, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, Science and Culture.

The judicial system is two-tiered, consisting of district courts, whose magistrates are appointed by the Minister of Justice; their decisions are subject to appeal to the Supreme Court, which has nine permanent members, also appointed by the Minister of Justice. The judges, holders of judicial power, are autonomous and independent of the executive and legislative branches.

In 2008, Iceland comprised 78 municipalities. The municipal councils are elected by universal suffrage at four years' interval, by proportional representation in municipalities with over 300 inhabitants, and in others by simple majority.

As of 1 January 2009 the population of Iceland was 319 368, with a population density approximately 2.9 inhabitants per km². In 2007, 65 % of the population aged 25-64 had completed at least upper secondary education.

There is great disparity in population; the largest municipality, the capital Reykjavík, had 118 665 inhabitants as of 1 January 2009, while some of the smaller rural districts had populations of fewer than 100.

Icelandic is the native tongue of Iceland and the teaching language in Iceland is Icelandic. There are no minority languages in Iceland.

Education in Iceland has traditionally been organized within the public sector, and there are relatively few private institutions in the school system. Almost all private schools receive public funding.

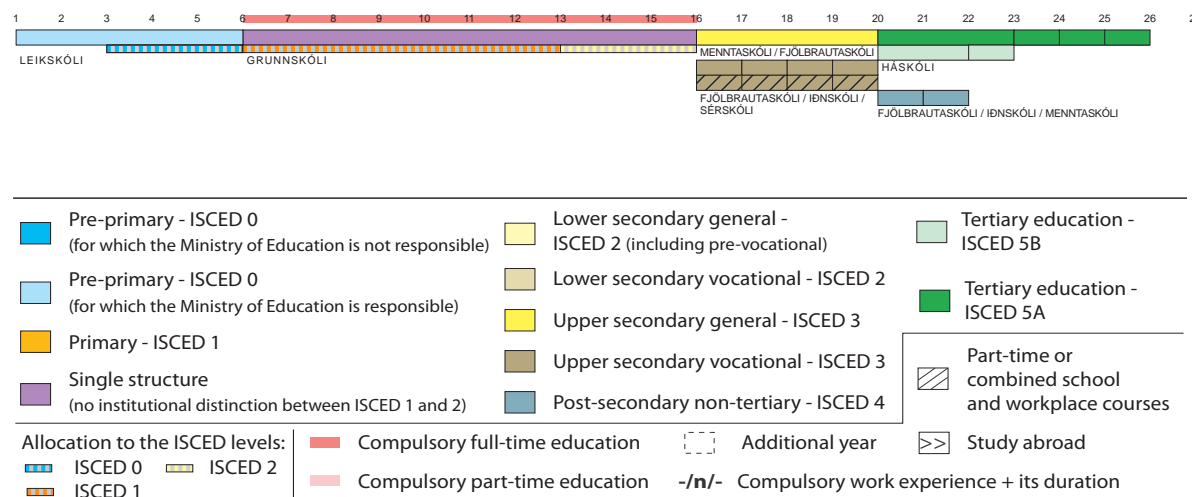
A fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system is that everyone shall have equal access to education irrespective of sex, economic status, geographic location, religion, and cultural or social background. This principle is stated in the Constitution of the Icelandic Republic as well as in the various laws pertaining to the different educational levels. Education is compulsory (primary and lower secondary education) from age six through age sixteen, i.e. for ten years. Emphasis is placed on providing the opportunity for upper secondary education for all and everyone has the legal right to enter school at that school level, irrespective of results at the end of compulsory schooling.

According to the laws that govern different educational levels, handicapped pupils, at pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary school levels, are entitled to the same education as other pupils. The main policy is integration rather than segregation. Schools are expected to provide handicapped pupils with appropriate opportunities. Only the most severely handicapped are in special schools which only operate at the compulsory level. No legislation deals with special needs or disabled students in higher education. However, higher education institutions may have an official policy on how to meet the students' special needs, such as dyslexia, physical disabilities and psychological problems.

Laws governing the educational system in Iceland are: The Pre-Primary School Act from 2008, The Compulsory School Act from 2008, The Upper Secondary School Act from 2008 and The University Act of 2006. The various institutions that offer higher education are also governed by individual acts passed separately for each institution.

1. INITIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ORGANISATION, FUNDING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1.1 Organisation of the initial education and training system



The educational system is divided into four levels: Pre-primary, compulsory (single structure primary and lower secondary education), upper secondary and higher education.

The pre-primary school level is intended for children up to the age six when the compulsory school begins. Education is compulsory for children from six to sixteen years of age. The upper secondary level normally includes the sixteen- to twenty-year age group. Anyone who has completed compulsory education, has had equivalent basic education or has turned sixteen is entitled to enrol in upper secondary education. Those that have the right to enrol in upper secondary school studies have a right to study in upper secondary schools, both general and vocational, until the age of 18 as a minimum. Students at the higher education level are generally required to have passed the matriculation examination, or its equivalent. Continuing and adult education is provided by public authorities, private institutions, companies and organisations.

1.2 Distribution of responsibilities

The Icelandic Parliament is legally and politically responsible for the school system determining the basic objectives and administrative framework of the educational system. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the implementation of legislation at all school levels from pre-primary and compulsory education through the upper secondary and higher education levels, in addition to continuing and adult education. The Ministry is, among other things, in charge of making curriculum guides for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools, issuing regulations and planning educational reforms. The municipalities are responsible for the operation of pre-primary and compulsory education. Upper secondary schools and higher education institutions are run by the State.

1.2.1. Pre-primary Education

Municipalities are responsible for all operation of schools at the pre-primary-level, as well as the construction, operation and maintenance of facilities in accordance with the Pre-primary School Act from 2008.

Municipalities are responsible for all operation of pre-primary schools. Pre-primary education is controlled by the pre-primary board which supervises pre-primary education in the municipality concerned. The pre-primary board is comprised of representatives appointed by the political parties or organisations that have been elected to the local government. The number of members varies according to the size of the community, but most often there are five politically appointed representatives. In addition, teachers' and parents' representatives are entitled to attend the pre-primary board meetings, with the right to speak and make proposals. In municipalities where the same body is responsible for both pre-primary and compulsory education, a school board is appointed which supervises educational affairs at both school levels.

A pre-primary school is administered by a head teacher that represents the parties that operate the pre-primary school in question. The head teacher is responsible for making plans for the educational work that goes on in the school and for having regular meetings with the staff concerning the operation of the school and the welfare of each child. Pre-primary schools are divided into departments and each department usually has a supervisor who, in co-operation with the head teacher, is responsible for the work in that department. It is a matter of negotiation between the head teacher of a pre-primary school and the local municipality in question whether the head also works in a department.

Each pre-primary school elects representatives for a parent council and the head teacher shall take the initiative for council elections. At least three parents shall sit on the parent council. The parent council defines its own rules. The role of the parent council is to provide reference to the pre-primary school and the Pre-primary School Board on the school curriculum guide and other plans for the school's operations. The parent council shall also follow closely the implementation of the school curriculum guide and other plans within the school, as well as the presentation thereof to parents. The parent council has the right for reference regarding all major changes in pre-primary school activities.

Municipalities shall recruit pre-primary school education specialist to provide counselling and support to pre-primary schools regarding innovation and development in pre-primary school activities. They shall also take care of monitoring pre-primary school operations and encourage cooperation between pre-primary schools as well as between school levels.

1.2.2. Compulsory Education

Municipalities are responsible for all operation of schools at the compulsory level, as well as the construction, operation and maintenance of facilities in accordance with the Compulsory School Act from 2008.

Within each municipality, matters concerning compulsory schools come under the authority of the School Board, which is in charge of educational affairs in the municipality in question. The School Board is elected by the relevant local government at the outset of each elective term. The Local Government Act and agreements of the municipality in question apply to School Board elections and operations. School board alternates shall be of the same number as main board.

Head teacher, compulsory school teachers and parents shall vote for their School Board representative and alternate to sit in School Board meetings with the right to speak and propose a motion.

With the law from 2008 on compulsory education, the role of the School Board was increased, particularly with respect to professional activities in compulsory schools. In each school district a School Board is responsible for compulsory school affairs, in accordance with laws and regulations or as assigned to it by the local municipalities. The School Board is responsible for ensuring that all children in the school district of compulsory school age receive instruction as provided for by law.

The head teacher is the director of a compulsory school, is responsible for its activities and provides professional leadership. In his or her work it depends on the size of the school whether the head teacher has teaching duties. The head teacher summons teacher and personnel meetings as often as deemed necessary. He makes proposals to the local government regarding administrative arrangements in the compulsory school. The head teacher determines the purview of other administrative staff, of which one shall serve as substitute for the head teacher. If a compulsory school has less than 60 pupils, and does not have other administrative staff, the head teacher decides at the beginning of each school year, which one of the school's permanent teachers shall assume the role of head teacher in case of his or her absence.

Each compulsory school shall operate a School Council, which shall be a forum for cooperation between the head teacher and the school community regarding school operations and activities. The School Council participates in policy making for the school and in devising and developing the school culture. The School Council shall discuss the school curriculum guide, annual operational schedule, financial plan and other plans regarding school activities. The School Council shall have a saying regarding any plans for major changes to school operations and activities before a final decision is made thereof. The School Council shall monitor security, conditions and general well-being of pupils. The School Council shall be comprised of nine members for two years at a time: two teachers' representatives together with one representative of general personnel of the respective school, two pupils' representatives and two parents' representatives in addition to the head teacher who directs the School Council work and is responsible for its establishment.

The compulsory school shall operate a parent council. The head teacher is responsible for its foundation and takes care that it is provided with all needed assistance. The role of the parent council is to support school activities, encourage pupils' welfare and promote the relations between school and home. The parent council of each compulsory school shall set its own rules, e.g. regarding elections for its board and election of representatives for the School Council.

The compulsory school shall operate a pupils' association and the head teacher is responsible for its foundation. The pupils' association shall e.g. address pupils' interests, social and welfare issues and the head teacher shall take care that it is provided with all needed assistance. The pupils' association in each school shall set its own rules, e.g. regarding elections for its board and election of its representative for the School Council.

1.2.3. Upper Secondary Education

According to the Upper Secondary School Act from 2008, the daily administration of an upper secondary school is managed by a head teacher who ensures that school operations comply with acts, regulations, The National Curriculum Guide and other existing statutes at each time. He or she is also responsible for adhering to the budgetary plans of the school. The head teacher serves as director of the school board, and hires administrative staff, teachers and other school personnel in consultation with the school board. The head teacher is responsible for devising a financial plan and ensuring that the school budget is followed, He or she shall take initiative in formulating the school curriculum guide and organise developmental work within the school.

In every upper secondary school there is a school board with five members: three representatives nominated by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture and two representatives nominated by the respective municipality. There are three non-voting observers, with a right to speak and propose a motion, one nominated by the teachers' assembly, one by the pupils' association and one by the parents' council. The head teacher shall attend school board meetings as a non-voting observer with the right to speak and propose a motion. The board is appointed for a four-year period.

The school council shall provide consultation and assistance to the head teacher. The head teacher serves as chair to the school council, which, in addition to the head teacher, shall be comprised of the head teacher's assistant and representatives of teachers and pupils.

Upper secondary schools shall organise a teacher assembly at least twice every school year. The head teacher summons the assembly, proposes a schedule and chairs the assembly, or delegates the chair. The teacher assembly in upper secondary schools shall cover policy making for school activities, such as organisation of study, methods of instruction, structure of school curriculum guide and organisation of examinations and study assessments.

Upper secondary schools shall organise a school assembly at least once every school year. All school personnel and pupils' representatives, according to further decision by the head teacher, have a right to sit in the school assembly. The school assembly discusses school matters. The head teacher summons the assembly, proposes the meeting schedule and chairs the meeting, or delegates the chair. The school assembly minutes shall be presented to the school board. The head teacher is obliged to summon a school assembly if one third of permanent staff requires so.

Occupational councils shall advise the Minister regarding vocational education at upper secondary school level in their respective occupations. Their role is among other things to propose general study objectives and define the needs for knowledge and skills which the study programme descriptions for the respective occupations shall be based on, to devise criteria for division of study between school-based and workplace learning and to make proposals regarding structure and content of examinations for individual occupations. Occupational councils are appointed for all occupations or occupational groups in which education and training are offered at the upper secondary level.

The role of the occupational committee shall be to advise the Minister regarding policy making and implementation of vocational education, to serve as platform for collaboration and coordination for the occupational councils, and to provide opinion of categorisation and division of occupations between occupational councils.

1.2.4. Higher Education

The administration of public higher institutions is entrusted to the University Council and the Rector. The Rector of public higher education institutions is appointed for a five-year term by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture on the recommendation of the University Council. The University Council shall define the general policy on teaching and research and formulate the university's organisational structure. The University Council shall carry out general monitoring of all the university's activities, of individual schools and university institutions and is responsible for ensuring that the university operates according to law and official edicts. The Rector sits on the University Council and is also the chair of the council.

There are no provisions in the higher education act that prescribe how the University Council is comprised. The objective is to ensure that interested parties, teachers, students and other staff have a say in the institutions' academic policy making. The University Act reiterates the independence of institutions with the purpose of ensuring that the public authorities do not interfere with academic work within institutions and respect freedom of research and academic independence.

Each Higher Education Institution shall organise a general forum at least annually. The assembly is a forum for discussion on professional matters within and for academic policy making. The senate decides further on the role and organisation of the assembly. The senate shall ensure the rightful representation of teachers, students and other personnel at the assembly.

Faculties are autonomous in their internal affairs, within limits specified in the laws and regulations of each institution. The administration of faculties is in the hands of the deans, faculty meetings and faculty councils.

Higher education institutions have a significant degree of academic freedom and autonomy; as a result the institutions largely determine the nature and structure of their educational curricula and courses.

The private higher institutions have councils and they have a significant degree of autonomy, and can for example decide such matters as admission requirements, progression of students from one year to the next, certification etc. These matters do not in fact differ much between public and private institutions. Private institutions receive considerable financial assistance from the State under service contracts made with each institution. The institutions are subject to the provisions of the Universities Act but they also operate according to their individual charters, which are confirmed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

1.3 Financing

Local municipalities pay for the construction and the operation of pre-primary schools and compulsory schools as well as 40 % of the construction cost of upper secondary schools. State contributions towards the operation and construction of schools at the upper-secondary and at the tertiary level are determined in the annual State Budget as passed by Parliament each year.

1.3.1. Financing of pre-primary education

The construction and the running of pre-primary schools (including all salaries and operation cost) are by law at the expense and the responsibility of municipalities. Funds are allocated to the municipalities from the national income. Local taxes may also be used for the financing. Parents contribute a substantial amount towards operating costs at the pre-primary level. The share that parents contribute varies from one municipality to another and in some cases depends on the circumstances of the parents. On the whole, parents contribute about a third of the operating costs of pre-primary schools.

Local municipalities have the power to allow parents or private parties to operate a pre-primary school. All private pre-primary schools get financial support from their local municipality, and therefore the private sector of the pre-primary level could be described as grant-aided private sector. Approximately 12 % of all children in pre-primary schools attend privately run schools. It varies in which form private pre-primary schools are operated. There are, for example, parent-operated pre-primary schools where a special association is formed to carry out the operation of the school, and there are also parochial pre-primary schools.

1.3.2. Financing of compulsory education

The cost of education at the compulsory education is entirely born by local municipalities, except for educational materials and the national coordinated examinations. All decisions regarding the construction and maintenance of school buildings and facilities are made by the local municipalities in question. Funds are allocated to the municipalities from the national income taxation.

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture may provide accreditation to compulsory schools or parts thereof which are run by other parties than the municipalities, as non-profit organisations, as limited companies or as other recognised legal forms, given the consent of the municipality regarding the establishment of the school. The consent of the municipality may be subject to a certain maximum number of pupils. Same law and regulations shall apply to those compulsory schools as to compulsory schools operated by the municipalities.

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture may authorise accreditation of compulsory schools or study programmes within general compulsory schools which are operated according to recognised foreign or international curriculum guide and study organisation.

The school year 2007/08 there were seven grant aided private schools at the compulsory level in Iceland. 1.3 % of the pupil population of the school year 2007/08 attended private schools.

All these private schools receive considerable financial assistance from the municipalities and in addition their pupils pay school fees. Teaching in private schools follows the National Curriculum Guide which is in effect for compulsory schools and pupils take the same nationally co-ordinated examinations in the grades 4, 7 and 10.

1.3.3. Financing of upper secondary education

Costs concerning new construction and initial capital investment for equipment at the upper secondary level are met in such a way that the state pays 60 % and the local municipalities, one or more, that are formally parties to the construction of the school, pay 40 %. All other costs at the upper secondary level are allocated in the State Budget.

Education in Iceland has traditionally been organized within the public sector. There were eight grant-aided private upper secondary schools in the country in the school year 2007/08. These schools operate in accordance with the same legislation as the public schools and are subject to the same supervision. All eight schools receive public funding determined in the State Budget.

According to the Upper Secondary School Act of 2008 the Minister of Education, Science and Culture can provide schools, other than public upper secondary schools, with accreditation to carry out instruction at upper secondary level subject to certain conditions. Accreditation of an upper secondary school provides a confirmation that at the time in which accreditation is granted, the activities of the respective school comply with general conditions of the Act and other law and regulations issued under the Act.

Agreements between the Minister of Education, Science and Culture and individual upper secondary schools, made for a period of 3-5 years at a time, shall specify main emphases in school activities, school curricula, study offer, organization of instruction, quality control and evaluation, as well as other matters which the parties to the agreement consider feasible. The implementation of these agreements shall be reviewed annually and valid agreements revised if the parties to the agreements consider necessary.

The state finances in part various forms of continuing and adult education, such as the upper secondary schools' evening classes, distance learning and the lifelong learning centres. From the Job Education Fund, financed by the state, grants are given for continuing vocational training in business and industry. The state also allocates funds for the continuing education of its civil servants, e.g. for the in-service training of upper secondary school teachers.

1.3.4. Financing of higher education

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture is authorised to negotiate agreements for the duration 3-5 years at a time regarding financial contribution for teaching and research in Higher Education Institutions accredited by the Ministry under this Act. Such agreements are a prerequisite for a financial contribution to the corresponding Higher Education Institution.

The agreement shall stipulate the following:

- a. Terms laid out by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture regarding financial contribution to Higher Education Institutions.

- b. A definition of the kind of teaching and research which is paid for by the state treasury.
- c. Main operational emphases of the Higher Education Institution and the common objectives of the agreeing parties.
- d. Financial contribution and payments from the state treasury for studies defined as continuing education and lifelong learning

The Minister is authorised to set special provisions regarding payments from the state treasury to Higher Education Institutions, allocated to the studies of individuals with domicile outside the European Economic Area (EEA).

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture lays down rules regarding financial contribution to Higher Education Institutions. The rules stipulate the studies and research covered by the financial contribution, relevance of subjects, scope of research and other elements which serve as frame of reference for the financial contribution.

Higher Education Institutions receiving financial contribution from the state treasury shall summon an open annual meeting where the Higher Education Institution finances and the main aspects of its operational plan are presented. Both public and private higher education institutions receive individual appropriations from the State Budget.

1.4 Quality assurance

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the evaluation and monitoring of educational institutions and of the entire educational system in Iceland.

External evaluations are organised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and evaluation of schools/institutions as a whole, internal evaluation methods or other defined parts of school activities. At pre-primary and compulsory school levels, the municipalities may conduct their own external evaluation of school and school activities.

1.4.1. Quality Assurance in pre-primary education

The objectives of evaluation and quality control in pre-primary schools are:

- a. To provide information about school activities, school achievements and development to educational authorities, pre-primary school personnel, receiving schools and parents
- b. To ensure that school activities are according to law, regulations and National Curriculum Guide for pre-primary schools
- c. To increase the quality of education and school activities and encourage improvements
- d. To ensure that children's rights are respected and that they get the service they are entitled to according to law evaluation

Each pre-primary school shall systematically evaluate the achievements and quality of the school's activities with active participation from the school personnel, children and parents as relevant. The pre-primary school issues publicly information on its internal evaluation, its connections with school curriculum guide and plans for improvement.

Municipalities shall administer evaluation and quality control of pre-primary school activities and provide the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture with information about implementation of pre-primary school operations, internal evaluation, external evaluation by municipalities, process of pre-primary school policy and plan for improvement. Municipalities shall follow up on internal and external evaluation, so that such evaluation leads to improvements in pre-primary school operations.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture administers the analysis and dissemination of information regarding pre-primary school activities on the basis of information provided by the municipalities and on autonomous data collection. The Ministry sets an agenda for three years at a time regarding surveys and evaluations that aim at providing information on implementation of the Pre-primary School Act, the National Curriculum Guide and other school activities.

1.4.2. Quality Assurance in compulsory education

The objectives of evaluation and quality control in compulsory schools are:

- a. To provide information about school activities, school achievements and development to educational authorities, compulsory school personnel, receiving schools, parents and pupils
- b. To ensure that school activities are according to law, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools
- c. To increase the quality of education and school activities and encourage developmental work
- d. To ensure that pupils' rights are respected and that they get the service they are entitled to according to law

Each compulsory school systematically evaluates the achievements and quality of school activities with active participation from school personnel, pupils and parents as relevant. The compulsory school issues publicly information on its internal evaluation, its connections with school curriculum guide and plans for improvement.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture administers the analysis and dissemination of information regarding compulsory school activities on the basis of information provided by the municipalities and on autonomous data collection.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture sets an agenda for three years at a time regarding surveys and external evaluations that aim at providing information on implementation of the Compulsory School Act, the National Curriculum Guide and any other school activities. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture also organises participation in international educational research and comparison.

Municipalities administer evaluation and quality control of school activities and provide the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture with information regarding implementation of school operations, internal evaluation of schools, external evaluation by municipalities, process of school policy and plan for improvement. Municipalities follow up on internal and external evaluation, so that such evaluation may lead to improvements in school operations.

1.4.3. Quality Assurance in upper secondary education

The objectives of evaluation and quality control in upper secondary schools are the same as in compulsory education, see 1.4.2. The same applies also to the implementation of schools' internal evaluation of school activities, see 1.4.2.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture administers the acquirement, analysis and dissemination of information regarding upper secondary school activities as an integral part of regular external quality control of school activities, together with external evaluations, surveys and studies.

External evaluation can apply to the upper secondary school as a whole, to internal evaluation methods or other defined parts of upper secondary school activities. External evaluation can also involve several upper secondary schools simultaneously. Upper secondary schools shall provide all the information and assistance required in the evaluation procedure, including the results of internal evaluations. Evaluation reports shall be published. Upon completion of external evaluation, upper

secondary schools shall state how they intend to react to the evaluation results. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture shall strive to follow up on internal and external evaluation by providing the relevant institutions with support, instruction and counselling in order for the evaluation procedure to result in reforms in school activities.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture sets an agenda for three years at a time regarding surveys and external evaluations. External evaluations of upper secondary schools shall be carried out no less than every five years and shall be assigned to independent agents.

1.4.4. Quality Assurance in higher education

The objectives of quality control of teaching and research in Higher Education Institutions are:

- a. To ensure that the requirements for accreditation of Higher Education Institutions are met
- b. To ensure that the qualification framework for higher education and degrees is fulfilled
- c. To improve the quality of teaching and research in an efficient way
- d. To encourage increased responsibility of Higher Education Institutions for their own activities
- e. To ensure competitiveness of Higher Education Institutions at international level

Quality control of teaching and research is carried out both by an internal evaluation of higher education institutions and by regular external evaluation. The Minister of Education, Science and Culture lays down rules on quality control of teaching and research.

The internal evaluation of higher education institutions and its individual units is carried out regularly and deal with policy and objectives, study content, teaching, teaching methods, assessment, research, research effectiveness, working conditions, administration and external relations. Active participation of staff and students, in the internal quality control process of higher education institutions is to be ensured as appropriate. Higher education institutions publish information pertaining to their internal quality management.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture determines the time for conducting an external evaluation of teaching and research and sets the agenda for such evaluation for three years. In addition, the Ministry can decide to conduct a special evaluation in order to review how a higher education institution carries out systematic quality control of teaching and research on the basis of an internal evaluation.

2. PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

The present legislation concerning pre-primary schools was passed in 2008. The first article of the law defines pre-primary schools as the first level of the educational system. According to the law, pre-primary schools are to provide education for children who have not reached the age at which compulsory education begins.

The law concerning pre-primary schools defines main objectives of upbringing and instruction in the pre-primary school as follows:

- to monitor and encourage children's general development in close cooperation with parents
- to provide systematic linguistic stimulation and contribute to common skills in the Icelandic language
- to provide children with mental, intellectual and physical care according to the needs of each individual, so that they may enjoy their childhood
- to encourage children's broadmindedness and strengthen their moral values
- to lay the foundation necessary for the children to become independent, autonomous, active and responsible participants in a democratic society which is undergoing rapid and continuous development
- to cultivate children's expressive and creative abilities with the aim of strengthening their self esteem, health awareness, confidence and communication skills

Local authorities are responsible for pre-primary school operations and most pre-primary schools are established and run by the municipalities. Local municipalities have the power to allow parents or private parties to operate a pre-primary school. All the private pre-primary schools get financial support from their local municipality, and therefore the private sector of the pre-primary level could be described as grant-aided private sector.

The pre-primary school participate in the upbringing, caring and education of children at the request of the parents. Pre-primary schools are for all children who have not reached the age at which compulsory school begins and are intended for both boys and girls, coeducational.

Parents pay fees at pre-primary schools. Local authorities determine fee collection for a child's pre-primary school attendance, but the fee collected for each child may not exceed the average real cost incurred by each child's attendance.

The local authorities shall establish an interactive cooperation between the pre-primary school and the compulsory school. The school curriculum guide shall provide information on the cooperation between the pre-primary school and the compulsory school and on how to organise children's transfer and adaptation between school levels. Personal information about each child in pre-primary school that is necessary for the child's welfare and adaptation in compulsory school shall follow the child, provided that full confidentiality is ensured and that procedures take into account provisions of current legislation on personal protection and personal information. This information shall be presented to parents. The Minister of Education, Science and Culture shall issue a Regulation regarding deliverance and communication of information between pre-primary school and compulsory school.

2.1 Admission

Pre-primary schools are for all children who have not reached the age at which compulsory school begins, i.e. the 1st of September of the year in which the child turns six. Usually pre-primary schools

accept children of around two years old but few pre-primary schools accept children less than one year old. Approximately 96 % of the age group 2-5 years old attend pre-primary schools.

Parents have to apply for admission for the child at a pre-primary school. In many municipalities there are waiting lists for places at pre-primary schools. In local municipalities where there may be insufficient room to accommodate all applicants, children of single parents and students are often given priority.

Handicapped children have the same right as other children to attend pre-primary schools, and in many cases are given a priority status in regard to admission. The programme for handicapped children is the same as for other children, but adapted to their abilities.

2.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

Children can stay at the pre-primary school from four to nine hours a day. It is up to the parents to decide how long they deem it necessary for the child to stay there. The pre-primary schools usually open between 7.30 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. and finish between 17.30 p.m. and 18.00 p.m. The daily routine of a pre-primary school is determined by the head of the school and the staff, and there are no coordinated rules to dictate how pre-primary school work should be organised. Meal times are a permanent part of the pre-primary school routine and children are expected to be outside for a certain time every day. Pre-primary schools usually close for summer vacation, sometimes for three to five weeks.

On determining the number of children for each pre-primary school, various factors shall be taken into account, such as age distribution and special needs of children, their length of stay, the size of the space for instruction and play and composition of personnel. Each school has 1-5 departments usually with 18-24 children in each. Departments where handicapped and other children are integrated have often 14-18 children. Children are divided into different departments often in mixed age-groups. 1, 2 and 3 year olds are usually together in a department and so are 3 to 5 year old. The size of pre-primary schools varies; in rural areas there are schools with 10-20 children, but in urban areas they have as many as 170.

Pre-primary schools are most often in buildings that are specifically designed and constructed for their operation, and they are to have a outside playground. According to law the structure of pre-primary school housing and facilities shall take into account the needs of children and the activities carried out in pre-primary school. Emphasis shall be placed on providing a safe and spacious study and work environment. Buildings and all other facilities shall be aimed at ensuring safety and well being of children and personnel with regard to convenient furnishing, sound setting, lighting and air-conditioning. Special space shall be allocated for specialist services for children with special needs as well as facilities for staff.

2.3 Curriculum

As the Pre-primary School Act stipulates, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues a National Curriculum Guideline for pre-primary schools which pre-primary schools are to follow.

The national curriculum guidelines for pre-primary schools:

- is a professional policy outline concerning upbringing and education in pre-primary schools
- is based on a child-oriented ideology which focuses on the needs and development of the child
- is a basis for evaluating pre-primary education and the training of pre-primary school teachers

- is intended to ensure the quality of pre-primary school education and to ensure equal opportunities in the upbringing of children
- emphasises the importance of a good relationship between the pre-primary school and the parents and cooperation between the play- and the compulsory school in the education of the child.

The national curriculum guidelines stress the importance of play in the education and upbringing of the child, comprehensive development in their education, discovery learning and creative work.

Individual pre-primary schools are required to formulate their own school curriculum on the basis of the national curriculum guidelines that the Ministry has issued. The school curriculum sets out the policy of the schools and describes how they intend to meet the educational aims that are stipulated by the national curriculum guidelines.

The national curriculum guideline and the Pre primary School Act do not prescribe working methods. Each pre-primary school is expected to choose methods that are based on the ideology and aims that underlie the educational programme and the Act. The educational programmes stress the area of work; i.e. that specific types of games are played in different locations. This applies to activities such as art work, sorting and ordering games, role play, motion games, music, water games etc. Iceland has pre-primary schools that work in the spirit of different ideology e.g. Reggio Emilia, Montessori and Waldorf. Most pre-primary schools are eclectic in their approach to different ideologies and choose to adapt them to their circumstances. Free and organised play is emphasised, and so is linguistic and artistic, musical creativity as well as exercise.

2.4 Assessment

Pre-primary schools are not required to assess the performance or the progress of each child. However, such an assessment is made by the pre-primary school staff or specialists if any suspicion of deviation from normal development arises within the pre-primary school.

2.5 Teachers

According to the new law from 2008 on education and hiring of pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary teachers, the requirements in initial training for teachers will change in the year 2011. It will then be necessary to complete a MA degree consisting of 300 ECTS or equivalent education and training to become a qualified pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary teacher.

Until year 2011, training to become a pre-primary school teacher is a three year course offered by the University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri, which graduate students with a B.Ed. degree. The University of Iceland also qualifies pre-primary school teachers through a distance learning course which takes four years. These courses of study are both academic and practical.

The 3 year pre-primary school teachers' programme at the University of Iceland consists of training in social science subjects, Icelandic, health studies and ecology, art, music, and literature. Subjects taught include psychology, pedagogy, sociology, Icelandic, history of education, behaviour studies, health studies, nutrition science, ecology, family law, children's literature, music, drama, diction and vocalism, art, children's drawing, puppetry, first aid, theme studies and vocational training. The institution emphasises the importance of combining theoretical knowledge and methodological training in educational institutions.

The Educational Department of the University of Akureyri offers a 3 year course, leading to a B.Ed for students wishing to become pre-primary school teachers. In their first year most courses the students take are the same as those students taking an initial teacher training course as compulsory teachers. The course of study is both academic and practical. Emphasis is however placed on the following:

Working methods; the importance of play in the education and the development of the child; the interrelation of the arts to other activities carried out at the pre-primary school; field trips; education on the environment and the nature; the interrelation between various activities carried out at pre-primary school and the theoretical knowledge of the student.

For pre-primary school teacher trainees, practical training takes place in pre-primary schools, school day-care centres or other educational establishments where the trainees are monitored by a supervisor.

To qualify as a teacher to work with children with special educational needs a one year diploma programme or a 2 years programme leading to M.Ed. degree in addition to a B.Ed. degree is needed.

Those who have completed their matriculation examination from an upper secondary school have the right to apply to teacher training institutions. As there are limited numbers of places available for teachers trainees at the teacher training institutions, the institutions use a selection procedure when admitting applicants to the course of training. The types of selection criteria used are good academic results with a particular emphasis on Icelandic, additional training, work experience, experience from working in social organisations and references. The admission requirements are determined by each individual institution.

General admission requirements to the University of Iceland is a matriculation examination. The University also allows for 10 % of the available places to incoming students be allotted to students 25 years of age or older who are without a matriculation examination but have study or work experience which the school deems relevant and suitable. For the physical education programme there is an upper age limit, i.e. students over the age of 26 are not admitted. There is also emphasis on the students' athletic experience (programmes, courses or participation in sports).

The University of Akureyri requires a matriculation examination or comparable education for admission to its Education Department. Exemptions may be granted to students with work experience in the field and who also have satisfactory basic education.

The Ministry of Education Science and Culture gives a letter of accreditation to those who meet the qualification requirements that are specified in the law concerning the protection of the professional title and professional rights of pre-primary school teachers.

There is no single comprehensive legislation that applies to the in-service training of teachers and further education for them. All teachers and head teachers who are employed can apply to be enrolled in in-service courses. In recent years emphasis has been placed on making it possible for teachers to have access to in-service training or further education.

The University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri provide in-service training and further education for pre-primary school teachers. Some courses are held in co-operation with teachers' organisations or their professional associations. Local municipalities have also organised in-service training courses and other forms of education for employees of educational institutions.

In recent years in-service training courses for pre-primary school teachers have included courses on teaching of very young learners, teaching techniques, information technology, computer networking, the writing of educational materials, the writing of exams, assessment, diction, drama and role-play, special education, teaching methods at different levels of the school system, gender and education, integration, education for immigrants, team teaching in small schools, school development projects, ecological studies, nature study field trips, ethics, field studies, reading and literacy, dancing, human rights studies, options and choices in education, counselling and support for parents, administration, behaviourism, music, ecology, and games and activities. Courses of this kind are usually from 12 to 30 hours of instruction.

3. SINGLE STRUCTURE EDUCATION

There is no division between primary and lower secondary education. They form part of the same school level and usually take place in the same school. Compulsory schooling is mandatory for ten years, i.e. from the age of six to the age of sixteen.

The Compulsory School Act of 2008 stipulates mandatory education for children and adolescents between the ages of six and sixteen. Compulsory school instruction in public compulsory schools is free of charge and neither pupils nor their parents may be charged any fee for instruction, service, instructional material or other material which pupils are required to use in their studies.

The objective of compulsory education, as stated in the Compulsory School Act, is as follows:

The role of the compulsory school, in cooperation with the home, is to encourage pupils' general development and prepare them for active participation in a democratic society that is continuously developing. Compulsory school practice and methods shall be characterised by tolerance and affection, Christian heritage of Icelandic culture, equality, democratic cooperation, responsibility, concern, forgiveness and respect for human values. The compulsory school shall endeavour to organise its activities to correspond fully with the position and needs of their pupils and encourage the overall development, well-being and education of each individual.

The compulsory school shall encourage broadmindedness in its pupils, strengthen their skills in the Icelandic language and their understanding of Icelandic society, its history and characteristics, of people's living conditions and the individual's duties to the community, the environment and to the world. Pupils shall be provided with the opportunity to develop and use their creativity and to acquire knowledge and skills in their strive towards education and development. School activities shall lay the foundations for pupils' autonomy, initiative and independent thinking and train their cooperation skills.

The compulsory school shall encourage good cooperation between the school and the home, with the objective of ensuring successful school operation, general welfare and safety for pupils.

Local municipalities operate compulsory schools and pay for instruction, general teaching, substitute teaching, administration and specialists' services. They also pay for the establishment and running of schools at the compulsory level, and the provision of special education, including the teaching of children in hospitals and the operation of a school attached to the state psychiatric ward for children.

Compulsory schools are organised into classes by age from grade one to ten. Three types of schools are the most common: schools that have all ten grades, schools that have grades one to seven and schools that have grades eight to ten. Schools that have grades eight to ten are often merger schools, i.e. they take in pupils from more than one school in the catchment area that has grades one to seven. All compulsory schools are coeducational, i.e. pupils of both sexes attend. The number of compulsory schools in the school year 2008/09 was 174 and the number of pupils was 43.511. The size of schools varies. The largest schools are in the capital and its suburbs and have about 800 pupils. In rural areas, outside Reykjavík and its suburbs, there are many small schools, some with fewer than 10 pupils. One-half of all compulsory schools have fewer than 100 pupils.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture may provide accreditation to compulsory schools which are run by other parties than the municipalities, as non-profit organisations, as limited companies or as other recognised legal forms, given the consent of the municipality regarding the establishment of the school. The consent of the municipality may be subject to a certain maximum number of pupils. Same law and regulations apply to those compulsory schools as to compulsory schools operated by the municipalities.

The school year 2008/09 there were nine private schools at the compulsory level in Iceland. the number of pupils was 666 or 1.5 % of the pupil population of that school year attended private schools.

All the private schools receive considerable financial assistance from the municipalities and in addition their pupils pay school fees. Teaching in private schools follows the National Curriculum Guide that are in effect for compulsory schools and pupils take the same nationally co-ordinated examinations in the grades 4.7 and 10.

Parents who wish to teach their children at home, in part or totally, apply for such exemption from their municipality. A head teacher may provide an exemption in consultation with the School Board and specialist services. Children that receive instruction at home are exempt from compulsory schooling but comply with regular evaluation and monitoring and undergo evaluation tests according to the Compulsory School Act.

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture may authorise municipalities and privately run compulsory schools to organise experimental and developmental schools or to carry out experiments in particular aspects of school activities by exempting them from provisions of the Compulsory School Act, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide. Reasonable time limits shall always be stipulated for such experiments and provisions made for their evaluation upon conclusion of the experiment.

3.1 Admission

Pupils are obliged to attend compulsory school and therefore there are no entrance requirements. Compulsory education may be provided by compulsory schools run by the local authorities, by privately run schools at compulsory school level or through other recognised means such as home schooling.

A child's compulsory education normally starts at the outset of the school year on the calendar year in which the child turns six years old. Parents can request or consent to their child starting school attendance before that time. A head teacher may authorise this, given the reference of a specialist.

3.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

The instructional year for pupils in compulsory school shall be at least nine months each school year. It shall include at least 180 days of school attendance. Division between days of instruction and other school days is the responsibility of the head teacher in consultation with the School Council and with the consent of the School Board.

The weekly instruction received by each compulsory school pupil shall be at least:

1 200 minutes in grades 1-4

1 400 minutes in grades 5-7

1 480 minutes in grades 8-10

The head teacher determines the implementation of weekly instruction periods in consultation with the School Council. In determining daily and weekly working hours of compulsory school pupils, care shall be taken to ensure continuity and that the total does not exceed a reasonable workload considering the age and maturity of pupils. Temporary deviations from the minimum weekly instruction period can be made, as long as pupils are ensured additional instruction within the same school year to make up for the deviation.

Schools are organised into classes by age from grades one to ten. Officially, there is no selection or streaming by ability. Classrooms are generally allocated to individual classes, i.e. each class has its own classroom and teachers move from room to room. Certain subjects in most compulsory schools,

for example arts and crafts, home economics and physical education, are taught in classrooms that are specially intended for them.

The law does not contain any provisions concerning the maximum number of pupils within a single class. In the larger schools, there are several classes for one yearly intake. In smaller schools, mostly rural schools, several grades can be grouped into a single class with one teacher. All compulsory schools operate on single shift system. Pupils can remain at school after regular teaching is over, to study, play and have their hobbies. All schools are single shift schools.

3.3 Curriculum

The Ministry of Culture and Education issues the National Curriculum Guide, which is intended both to provide the more detailed objectives necessary to implement the Compulsory School Act and offer instruction as to how it is to be carried out in practice. The National Curriculum Guide, which is revised on regular basis, stipulates the compulsory school's pedagogical role and general policy in teaching and instructional organisation according to the role of the compulsory school. The National Curriculum Guide emphasises among other things the following:

1. Self consciousness, personal awareness, ethical consciousness, social awareness and pupils' awareness of their civil responsibilities and duties.
2. Physical and mental well-being, healthy lifestyle and responsible approach towards living beings and the environment.
3. Training pupils in using the Icelandic language in all studies.
4. Dramatic and artistic expression.
5. The ability of pupils to understand causal relationships and to draw logical conclusions.
6. Understanding of vital and creative activities, innovation and entrepreneurial studies.
7. Balance between academic and practical studies.
8. Utilising children's' play as means of learning and development.
9. Studies which will be of advantage to pupils in their daily life as well as in further studies and future employment.
10. Preparing both sexes equally for active participation in society, family life and employment.
11. A variety of means to acquire knowledge, through the use of technological media, information and communication technology, school resource centres and written sources.
12. Education and career guidance and counselling, information about occupations and employment, available courses of study in preparing for future studies or employment.

In devising the National Curriculum Guide, in the organisation of study and instruction and in producing and selecting study material, special effort is made to ensure that all pupils have equal study opportunities and a chance to select subjects and learning approaches in their own education.

The objectives and practice of study and instruction aim at preventing discrimination on the basis of origin, gender, sexual orientation, residence, social class, religion, health condition, handicap or situation in general.

All school activities shall encourage a healthy lifestyle and take into account the variation of personality, development, talent, abilities and interests of each individual pupil.

The National Curriculum Guide stipulates the content and organisation of study in the following fields: Icelandic or Icelandic as second language or Icelandic sign language, mathematics, English, Danish

or other Nordic languages, arts and crafts, natural sciences, physical education, social sciences, equal rights affairs, religious studies, life skills and information and communication technology.

From the beginning of their compulsory education, pupils shall have the possibility of choice regarding their studies, such as of topics, learning methods and subjects, according to the framework provided by the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools and the school curriculum. The objective is to encourage pupils to take responsibility for their studies and create flexibility in school activities. Distance education and web-based learning can account for part of pupils' schoolwork.

In 8th, 9th and 10th grade, elective subjects and subject areas chosen by pupils may account for around one third of study time.

Organised studies carried out outside of the compulsory school, such as in music schools, may be evaluated as part of compulsory education according to further implementation laid out in the National Curriculum Guide. If a pupil engages in such studies, the local authorities in question are not obliged to bear the related cost, even though the studies are accredited as part of compulsory education. Temporary participation in employment, social activities, sports or organised voluntary work can also be evaluated as part of compulsory education as long as it complies with school operation objectives.

Each compulsory school shall annually issue a school curriculum guide and an operational plan. The head teacher is responsible for their implementation and shall devise them in consultation with teachers. The school curriculum guide is a more detailed version of the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools, as regards objectives, content and assessment of studies, operational methods and evaluation and quality control of school activities. The school curriculum guide shall take into consideration the compulsory school's culture, characteristics and circumstances and shall be revised regularly.

The annual operational plan shall provide information on the school calendar, including pupils' study schedule, school rules, support services, extra-curricular and social activities, duration of Christmas vacation, Easter vacation and other winter vacation, as well as other aspects concerning school activities each year. The school's annual operational plan shall be submitted to the School Board for approval, which confirms its entry into force provided that it has been devised in accordance with law, regulations, National Curriculum Guide, collective bargaining agreements and local authorities' decisions regarding school activities.

Pupils are generally expected to cover the same subject material at roughly the same speed. Individuals having difficulty are provided with remedial teaching, primarily in Icelandic and mathematics, but remain with their class for most of their lessons.

Neither the curriculum nor laws and regulations contain instructions regarding teaching methods. Teachers choose teaching methods suited to their pupils, their instructional aims and the conditions under which they teach. In general, an attempt is made to provide as much variety as possible. In grades one to three, a class teacher teaches most of the subjects in his or her class. The borders between individual subjects at this age are not very clear. Teaching takes a variety of forms, class teaching, group work or individual tutoring. Teaching in these grades resembles the teaching in open-plan schools. This applies in particular to very small schools where pupils of various ages are together in the same class. Instruction in clearly defined subjects characterises teaching in the later stages of compulsory education. In the upper grades of compulsory school, the borders between traditional subjects are clearly defined and teachers tend to be subject teachers teaching one or two subjects in many classes. Instruction based upon the school's immediate environment generally takes place in the form of special field trips which are most often linked to studies in traditional subjects. Studies of pollution in a nearby lake or river or studies of soil erosion and actions to make the situation better are examples of projects related to natural and social sciences.

Pupils are provided with teaching materials free of charge. A public institution, The National Centre for Educational Materials, is responsible for providing all children in compulsory schools with teaching materials and receives a budget appropriation for this purpose. It is relatively expensive for a small nation to publish satisfactory teaching materials in its own language. For this reason there is no possibility of a choice of a variety of different textbooks for all subjects, but the variety of teaching material has increased in recent years, for example audio-visual material and computer programmes. Individual schools and teachers may choose which materials they use when alternatives are available.

3.4 Assessment, progression and certification

Assessment of pupils' results and progress shall be a regular part of school activities. The purpose is to monitor whether pupils fulfil the objectives laid down in the National Curriculum Guide, to encourage pupils to make progress and determine which pupils may need special support.

Examinations and other forms of assessment, usually written, are carried out by individual teachers and schools. Assessment is therefore not necessarily standardised between different schools and teachers. The way in which the reports on pupils' progress are written varies greatly: the assessment can be in the form of a number, a letter or a description either oral or written. Reports are given at regular intervals throughout the school year and at the end of each year. The purpose of assessment by the school and the teacher is above all to help improve learning and teaching and to provide both the parents and the children with information on how their studies are progressing.

Children at the compulsory level are automatically moved up from one grade to the next at the end of each year, with the weakest pupils receiving ongoing remedial teaching. Academically gifted children are, however, allowed to omit a grade. They can begin their schooling at the age of five or finish compulsory schooling in a shorter time than others. Very few pupils, however, choose to accelerate or lengthen their studies at this level

When children start compulsory school at the age of six, emphasis is on diagnosing their standing and they are offered a test for dyslexia so it will be possible to support those who need it from the beginning of their school attendance.

National co-ordinated examinations are given every year in Icelandic and mathematics, in grades 4 and 7 and in Icelandic, English and mathematics in grade 10.

The national co-ordinated examinations are composed, marked and organised by The Educational Testing Institute. Marks ranging from one to ten are given based on referenced criteria.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is also to produce for the survey examinations and standardised proficiency examinations, which measure the academic standing of pupils.

Upon completion of compulsory school education, the pupil receives a certificate attesting to the completion of compulsory studies. The certificate shall record the pupil's study assessment report for his/her final year of compulsory school education for the study undertaken.

The head teacher determines whether a pupil has concluded compulsory school education and is responsible for the pupil's graduation from compulsory school. A pupil may graduate from compulsory school before completing the 10-year compulsory education, provided that the pupil fulfils compulsory school requirements according to description of learning outcomes in the National Curriculum Guide.

Pupils and parents are entitled to information about test results, evaluation methods and evaluation techniques, including the right to examine evaluated projects and test results. They are also entitled to an oral explanation of the assessment and that the assessment results are revised within the compulsory school.

3.5 Guidance and counselling

Compulsory schools generally offer educational counselling which, among other things, includes assistance in organising studies and study-related problems. Educational counselling also often involves helping students with their personal problems. According to the Compulsory School Act the pupils have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the compulsory school by appropriate specialists.

The Compulsory School Act stipulates that all children have the right to appropriate instruction within an encouraging study environment in suitable facilities which takes into account their needs and general well-being. A compulsory school shall endeavour to organise its activities in such a way that pupils feel safe and able to apply their talents to the fullest.

3.6 Teachers

According to the new law from 2008 on education and hiring of pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary teachers, the requirements in initial training for teachers will change in the year 2011. It will then be necessary to complete a MA degree consisting of 300 ECTS or equivalent education and training to become a qualified pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary teacher.

Until year 2011, a three-year course at a teacher training university is required to qualify as a compulsory school teacher. Those who have completed their matriculation examination from an upper secondary school have the right to apply to teacher training institutions. As there are limited number of places available for teachers trainees at the teacher training institutions, the institutions use a selection procedure when admitting applicants to the course of training. The types of selection criteria used are good academic results with a particular emphasis on Icelandic, additional training, work experience, experience from working in social organisations and references. The admission requirements are determined by each individual institution

A general course which leads to a B.Ed. degree for teacher trainees who intend to teach at the compulsory level (primary and lower secondary level) takes three years (180 credits). This course is offered by the University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri. The University of Iceland also graduates teachers through a distance learning programme which takes four years.

Teachers trained at the University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri are trained according to a concurrent model. The University of Iceland also offers a teaching certification programme that qualifies students who have a B.A. or B.Sc. degree to teach at the compulsory level (consecutive model).

Icelandic teachers are trained as semi-specialists and have permission to teach all subjects in compulsory education. Teachers trained in the consecutive model at the University of Iceland are specialists with permission to teach their specific subject at lower-secondary and upper secondary level.

To qualify as a teacher to work with children with special educational needs a one year diploma programme or a 2 years programme leading to M.Ed. degree in addition to a B.Ed. degree is needed. Specialist teachers in music are trained in the Academy of the Arts. To be admitted into the education programme of the Iceland Academy of Art a matriculation examination or comparable education is required.

The Ministry of Education Science and Culture gives a letter of accreditation to those who meet the qualification requirements that are specified in the law concerning the protection of the professional title and professional rights of compulsory school teachers, upper secondary school teachers and head teachers.

Teachers have civil servant status and are employed by the municipalities on open recruitment procedure. They work either full-time or part-time and are appointed to a specific school.

There is no single comprehensive legislation that applies to the in-service training of teachers and further education for them. All teachers and head teachers who are employed can apply to be enrolled in in-service courses. In recent years emphasis has been placed on making it possible for teachers to have access to in-service training.

In-service training for teachers at the compulsory level have remained optional in Iceland, but in the teachers wage-contract, they are expected to spend 150 hours per year in in-service training, preparation and other duties outside presence in school.

4. UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Introduction

Upper secondary education is governed by the Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008. The act applies to the entire upper secondary level, including initial vocational education. It primarily defines the framework for education at this level, its objectives, the role and responsibilities of the State and local authorities, individual institutions and their staff, as well as other parties that are involved in providing and administering education at this level. All education at this level is under the administration of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. More detailed provisions regarding the implementation of upper secondary education are to be found in the regulations which the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues as well as the Ministry's National Curriculum Guide. A new National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools is currently being written. Special regulations issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture concerning initial vocational education are in force such as on journeyman's examinations, apprenticeship agreements and on-the-job training.

The above mentioned act on upper secondary education came into effect on 1 August 2008. Schools, however, have three years from the entry of the act into force to comply with the act's chapter Curriculum and Programmes of Study, as well as the chapter Study Organization, Study Completion. The new act introduces changes in the organisation of upper secondary education including increased decentralisation of the curriculum and course development and more flexibility in the organization of teaching and learning. Emphasis is put on the strengthening of vocational education and training. Possibilities of shortening general academic studies leading to matriculation examination have been opened. Upper secondary schools shall formulate descriptions of their study programmes and submit for Ministry approval.

As stated above the upper secondary school level is in a transition phase in the period 2008-2011 with regard to study programmes, curriculum and organisation of study. During the school year 2009/10 most schools will thus and run the same study programmes as before prepare for the full compliance of the act, see below.

The Upper Secondary School Act defines the purpose of upper secondary education as follows:

The objective of the upper secondary school is to encourage the overall development of all pupils and encourage their active participation in democratic society by offering studies suitable to the needs of each pupil. The upper secondary school prepares pupils for employment and further studies. It shall strive to strengthen its pupils' skills in the Icelandic language, both spoken and written, develop moral values, sense of responsibility, broadmindedness, initiative, self-confidence and tolerance in its pupils, train them to apply disciplined, autonomous working methods and critical thought, teach them to appreciate cultural values and encourage them to seek further knowledge. The upper secondary school shall strive to communicate knowledge and train pupils in a way that provides them with skills to carry out specialized work and with solid foundations to pursue further education.

The Upper Secondary School Act of 2008 makes provision for the influence and responsibilities of both sides of industry in initial vocational education. This shall on the one hand be achieved through occupational councils, and on the other, through an occupational committee.

Pupils who progress normally through upper secondary education are between the ages 16 and 20. The average age of students in vocational education is however higher.

All schools at that level, like other schools in Iceland, are coeducational.

Although upper secondary education is generally divided into general and vocational education with some artistic programmes of study as well, it is in many respects organised in a single structure with a

variety of options. It is also common to provide more than one type of education in one school. There are very few private schools at that school level. The main types of upper secondary schools are as follows:

- Grammar schools *menntaskólar* which offer a four-year academic course of study concluding with a matriculation examination *stúdentspróf*, i.e. a university entrance examination.
- Comprehensive schools *fjölbraitaskólar* which offer an academic course comparable to that of the grammar schools concluding with a matriculation examination. These schools also offer theoretical and practical training as in the industrial-vocational schools (see below) and, in addition, some other programmes providing vocational and artistic education.
- Industrial-vocational schools *iðnskólar*, which offer theoretical and practical programmes of study in the certified and some non-certified trades.

The size of upper secondary schools varies; the largest schools have around 2 000 students while the smallest have 50-100.

While there is no charge for tuition in public schools, pupils are required to pay an enrolment fee. Pupils who have to leave their legal residence for the purpose of studying have the right to non-refundable grants to cover expenses in this respect. In addition, pupils in the certified trades and in some other vocational branches of study have the right to receive study loans from the Icelandic Government Study Loan Fund.

Costs of training off the job, i.e. costs of the running of schools are paid by the State. Companies and institutions (such as hospitals etc.) pay the costs of the on-the-job training. Provisions concerning wages and other benefits are in accordance with currently applicable collective bargaining agreements for apprentices in the occupation concerned. During the training period, students in the certified trades receive payments from the employer according to such agreements. In other fields of vocational training, how payments set varies and in some programmes, students receive no payments during their training.

General academic education

General academic education at the upper secondary level is primarily organised as a four-year course leading to a matriculation examination *stúdentspróf*. The Upper Secondary School Act of 1996 stipulated that academic programmes of study leading to matriculation were to be three: natural sciences, social sciences and foreign languages. According to the National Curriculum Guide in force the four-year course leading to matriculation, requires 140 credits. Core subjects constitute the required course in each academic programme of study and amount to 70 % of the total course load. The core subjects include special subjects within that programme together with subjects that provide and support general education. Elected fields cover specialisation in an area of the programme of study and constitute 21 % of the total course load. Free selection constitutes about 9 % of the total course load. Core subjects common for all students in general academic programmes are: Icelandic, mathematics, foreign languages, natural sciences, social sciences, life skills and physical education. The number of credits in each subject may vary according to programmes. See above for the transition period in relation to the Upper Secondary School Act of 2008.

In addition, a short general programme of study *almenn námsbraut* (1-2 years of studies depending on individual pupils and schools) was intended for pupils who are undecided as to what to do after compulsory education or need further preparation for academic or vocational studies. The new act on upper secondary education of 2008 provides for an upper secondary school leaving certificate, *framhaldsskólapróf*, after two years of study.

Artistic education

Study of the arts is defined as a three-year programme of study, which is to provide preparation for further study in the arts in specialised schools or at the higher education level. Emphasis is to be placed on design, visual arts, and music.

Vocational education

Vocational education and training is organised in different ways depending on subjects. It is generally divided between the school and the workplace but may in some cases only take place at school. Vocational education and workplace learning are based on general provisions on work based training in the National Curriculum Guide and rules concerning workplace instruction in the occupation concerned. The organisation of courses varies as well as their length, both with regard to the duration of the on-the-job training and the course as a whole. Initial vocational education can be divided into two main categories: vocational education and training which confers legally certified qualifications, and education which does not lead to certified qualifications. Vocational training conferring certified qualifications comprises study in the certified trades, study within the health care system, study for officers of air and sea transportation vehicles and study for law enforcement officers. A regulation on apprenticeship agreements and on-the-job training is in force. A special on-the-job training contract for workplace instruction is concluded between a school and workplace or an apprenticeship contract between the pupil and the employer. Occupational Councils shall keep a record of companies and workplaces that fulfil the requirements for providing workplace learning.

Initial vocational education that is formally recognised but does not confer certification differs in structure to that of certified trades. Study in the non-certified trades usually takes place at an educational institution, (i.e. there is usually no on-the job training at a workplace). Its position within the education system is weaker, as is the status of individuals on completion of studies. This form of education and training includes a wide variety of study programmes: fish processing, fish farming, agriculture, horticulture, service trades, design and ICT.

The course in the certified trades usually takes four years. It involves taking a vocational programme of study at an upper secondary school and an apprenticeship contract with a master craftsman or an industrial firm. Pupils can mainly choose from eight different vocational fields in this sector of upper secondary education. These fields are printing, construction and woodwork, tailoring, food-related industries, metalwork, electricity related trades, landscape gardening and cosmetic trades. Each field is sub-divided into specialised programmes of study.

The school is responsible for basic education and the theoretical part of the course, whereas practical training takes place in the workplace in accordance with the contract made with a master craftsman.

Other vocational education programmes that confer legally certified qualifications vary considerably both in scope and structure as they are directed at conferring a variety of qualifications.

In the school year 2008/09 the percentage of age groups enrolled in upper secondary education was as follows:

16 years	93 %
17 years	85 %
18 years	75 %
19 years	71 %

Upper secondary education (including all vocational education) statistics 2008/09:

No. of students in day and evening schools	22 771
No. of students in distance learning courses	2 819
No. of upper secondary schools including private schools	39
No. of private schools	8
Average pupil- teacher ratio	13
No. of qualified teachers	1,499
No. of instructors (lacking full qualification as teachers)	419

The percentages of pupils in the various programmes of study 2008/09 were as follows:

General programmes	67 %
Education	1 %
Humanities and arts	6 %
Social sciences, business	2 %
Sciences, mathematics and computing	1 %
Manufacturing and construction	13 %
Agriculture	1 %
Health and welfare	4 %
Services	5 %

Sources: Statistics Iceland 2009 and Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2009.

4.1 Admission

All pupils who have completed compulsory education, have equivalent education or have reached the age of 16 have the legal right to upper secondary education, regardless of their results in the 10th and last grade of compulsory school. Those that have the right to enrol in upper secondary school, also have the right to study until the age of 18.

According to a regulation on the enrolment of pupils each upper secondary school shall be responsible for admission of pupils. The obligations of each upper secondary school regarding pupils' enrolment and the requirements for admission made by the school shall be prescribed in an agreement between the upper secondary school and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The upper secondary school may place specific demands for enrolment in individual programmes of study in the upper secondary school regarding preparation and study results.

4.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

The school year, which lasts for 9 months, is divided into autumn and spring terms. Generally, the teaching period of each term lasts 14-15 weeks and the testing period 2-3 weeks, as a whole 35 weeks per school year. According to a new law on upper secondary education, see introduction, pupils' school working days are to be 180 per school year. Pupils generally attend 30-40 lessons per week, with each lesson lasting 40 minutes. The length of the school day differs from one school to another depending on whether the school buildings can accommodate the pupils as one set. Some schools offer evening courses or distance learning courses in addition to daytime courses.

Upper secondary schools either have traditional classes or they operate according to a unit-credit system, i.e. the pupil groups vary according to the pupils' choice of course units. The unit-credit system is the prevalent form of organisation for schools at this level. In a unit-credit system the educational content of each subject is divided into a number of defined course units which last for one

semester and give a certain number of credits. At the end of every semester, the pupil decides on courses for the following semester according to certain rules and in accordance with his own study plans and results. The unit-credit system allows pupils to regulate to a certain extent the speed at which they complete their studies. Those schools that have traditional classes or forms operate around the class as a unit. At these schools all pupils in a particular programme of study follow the same course at the same time and rate, with the exception of their electives.

In schools based on classes or forms, the pupils in a given class tend to be of the same age. In a unit-credit system, it is the student's choice of courses and rate of progress in a given subject, which determines the group he/she goes into. It is common that pupils between the ages of sixteen and twenty and even older are together in a group. The number of pupils in a group varies greatly, especially in schools which function according to the unit-credit system.

No norms or regulations govern the minimum or maximum numbers of pupils in a class or group or per teacher or trainer. However, norms regarding the number of pupils in a class or group are one of the criteria used to decide pecuniary contributions to schools.

4.3 Curriculum

The National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools, issued by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, stipulates the objectives and organisation of school activities at upper secondary level. The Guide shall according to the Upper Secondary School Act of 2008 be divided into two parts; general part and descriptions of study programmes.

The general part of the National Curriculum Guide shall describe the objectives and operations of the upper secondary school. It shall at least include the following:

- a. Provisions on the structure of study programme descriptions and on the relevance between core subjects in the upper secondary school
- b. Conditions on how the objectives of specific courses, study programmes as well as final learning objectives shall be defined
- c. Criteria for study requirements and study process
- d. Rules for evaluation methods, reporting and grading
- e. Definition of work based learning and rules regarding organisation of work based learning
- f. Rules for evaluation of vocational training and definition of skills objectives
- g. Rules for recognition of non-formal and informal learning, equivalence of learning and evaluation of learning when pupils move between schools or study programmes
- h. General rules on school curricula guides
- i. Provisions on evaluation of school activities
- j. General rules on rights and duties of pupils and on conflict resolution.

Upper secondary schools shall formulate descriptions of their study programmes and submit for Minister's approval. Upon confirmation from the Minister, the description of the upper secondary school study programmes becomes part of the upper secondary school National Curriculum Guide.

Each upper secondary school shall issue a school curriculum guide. The general part of the school curriculum guide shall describe school activities, main emphases and policy, school administration, study offer and study organisation, instructional methods, study evaluation, support measures, guidance and counselling and other pupils' services, rights and duties of pupils, school-parent cooperation and cooperation with third parties, internal evaluation and quality control.

For the main types of upper secondary programmes, see introduction to this chapter.

The National Curriculum Guide of 1999 and 2004 (general part) is currently under revision.

Neither the National Curriculum Guide nor laws and regulations contain instruction regarding teaching methods. Teachers are free to choose those methods that suit their aims and circumstances at any given time. Teachers are also free to choose their textbooks and other educational materials.

4.4 Assessment, progression and certification

Pupil evaluation is carried out both by continuous assessment and final assessment at the end of each semester. Schools generally have examinations at the end of every semester, regardless of the type of school and programmes of study. These examinations cover a range of subjects and are compulsory for pupils. Continuous assessment and assignments set usually count towards the final mark. Oral examinations are rare. Some grammar schools that have traditional classes have more extensive final examinations (matriculation examinations) at the end of studies.

Examinations are set and graded in each school by subject teachers and supervised by the head of department in question. In the general academic programmes of study as well as in the non-certified trades, there have been no nationally coordinated examinations either with respect to final examinations or earlier ones. For the certified trades there are journeyman's examinations. They are the responsibility of the trade in question. A committee with members from industry and the trade unions (employers and employees) define the requirements and oversee the journeyman's examination. This national co-ordinated examination consists of a practical and a theoretical part.

According to the Upper Secondary School Act from 2008 the Minister of Education, Science and Culture may decide to put on assessment examinations in individual upper secondary school subjects. The same act also stipulates that study assessment in final courses leading to matriculation examination shall be based on reference examinations in the core subjects Icelandic, English and mathematics.

The grading system is based on individual attainment of pupils. Marks are given in whole numbers on a scale from one to ten in all schools, ten being the highest. At the end of each semester, pupils are given a transcript, which shows their marks and present standing within the programme of study. On receiving their marks, all pupils have the right to inspect their examinations in the presence of a teacher.

In schools that operate according to the unit-credit system, the passing grade for each course unit is five. Pupils who fail to receive a passing grade in any given course unit have to repeat that course unit during the next semester in order to continue in that particular subject. No average mark is calculated, but pupils must complete at least nine credits per semester.

In schools that have traditional classes or forms, a minimum grade of four in every subject and a five average for all subjects is needed to be allowed to move up to the next year. Examinations in individual subjects can, with certain reservations, be retaken after the regular examinations at the end of the school year. Those pupils whose grade average is under five or who do not reach a minimum grade of four in individual subjects after the retakes must repeat the year.

On completing a programme of study, pupils are issued with a certificate by the school, which specifies which course units or subjects, they have taken and the marks they have received. Pupils in schools that operate using a unit-credit system are able to graduate at the end of both the autumn and spring semesters.

The matriculation certificate gives the pupil the right to enter schools at the higher education level. On completion of his/her studies, the apprentice in the certified trades takes the journeyman's examination, which provides her/him with qualifications to pursue the trade concerned.

The journeyman's examinations are the responsibility of the trade in question and are administered on a national basis. A committee with members from industry and the trade unions (employers and employees) defines the requirements and oversees the examination. The journeyman's examination consists of a practical and a theoretical part.

Those who have completed the journeyman's examination can become master craftsmen after a certain period of work experience and advanced studies.

Certified qualifications are issued by the ministry that handles matters relating to the occupation in question. Master craftsmen receive their qualifications from the local chief of police or sheriff.

4.5 Guidance and counselling

According to the Upper Secondary School Act of 2008 pupils have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the upper secondary school from the appropriate specialists.

Upper secondary schools offer educational counselling which, among other things, includes assistance in choosing a programme of study, assistance in organising studies and making a study plan and assistance with study-related problems. Educational counselling also often involves assisting pupils with their personal problems.

All pupils at upper secondary schools have a particular teacher as their educational supervisor. The teacher assists them in making their study plans, monitors their progress and attendance and acts as an intermediary between the pupil and other teachers or the school authorities.

School curriculum guides shall include description of the school's objectives and policy concerning educational and vocational guidance and counselling. The guide shall also describe how the school fulfils its role and duty in this regard.

4.6 Teachers and trainers

Teachers at upper secondary school level are state employees. They are allocated by subject. Legislation stipulates that upper secondary school teachers of academic subjects should have a Master's degree from a university that has been accredited by the Minister or equivalent education. Teachers in vocational and art programmes of study shall have qualification as Master craftsmen in a trade or a certified final examination from the fields of art, technology or vocational education in addition to 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies.

Teachers are paid by the State, although they are hired by individual schools.

A wide variety of in-service training courses are held annually. According to wage contracts teachers are to attend up to two weeks of in-service training over a period of two years.

Workplaces have to receive an approval from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to be able to accept apprentices in the certified trades for on-the-job training or on apprenticeship contracts. A master craftsman is made responsible for the training of an apprentice in the certified trades. No rules are in force concerning the in-service training of trainers.

5. POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION

Introduction

Legislation on upper secondary education covers post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4). In most cases, education at this level takes place in upper secondary schools, see chapter 4. All education at this level is classified as vocational education (ISCED 4C). The length of studies is 1-2 years, depending on programmes. The programmes are often attended by older students. These studies include mainly the following:

- Trade masters' programmes. These include all certified trades, such as construction, electricity and cosmetic related trades. Master craftsmen exercise supervisory responsibilities in their fields.
- Marine captain and engineering programmes, 4th grade. Last stage of studies in these fields. Each stage qualifying students to work with larger vessels and engines.
- Tourist service programmes. These programmes include for example tourist guides' studies, which often are attended by university graduates, as well some other tourism studies.
- Health service programmes. These programmes include mostly medical secretaries' studies.
- Technicians' programmes. Programmes are organised in different fields for those who have considerable work experience, previous vocational studies at upper secondary level plus some additional general academic studies.

In the autumn of 2008, 1 160 students were enrolled in programmes at this level of education.

Post-secondary non-tertiary education is generally offered in industrial-vocational schools and in upper secondary comprehensive schools, see chapter 4, Introduction.

5.1 Admission

As a general rule students shall have completed education at ISCED level 3, either related to the study programme they are enrolled in (such as journeyman's examination in the certified trades and marine captain and engineering programmes) or general education programmes, generally matriculation. Work experience is often required, for example in the trade masters' programmes where one year work experience is required after the journeyman's examination.

5.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

Studies at the post-secondary non-tertiary education level in most cases take place in upper secondary schools, both in day time programmes and in evening schools. Trade masters' programmes and tourist guides' programmes for example are generally organized in evening schools whereas marine captain and engineering programmes, 4th grade, are organized as day-time courses.

Some courses may be organized as distance learning courses. Agricultural programmes are generally run by higher education institutions.

Classes and groups are organized by subject. No norms and regulations are governing the minimum and maximum numbers of students per class/group/teacher/trainer.

5.3 Curriculum

See 4.3

5.4 Assessment, progression and certification

Some of the programmes in post-secondary non-tertiary education result in a vocational certificate, giving right to work in a particular occupation, others result in a diploma of competence.

Master craftsmen receive their certificates from the local sheriff. Other certificates are delivered by the Ministry of Communications, the Directorate of Health or by the relating schools.

For assessment and progression, see further 4.4

5.5 Guidance and counselling

See 4.5

5.6 Teachers and trainers

See 4.6

6. TERTIARY EDUCATION

The foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911 marks the beginning of the modern Icelandic system of higher education. This first national university was established by merging three professional schools founded during the previous century – a school of theology, a school of medicine and a law school – and adding a new faculty of arts. Before that time Icelandic students had mainly travelled to Denmark for higher education. The University of Iceland has grown rapidly during the past century.

In 1971, the Teachers college, originally founded in 1908 was upgraded to tertiary level and changed its name to the Iceland University of Education. The main function of the institution has been training of compulsory school teachers. In 2008, the Iceland University of Education was merged into the University of Iceland following new Act from 2007. In 1987 The University of Akureyri was established in Northern Iceland and thereby becoming the first higher education institution outside the capital area. At the beginning, the institution had two faculties, for health science and industrial management but has grown substantially in recent years.

Agricultural education at tertiary level was first established at the Hvanneyri agricultural school in West Iceland in 1947 and the school gained university status as Agricultural University of Iceland in 1998.

In the last three decades the higher education system has grown more diverse. New higher education institutions have been established and several post-secondary institutions have been upgraded to higher education level. Thus four teacher-training institutions merged at the beginning of 1998 to form the Iceland University of Education under a law from 1997, and three art colleges merged into one in 1999 when the Academy of the Arts was founded. The Technical College of Iceland, established in 1964, gained university status under the Technical University of Iceland Act in 2002, and in 2005 it merged into Reykjavík University.

The Higher Education Act from 2006 establishes the general framework for the activities of higher education institutions. The role of each public higher education institution is further defined in a separate act of parliament on its activities. The charters of private institutions define their engagement.

The Act from 2006 fully implements the Bologna Process into higher education in Iceland, i.e. the Icelandic higher education system is in full accordance with the Bologna process.

In June 2008, a new Public Higher Education Act was passed in parliament. The Public Higher Education Act is fully compatible with the general Higher Education Act from 2006. It describes rules and guidelines concerning the inner administration of public higher education institution.

At present there are seven higher education institutions in Iceland. Higher education institutions include both traditional universities and institutions which do not carry out research. Four higher education institutions are operated by the State, while private parties with State support operate three institutions. The Higher Education Institutions vary in the extent to which they engage in research and the number of programmes of study offered. They can also be categorized into four groups according to their specialization: three institutions offering a wide range of studies, two agricultural institutions, one academy of arts and one business school. Other differences include the number of enrolled students, the mix of programmes offered, and the level of education and research activity.

Over the last decade institutions of higher education have increasingly started to offer postgraduate programmes. This has been to meet demands from the society and to accommodate an increasing number of students. However, programmes at Master's and PhD level are still not offered in all fields of study. At present two higher education institutions offer PhD degrees. In spite of this development, Icelandic students continue to travel abroad for their postgraduate studies.

6.1 Admission

The Higher Education Act allows higher education institutions to set specific admission requirements for students enrolling in study at higher education level, such as requiring students, who meet with the aforementioned demands, to pass an entrance examination or assessment.

According to the Higher Education Act, students enrolling in higher education must have completed matriculation examination or equivalent study. Higher education institutions can accept students who possess equivalent level of maturity and knowledge as assessed by the respective higher education institution. It must be ensured that higher education institutions' admission requirements and study standards correspond to those demanded in certified higher education institutions within similar fields in other countries.

Students enrolling in studies at second cycle (Master's studies) shall have completed a Bachelor's degree or equivalent three year study at higher education level. Students are expected to enroll in a study programme that is based on learning outcomes which they have acquired during studies at first cycle.

Students that enrol in doctorate studies are normally required to have completed Master's degree or *Candidatus* degree. Higher education institutions that intend to apply for permission to offer studies leading to Doctorate degree shall set specific rules for their doctorate studies, including stipulations on students' admission.

The University of Iceland has no general restrictions on admission for those who have passed the matriculation examination. However, in the Faculty of Medicine there is a selection procedure for students of medicine and physiotherapy at the point of entry. Competitive examinations at the end of the first semester are held in the Faculties of Nursing and of Odontology. The number of students allowed to continue after a competitive examination is limited (*numerus clausus*). For admission to the Faculty of Pharmacy or of Science, students are required to have matriculated from a mathematics, physics, or natural sciences programme of an upper secondary school.

Higher education institutions other than the University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri have exercised selection in their admission of students and often give priority to students with particular work experience. The Academy of the Arts, Department of Drama, holds an entrance examination.

To enter a postgraduate programme a first university degree (B.A., B.S. or B.Ed. degree) in the area of study is required. In some master's programmes the admission requirement is a B.A./B.Sc. degree with a 7.25 grade average on a scale of 1 to 10 (the highest grade is 10). Admission is based on selection by the respective faculties. The same goes for the PhD programmes offered. In research-oriented programmes students must reach an agreement with a supervisor on a research project for their master's thesis, and then file a joint application with that supervisor for a specific research project. The project must then be accepted by a review committee for the student to be allowed to enter the programme.

Admission of mature students to higher education institutions on the basis of professional qualifications and work experience without further tests is in the hands of each higher education institution.

The Icelandic NARIC/ENIC office is situated at the University of Iceland. Its role is to answer questions regarding the recognition of foreign credentials or qualifications. Certified copies of official transcripts or diplomas have to be enclosed with enquiries regarding recognition. The NARIC/ENIC office offers a guiding assessment, but the final decision on academic recognition is taken by each individual university, faculty or institution.

6.2 Students' contributions and financial support

There are no tuition fees at public institutions of higher education, but the institutions charge registration fees. Privately run institutions charge tuition fees.

The government has operated the Student Loan Fund for several decades, with the aim of providing equal access for students with different socio-economic backgrounds and, based on the same principle, provides free tuition at public institutions. Icelandic students attending institutions of higher education are eligible for student loans from the Icelandic Student Loan Fund. The total loan received per annum depends upon the income of the student and his/her spouse, as appropriate.

The Fund offers student loans that are sufficient to cover costs incurred by the studies (tuition fees, books and materials, travelling expenses, etc.) as well as the cost of living.

Repayment of loans begins two years after the completion of studies.

In accordance with the EEA Agreement, individuals from the European Union member states and the EEA-EFTA countries (Norway and Liechtenstein) who are residents in Iceland in connection with their work, their families, and others who are or have been supported by them, are entitled to student loans from the Fund. One condition for receiving loans from the Fund is that the applicant has been domiciled in Iceland for two continuous years, or has been domiciled in Iceland for three of the ten years preceding the beginning of the period for which the student loan is applied.

Students from the Nordic countries, who are permanent residents in Iceland and are registered at an Icelandic institution of higher education, are also eligible for student loans if they are not supported financially by their own country.

The Icelandic Student Loan Fund may grant loans to other foreign students if reciprocal agreements have been concluded between their countries of origin and Iceland.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture annually offers a limited number of scholarships to foreign students to pursue studies in Icelandic language and literature at the University of Iceland.

Grants are available for postgraduate, research-oriented studies at higher education institutions in Iceland. The grants are awarded on the basis of a research proposal submitted jointly by a student and a faculty member.

6.3 Organisation of the academic year

Each university issues rules regarding the length of the academic year and its divisions into semesters. In most institutions of higher education, the academic year is formally defined as lasting from August or September to the same time the following year. The teaching year usually lasts from September to May and is divided into two semesters, autumn and spring. The autumn semester starts at the beginning of September and lasts until approximately December 20. The spring semester lasts from the beginning of January until the end of May. Some institutions have summer sessions that last from May to August.

The holiday periods in higher education institutions are usually the following:

- Christmas holiday approx. two weeks
- Easter holiday approx. one week
- Summer holiday approx. three months for students.

In addition to this there is no teaching activity in most higher education institutions on December 1 and other official holidays.

Each institution at the higher education level organizes its own timetable. The timetable can vary depending on the structure of the course. In Iceland, the higher education institutions are bound by law to use the ECTS system, in accordance with the Bologna process. Studies are organized in course units each requiring a specified number of credit units, 60 credit units constituting one academic year of full-time studies, 30 credit units constituting one semester of full-time studies.

6.4 Assessment, progression and certification

Student assessment at the higher education level is generally based on written, oral or practical examinations, semester papers and assignments carried out throughout the whole course of study. Teachers are responsible for assessment, but each department provides the overall organization of the examinations within the regulatory framework of the institution. In some cases there are external examiners. Examinations are generally held at the end of each semester. Degrees are only awarded after students have written a final dissertation or completed a research project.

Competitive examinations are held in the programmes of Nursing and Odontology at the end of the first semester. Admission tests are held in the programmes of medicine and physiotherapy before the first semester.

At oral examinations an external examiner is often present, but written examinations are marked by the teacher in question. Teachers are required to explain the basis of their assessment to students upon request. Students who fail an examination can request that the head of the respective department appoint an external examiner to review his or her examination.

As a general rule grades are awarded on a scale of 0-10, where the passing grades are 5 and above, or by the assessment pass/fail. Course grades are usually given in increments of 0.5, and averages computed to two decimal places.

Rules regarding progression of students vary between institutions and faculties. In the professional programmes towards the *candidatus* degree students have to pass all examinations, or a certain percentage of each year's examinations, in order to be able to continue to the next. Students are allowed to repeat examinations in an individual course once. Students who fail to meet the requirements have to repeat the whole year of study, but can do so only twice during their studies.

In the programmes for the bachelor's degree there is more flexibility, but there is a limit on the overall time spent on studies towards a degree.

Higher education institutions offer courses which lead to the granting of a certificate and/or a degree or a title. Examination results and assessment are stated on the certificate, as is the degree/title to which the course gives entitlement. These are awarded when the student successfully completes the examinations, projects or dissertation described by the subject regulations. A dissertation or research project is almost always a pre-requisite for obtaining a degree. Some degree courses may lead directly to professional qualifications, while in other cases additional training specific to the profession, such as additional specialized study programmes, sometimes combined with practical training, is required.

As required by law, and subject to review by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, higher education institutions are responsible for issuing certificates and defining the content and examination methods of courses leading to certification.

6.5 Guidance and counselling

Student counselling centres are operated at most higher education institutions. Counselling centres provide courses and counselling for students regarding the choice of programmes, the organisation of

their studies, career opportunities, as well as personal problems. Some higher education institutions offer preparation courses e.g. in mathematics before student start their higher education.

Permanent faculty members have regular office hours for students and are available during those hours to give educational advice. No set rules apply for the educational counselling provided by teachers or regarding the referral of students to other counselling parties.

All foreign exchange students in Iceland may use the support services offered by the Office of International Education.

In the professional disciplines, students are required to gain practical experience in their field of study. A part of this experience is frequently achieved through employment, and the respective higher education institution often serves as the mediator for the placement of students for practical training.

Research institutions at the higher education institutions hire students to work on research projects that have been negotiated with state and private agencies. At the University of Iceland students also run a company that does contractual work for outside agencies where students are hired to work on projects related to their field of study. The Icelandic Students' Union at the University of Iceland also runs a placement service for students for summer work, where an effort is made to place students with employers in their field. Thus relations with possible future employers are cultivated.

Faculty members, companies or entrepreneurs can apply to an Innovation Fund, established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, to hire students to work on defined projects. The Fund pays the student salaries, while the company or the supervisor for the project provides workspace and materials. This gives students the opportunity to gain practical experience that may open future job opportunities and promotes innovation.

6.6 Academic staff

Senior lecturers and professors at institutions of higher education usually hold a Ph.D. degree. Other university teachers are required to have at least an MA or comparable education in their subject.

University teachers are state employees and come under the law concerning the rights and duties of state employees.

The forms of appointment for legally qualified university teachers are as follows:

a) permanent appointment, b) indeterminate appointment, c) temporary appointment. In addition to those teachers who have a formal contract of employment, there are sessional teachers at most institutions hired on an hourly basis. Most university teachers hold full-time appointment.

Lecturers, senior lecturers and professors receive a one-year sabbatical every six years or a six months sabbatical every three years. They also receive a yearly travel grant to travel abroad for research or continuing education. University teachers are not obliged to attend in-service training.

7. CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Introduction

Continuing education and training is an extensive sphere in Icelandic society and is provided by various parties such as public authorities, public and private institutions, companies and organizations. The continuing education and training dealt with in this chapter mostly concerns educational and training opportunities defined in laws and regulations and/or financially supported by public authorities. The educational opportunities provided by public authorities are open to all, although with certain restrictions in some cases. They are intended to serve everyone according to their needs, especially young school leavers and adults who want to improve their basic education, general knowledge or professional capabilities, or who want to cultivate their hobbies.

Continuing adult education and training is provided both as general and vocational education for unqualified young people and adults and as continuing vocational education and training for those who are already qualified for a given profession.

Stakeholders of the labour market have in recent years placed emphasis on increased access to education for those who have no qualifications. This need has, for example, been met by the national authorities through the establishment of the Education and Training Service Centre in 2002 – a body founded by the Icelandic Federation of Labour and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers and funded partly by the State Budget. In addition, a decision was taken in 2005 and 2006 by the government regarding important allocations of the funding of courses and educational counselling over the next three years for those who have little education, including those who have literacy problems.

The existence of centres for lifelong learning in Iceland, the discussion on lifelong learning within the EU, and pressure from individuals and labour unions for a system of validation for non-formal and informal learning has led to steps being taken towards such a system. Recognition has been given to the vast human resources existing in society and to society's benefit in making them visible.

7.1 Policy and legislative framework

No comprehensive legislation applies to continuing or adult education and training in Iceland. The Upper Secondary School Act of 2008 however, covers certain aspects of adult education, such as evening classes and distance learning courses. According to the act, schools can also, in co-operation with such parties as municipalities, employers, employees' organisations and companies, establish lifelong learning centres. Upper secondary schools may also organize courses and education for adults, in partnership with local authorities, professional associations, trade unions, employers' associations or other interest groups.

Any individual who has completed compulsory education, has had equivalent basic education or has reached the age of 16 is entitled to enrol in upper secondary school according to the above-mentioned act.

On the basis of laws on individual higher education institutions, these institutions may run continuing education institutions and offer distance-learning programmes for adults.

The Act on Vocational Training in Business and Industry of 1992 covers studies or courses followed by participants in order to increase their skills and knowledge for the jobs in which they work or intend to work. An Act on Labour Market Measures of 1997 provides for the right of the unemployed to study in connection with a job-seeking plan compiled by regional employment centres in consultation with the job seeker.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture prepares education bills, issues regulations and sees to it that laws and regulations are complied with. A bill on adult education and training was in 2008/09 brought before Parliament but was not passed as law.

The Icelandic government has largely left it to the unions and employers' organizations to negotiate terms that safeguard the rights of workers/employees to continuing education and training, rather than imposing laws and regulations. Wage agreements contain many provisions that guarantee workers the right to lifelong learning, as well as provisions on funds for lifelong learning, and provisions guaranteeing higher salaries for those who gain qualifications. It has thus become increasingly common for wage agreements to guarantee the right of workers to undertake studies. These provisions vary from one wage agreement to another: some guarantee the worker to unpaid study leave, while others provide for the employee to be able to undertake study during working hours on full pay, and also for grants to pay travel and other expenses.

Provision in the Upper Secondary School Act of 2008 stipulates the students' right to validation of non-formal education.

7.2 Distribution of responsibilities

Continuing education and training is offered by public institutions at the upper secondary and higher education levels, including lifelong learning centres. Adult education may also be provided for by municipality schools, private schools, companies or organizations.

Continuing education in Iceland does not come under any single ministry. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, however, has overall supervision of educational affairs and is in charge of virtually all education that takes place within the school system, including adult education and continuing education. The Ministry of Social Affairs also has responsibilities concerning vocational continuing education and training in business and industry, as well as concerning unemployment benefits, see 7.1 on vocational training in business and industry and on unemployment benefits. Other ministries may be involved in continuing education in their areas of concern, either through the continuing education of employees or through the organizations pertaining to them.

The role of the Education and Training Service Centre (see introduction to this chapter) is to be a collaborative forum of the founding parties for adult and continuing education and training in co-operation with other education bodies. The main goal is to increase educational opportunities among people on the labour market, support educational providers to define the target groups' need for education and assist in developing methods to assess informal competence.

No regulations are in force to cover the operation of educational courses offered by the private sector, except where a specific agreement has been made between the body offering the courses and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

7.3 Financing

Funds for adult education programmes and distance learning in upper secondary schools are determined by the Parliament in the annual State Budget. Schools may collect fees from students for part of teaching costs according to special rules. These fees may be covered partly or wholly by participants' unions. Running costs are paid by the State.

The running costs of operating lifelong learning centres are provided for by allocations in the annual State Budget. Course participants are responsible for tuition fees. However, unions, companies, institutions or organisations often pay the fees for people participating on their behalf. The same applies for participants at courses run by the Institute of Continuing Education of the University of

Iceland. Fees may also be financed by the State, as is, for example, the case for courses in Icelandic for immigrants.

Evening schools for adults operated by municipalities receive financial support from the local community in question but have to rely on tuition fees to make up the rest of their costs.

The Act on Vocational Training in Business and Industry, see 7.1, provides for a vocational training fund. Grants from the fund may for example be awarded for paying the cost of holding courses, the cost of project management and the production of teaching materials.

An individual job-seeking programme for the unemployed includes training and education free of charge. The financing of individual job-seeking programmes for the unemployed which includes training and education free of charge is provided for in the State Budget and by the income of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, see 7.1.

Provisions on funds for lifelong learning are to be found in several wage contracts, see 7.1.

7.4 Programmes and providers

Upper secondary schools are allowed to offer special programmes, including evening classes for students who are unable to avail themselves of regular instruction at the upper secondary schools but wish to complete studies comparable to the programmes offered by them. The evening programmes offered are comparable to those of the day school, but the students get half the number of lessons, see introduction. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues a national curriculum guide for upper secondary schools, which also applies to adult education. In those upper secondary schools which offer adult education programmes through evening school there is a unit-credit system. See 4.2.

Upper schools can in cooperation with bodies such as municipalities, employers' and employees' organizations, companies and other groups establish lifelong learning centres to provide courses and counselling for a particular geographical region in the country.

Nine lifelong learning centres have been established, with one in each of the main regions of the country as well as one in the capital. The lifelong learning centres provide educational opportunities to where the participants actually live. The centres have as well been providing for distance education at the higher education level.

Upper secondary and higher education institutions have in recent years increasingly been offering distance education courses.

The School of Education at the University of Iceland *Háskóli Íslands*, organizes basic training for adults in such a way that students have the chance to attend school as well as being employed part-time. The school offers a mixture of distance learning and direct teaching. Students undertake pre-primary school or compulsory school teacher training which leads to full qualification and which normally takes three years over a four-year period in this format.

The Institute of Continuing Education of the University of Iceland offers courses for adults. These courses cover a wide range of topics and include such diverse courses as a four-semester course in business administration, a three-semester course in official administration and a three-semester course in family therapy, health economy and administration of health institutions. The Institute also offers a wide variety of shorter courses, some of which are occupationally related, others are, for example, in the fields of languages, culture and personal development.

The Innovation Centre Iceland has a special department for the Icelandic business community and organizes various courses such as project management and personal leadership. Students tend to be university graduates.

Evening schools run by the municipalities offer hobby-related courses as well as courses for employees that relate to their work, preparatory courses for upper secondary schools and courses in Icelandic as a second language for immigrants. Generally speaking, there are not many educational opportunities for adults at the compulsory school level. However, the municipalities' evening schools may offer some courses and the upper secondary schools offer basic courses without credits which are equivalent to compulsory education. The curriculum for adults in compulsory education is the same as for pupils in compulsory schools. In the selection of teaching materials an attempt is made to take into account the age and experience of the adult.

There are no admission requirements for adults to attend courses at the compulsory school level. So far, no particular academic preparation has been required for adult education programmes at the upper secondary level. Schools are allowed to evaluate previous studies and give credits that count towards the completion of studies. Validation of non-formal education has increasingly been accepted. Admission requirements for adults at the higher education level vary. Most often students are required to have passed the matriculation examination or have comparable education. However, in certain cases, the work experience of the applicant is taken into consideration.

Courses in Icelandic as a second language for adult immigrants are organised by various actors, such as lifelong learning centres, municipality schools and companies. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has issued a guide on the teaching of Icelandic as a second language for adults.

As a general rule qualifications achieved by adults through participation in formal adult education are equivalent to those in mainstream education. This relates to all educational levels.

Students at the compulsory level receive a certificate from the institution stating that they have completed a certain course of study.

At the end of each semester, students in adult education programmes at the upper secondary level, both general and vocational, are given a transcript which shows his/her marks and present standing within the programme. On completing a branch of study at the upper secondary level, students are issued a certificate by the school which specifies which course units or subjects they have taken and the marks they have received. The certificate also shows the number of credits the students have completed in individual subjects and in the programme as a whole. Students are able to graduate at the end of both the autumn and spring semesters. The certificate is delivered by the school and is equivalent to the one delivered to the pupils attending day-time upper secondary school.

Lifelong learning centres issue certificates stating which courses of study students have completed.

Those adult students who complete their education at the higher education level receive from the institution a certificate which confirms that they have completed their education. In some cases the certificate gives them the right to work in a certain field of employment, as is, for example, the case with the teachers' certificate.

7.5 Quality assurance

Same rules apply to quality assurance in public adult and continuing education as in the different levels of the school system, see 1.4.3.

7.6 Guidance and counselling

According to the Upper Secondary School Act counselling and advice on studies and career choices, as well as on personal matters affecting their studies and school attendance, shall be available to students in upper secondary schools, including students in adult education programmes. This service

shall be provided by study counsellors, teachers and other personnel, as appropriate. Counselling for adults is also provided for by the lifelong learning centres and university institutions.

Special State allocations in recent years for those who have no qualifications shall go partly to educational counselling, see introduction.

7.7 Teachers and trainers

In upper secondary schools, those who teach in the adult education programmes usually also teach in regular day-time programmes. Consequently they are subject to the same rules as all upper secondary school teachers where qualifications are concerned.

Lifelong learning centres hire both qualified teachers as well as teachers without formal qualifications.

Teachers of adults at the higher education level usually have an MA or a doctorate.

Not all teachers of basic skills courses at the compulsory school level for adults are fully qualified, as some of them are employed by municipality schools which do not necessarily demand formal qualifications. The same applies for training courses in continuing vocational education.

Qualified teachers in adult and continuing education are subject to the same rules concerning in-service training as teachers of the school system, see 3.6 and 4.6.

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