



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Education and Culture

Lifelong Learning: Education and Training policies
Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies

Brussels, December 2005

IMPLEMENTING THE 'EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010' WORK PROGRAMME

2005 Progress Report



National Contact Person:

Thora Magnusdottir (thora.magnusdottir@utn.stjr.is)

Commission Contact Persons:

Ms Luce Pépin (Luce.Pepin@cec.eu.int)

Mr Sebastian Volkers (Sebastian.Volkers@cec.eu.int)

**Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives
in Education and Training**
National Report
Iceland

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

April 2005

INTRODUCTION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL POLICIES AND THE LISBON AGENDA

1.1. Overall development

Iceland has taken an energetic part in the EU education and training programmes since the early nineteen-nineties with positive influences on education at all school levels. The Icelandic government made the decision early on to do all they could to make the formal inclusion of Iceland in EU education and research collaboration possible, and to facilitate active participation. As a result, it is evident that participation in the various programmes has had a lasting impact on the working environment of both teachers and students. For example, it is safe to say that Iceland's participation in the Erasmus Programme has had a decisive effect in altering the Icelandic university community. The curriculum has been adjusted to accommodate foreign students, efforts have been made to support and encourage Icelandic students to conduct part of their studies abroad, and perhaps the least foreseen influence, increased formal cooperation with universities abroad has encouraged collaboration between higher education institutions within Iceland.

The introduction of the “open method of coordination” (OMC) has offered a new means of collaborating on educational matters within Europe. Through the OMC an effort is being made to support policy work of the countries engaged while respecting their independence and sovereignty of education matters. Room has been made for a shift of focus in European education co-operation. Instead of collaboration being mainly restricted to the individual or institutional level, the focus is now on common efforts toward reaching the goals of the Lisbon Agenda through systematic and co-ordinated changes in the European educational systems themselves. Though Iceland is not a member of the EU, it is obvious that the Icelandic government can agree to the general goals that the EU educational ministers have decided upon, and work towards reforms in European education and training systems, as well as to their further elaboration as presented in the so called “detailed work programme on future objectives of education and training systems”. Therefore Iceland welcomed the invitation to take part in the efforts that were instigated, and that are now referred to as “Education & Training 2010”. As a sign of this, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture decided to designate representatives in each of the working groups that were established and Iceland intends to participate in peer-review activities in a number of fields.¹ Though the Icelandic government has not officially adopted the five EU benchmarks in education, it closely follows the progress in Iceland with reference to these goals, as well as to other indicators of the state of education.

The following highlights actions taken by the Icelandic national education authorities within some of the key areas where improvements have been identified as being crucial in order to reach the Lisbon goals:

¹ Iceland has registered for participation in the cluster of countries focusing on peer-review activities around teacher and trainer education, ICT, quality in higher education and VET, basic skills and increasing participation in math and science.

- One of the aims of educational policy in Iceland in recent decades has been to raise the general level of education.
- In connection with plans to change the time span of the upper secondary education in order to utilize the students' time better, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture has recently appointed a task force to reassess the organisation of teachers and trainers education. The task force is to deliver a proposal on the future organisation of teacher training at the pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary level. It will also analyse the views of stakeholders regarding quality and standards in education.
- Working groups are in place to revise the curriculum in compulsory and upper secondary schools. In this work, which is to be completed in July 2005, the top priority policy reforms in Europe are taken into consideration.
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture recently issued an Action Plan for eLearning 2005-2008 that entails that information technology be utilised for the benefit of education and culture to create an advantage for the Icelandic nation in the economy of the future.
- At the end of 2004 the Minister of Education, Science and Culture appointed a task force which is to give guidance on quality issues at all school levels. The role of the group is furthermore to work towards a coherent policy framework for quality issues for the Ministry.
- The Minister of Education, Science and Culture has appointed a working group whose role is to propose ways to raise the level of interest among compulsory and upper secondary school students in courses and employment in the fields of science and technology.
- The Minister of Education, Science and Culture has appointed a national committee for women in science to monitor the conclusion of the EU management committee on women in science, which among other duties will supervise the Women in Science project, collect statistical overview data, etc.
- Iceland is taking an active role in both the Bologna and the Copenhagen processes.

1.1.1. Coordination of the Lisbon strategy

No inter-ministerial structures have been set up in order to coordinate the implementation of the education and training elements of the Lisbon strategy in Iceland. However, regular consultative meetings with working groups' representatives have been held, and recurrent progress reports on "Education & Training 2010" have been presented to the employees of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture as well as to the boards and staff members of the Icelandic national agencies of the Socrates and the Leonardo da Vinci programmes.

1.1.2. Use of quantitative international comparative data

Iceland participated in the IEA study of reading in 1991 and also joined the 1995 IEA study of mathematics and the natural sciences for the compulsory school level (TIMSS). Iceland is currently taking part in the OECD PISA 2006, CEBAS-PISA and PIRLS 2006 studies. Also, Iceland participates in the information gathering for Education at a Glance. Participation and findings of these international studies and cooperation has influenced the educational debate in Iceland and policy making for example in relation to the revision of national curriculum on compulsory and upper secondary level, for example in clearer goals in math and science education.

1.2. Promotion of Education and Training 2010. Difficulties encountered

With a subsidy from the Commission, an introductory pamphlet was published in Icelandic² detailing the objectives of the EU in education and training, and following that a conference was held at the start of 2003 entitled *Environment that Encourages Learning*. Both in the pamphlet and at the conference itself the EU objectives were introduced while means were sought to place them in an Icelandic context. The conference addressed the question how to encourage even more people to take advantage of educational opportunities available both within and outside the formal school system. In October 2003 a two-day meeting of working group G was organised in Iceland together with the Commission. The meeting was leverage for discussion in Iceland of “*open learning environment, active citizenship and inclusion*”. EU funding was then received to implement a widely attended conference in Reykjavik in March 2004 on the status of lifelong learning in Iceland, entitled *Organization and Funding of Lifelong Learning*.

The open method of coordination is a new method for collaboration and the ways on how best to use this instrument are still being developed both at the European level and in the countries that are taking part in “Education & Training 2010”. It has been the opinion of the Icelandic representatives in the working groups that their experience has been for the most part positive, though the work has as yet had only limited impact on changes in policy. It is hoped that in the next phase this will be even more positive as focus will be placed on fewer themes.

² **Menntun í Evrópu – mismunandi kerfi, sameiginleg markmið til ársins 2010 (Education in Europe – Different Systems, Common Goals til 2010)**. Published by The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and the Leonardo and Socrates national agencies in Iceland, with support from the European Commission. December 2002.

INVESTING MORE AND MORE EFFICIENTLY: FOCUSING REFORM ON THE KEY AREAS

2.1. Identification of national priorities for reform and investment

2.1.1. Priority areas for modernisation/reform

Since 2002, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has been working on a possible restructuring of general academic programmes leading to matriculation examination, and finding ways to reduce the duration of these programmes from four years to three. Icelandic pupils complete their matriculation examination in the year they turn 20, whereas in other countries pupils finish comparable programmes at the age of 18 or 19.

In the recent years emphasis has been placed on creating room for autonomy at universities as well as increasing their responsibility for their internal affairs. The increased autonomy has been followed by specific measures to secure both internal and external quality control. The government has created three-year contracts with all of the universities in which the objectives the universities are described and the financial frameworks defined. In connection with the contracts, emphasis has been placed on increasing the number of students attending university, as well as financial contribution, encouraging diversity in curriculum and specifically supporting higher learning and research in universities.

A Science and Technology Council was created in 2003. Its role is to promote scientific research, science education and technological development in Iceland to ensure strong foundations within the Icelandic culture and ensure a competitive economy. This Council formalizes the official position on scientific research and technological development. It is under the direction of the Prime Minister, and includes ministers, scientists and representatives from the economy.

2.1.2. Increased investment / Difficulties encountered

It is obvious that restructuring the curriculum leading to the matriculation examination entails increased expenditure, among other things due to revision of the core curriculum, new educational materials, retraining of teachers, longer working hours at upper secondary schools and evaluation of results.

An increase in the number of students at the university level has occurred much faster than expected, and the government has attempted after the fact to comply with the increased demands through endowments, with the result that the financial contribution at the university level has increased 42% (on fixed prices) from 2000. Developments indicate that in the next years the student population at the university level will increase even more.

With the creation of the Science and Technology Council, contributions to research and science funds have increased steadily since 2003. It can be expected that an even greater increase in contributions will be sought for this purpose, although Iceland has already reached the target EU has set itself for overall investment in research by 2010 (3% of GDP).

2.1.3. EU funds as supporting factor

It is of great importance to the educational authorities have access to international funds to increase the opportunity to support specialized projects that are otherwise not foreseen in the national budget. This is especially crucial with regard to opening up for possibilities to participate in international projects. This goes for instance for follow-up activities and development projects that stem from participation in "Education & Training 2010". Project grants that Iceland has received from the Leonardo da Vinci and the Socrates programmes have strongly encouraged progress and reforms in many areas.

2.2. Extent of correlation between Member States priority areas, and the common European objectives

2.2.1. Reforms in the structure of education/training institutions

The goal in shortening the upper secondary education is to utilize the students' time better so that they will be able to either enter the work force and/or higher education sooner. The main emphasis in altering this timeframe would not be solely the shortening of the education period, but also creating a more concentrated curriculum. The school year for both compulsory and upper secondary levels has lengthened considerably in the past ten years, and is now comparative to nearly two additional years of study. By utilizing this increase to concentrate the curriculum, the number of school years may be **lessened** without sacrificing educational quality, a benefit to both students and their families as well.

Furthermore, it may be noted that the government has placed emphasis on decentralization at the university level. The decision to decentralize was rendered in the Universities Act from 1997. The government has recently focused their attention on increasing competitiveness of universities. This has been accomplished by granting private parties the right to run universities and by granting all institutions of higher education the same right to financial contribution from the state.

2.2.2. Incentives to invest more in education and training

The government encourages universities and enterprises to collaborate on a variety of projects. There has been an increase in enterprises subsidizing teaching positions in universities and in that way make investments in education that can be later applied as normal tax deduction in their operation. As has been noted, the government has placed emphasis on competition between universities by giving private parties the right to run universities. This competition has encouraged more diversity and increased the quality of university education.

2.2.3. Funding mechanisms to increase private investment

The government has generally encouraged organizations, enterprises and individuals toward retraining. All Icelandic universities run continuing education institutions where businesses and/or individuals pay independently for their education. Lifelong Learning Centres get financial support from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (see chapter 3.1.3). The average age of university students has changed greatly recently, as older individuals coming from the work place invest in additional education.

2.3 Monitoring and evaluation of educational policies

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the evaluation and supervision of educational institutions and of the entire educational system in Iceland. Below is an overview of the varied approaches to evaluating Icelandic educational institutions.

Educational institutions	Internal evaluation	External evaluation of internal evaluation methods/Quality Audits	External evaluation of schools/institutions
Pre-primary schools	Yes	No	Yes
Compulsory schools	Yes	Yes	Yes
Upper secondary schools	Yes	Yes	Yes
Higher education institutions	Yes	No special audits. This factor is one of many factors included in programme and institutional evaluations.	Yes

In legislation on pre-primary, compulsory (primary and lower-secondary level), upper secondary and higher education, strong emphasis is placed on regular internal evaluation by schools/institutions. According to the legislation schools/institutions at all educational levels are to conduct internal evaluations. Internal evaluation is a way of working systematically on quality and improvements in school/institution activities. Internal evaluation is also a way of disseminating knowledge and information on school/institution activities. An internal evaluation is to include the school's/institution's policy and objectives, a definition of the ways in which these are to be achieved, an analysis of the strong and weak points of the school's/institution's activities and an action plan. Its main objective is to make it easier for staff to work towards the school's/institution's objectives, to assess whether they have been achieved, to review them and to promote improvements. This applies to objectives provided for in laws, regulations and the National Curriculum Guidelines, as well as to local objectives which the school includes in its school curriculum guide. At the same time, internal evaluation creates an objective basis for improvements. Part of the internal evaluation process is the collecting of comprehensive information on school/institution activities, and to provide information on the extent to which the achievements of the activities are in accordance with their objectives. An institution's self-evaluation report should include a detailed description and analysis of the institution's objectives and activities. In addition, it is important that the internal evaluation report provide proposals for improvement.

Two approaches to external evaluation are organised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture: the evaluation of schools/institutions and the evaluation of internal evaluation methods at compulsory and upper secondary schools. The purpose of evaluating schools/institutions externally is to obtain an overall picture of each school's or institution's activities or of specific aspects at any given time. Attention is directed towards various features of the school's or institution's internal activities, such as administration, teaching, development work, co-operation and communications within

the school/institution, study achievements and the connection between the school/institution and society. The purpose of the external evaluation of internal evaluation methods is to provide information on how schools fulfil legal provisions on evaluating school activities. These evaluations do not imply a detailed description of specific aspects of school activities or a comparison between schools, but are intended to examine whether the methods applied for internal evaluation fulfil the requirements laid down by the Ministry. These requirements stipulate that the self-evaluation method be formal, comprehensive, reliable, co-operative, improvement-oriented, performance-linked, institutionally and individually oriented, descriptive, analytical and public.

The overall evaluation of Iceland's educational system is mainly conducted through national co-ordinated examinations at compulsory and upper secondary levels.

The Icelandic Minister of Education, Science and Culture reports to Parliament at three-year intervals on compulsory and upper secondary school operations.

In 2004 the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture established a committee on quality in the education sector. The mission of the committee is to map the situation concerning quality issues at all educational levels. The Lisbon objectives as well as the Bologna process will be at the forefront of the work.

3. PUTTING IN PLACE TRULY COHERENT AND COMPREHENSIVE LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGIES

3.1. Main policy/measures

3.1.1. State of development of LLL strategy

The Icelandic government has in recent years paid growing attention to the need for and importance of lifelong learning. The Minister of Education appointed a committee on lifelong learning in 1997. This committee issued a report in 1998³ in which it put forth general recommendations and proposals for increasing general participation in lifelong learning in Iceland. The proposals stressed the importance of the following:

- New attitude towards education
- The responsibility must be everyone's
- Clear role for government
- Campaign on how to strengthen lifelong learning
- Focus on joint efforts of the social partners
- Finding ways to integrate companies and organisations in the organisation of LLL
- Finding ways to strengthen individuals' realisation of the importance of LLL
- Building in a second chance for study
- Improved access to information and counselling
- Diverse offering of studies
- Collaboration of business community and schools
- Focus on self-study programmes instead of courses
- Better foundations for lifelong learning plans
- Quality requirements
- Utilisation of information technology

Educational institutions have been very active in supporting increased participation in LLL and to create new opportunities in this area. In 2004 the Minister of Education, Science and Culture appointed a new committee which is to propose activities to implement the government's policy in lifelong learning.

No comprehensive legislation applies to continuing or adult education in Iceland. The Upper Secondary School Act of 1996, however, covers several aspects of adult education, such as evening classes for adults and lifelong learning centres.

3.1.2. General approach and policy

In the above mentioned report from 1998 the general goals of the government in LLL are noted. The report can be accessed online at:

<http://bella.mrn.stjr.is/utgafuskra/rit.adp?id=34868>

³ **Lifelong Learning, Force for a New Century.** Published by The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. May 1998.

3.1.3. Priority reforms

- Involvement of key players

In recent years it has become more common for parties involved in vocational education and training to collaborate in lifelong learning. An example of this cooperation is the establishment of The Education and Training Service Centre and the Centres for Lifelong Learning in Iceland.

The Education and Training Service Centre was established in Iceland in 2002 by the Icelandic Federation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA). The role of the Centre is to be a collaborative forum of the founding parties for adult education and vocational training in co-operation with other education bodies operating under the auspices of the member associations of ASÍ and SA. The Centre operates in accordance with its articles of association and a service agreement with the Ministry of Education. The Centre targets those who have not completed the upper secondary level of education. This target group comprises almost 40% of people in the labour market, although the ratio varies between years and regions. The objective is to enable individuals who have not graduated from the upper secondary level to obtain an education and improve their position on the labour market.

Examples of the Centre's objectives are:

- To assessments performed of the education supply and real professional competence in the labour market.
- To ensure recognition of skills and knowledge acquired on training courses.
- To ensure recognition of skills acquired through experience, independent study, etc.
- To develop career counselling services in the labour market.
- To develop education records.

Lifelong Learning Centres are currently operated in nine different places in the country. The centres are non-profit, autonomous corporations run in collaboration with the municipalities, local school authorities and the local trade unions. Each is set up in its own way and the programme offered can differ from one centre to the other as each is responsible for identifying the needs in the region and acting as a broker between those who need courses in a particular field and those who can offer courses in that field. As well as promoting and developing local educational courses, the LLL centres provide information on distance learning and administrate of student access to a highly efficient Internet connection. The Lifelong Learning Centres also provide for distance education at the upper secondary and higher education levels by offering technical and organisational facilities. The centres receive economic support from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

- Foundations for further learning

Upper secondary schools have greatly increased the availability of distance learning, giving individuals the opportunity to engage in studies regardless of time or place. This curriculum is available immediately after the completion of compulsory school that is at 16 years of age. These courses have been very beneficial to those returning to school after taking extended breaks in their education.

- Objectives concerning key competencies

The curriculum for Icelandic schools is constantly being revised, with consideration taken for altered emphases and needs each time. Revisions involve all areas of the school environment including key competencies, as that concept has been described by Working Group B on basic skills, foreign language teaching and entrepreneurship. For example, in the core curriculum for compulsory and upper secondary schools that was published in 1999 much emphasis is placed on key competencies in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all areas of study. Two new areas were specified within the general curriculum at both school levels that should place focus on key competency. The first refers to interpersonal, intercultural and social competencies and the support of individuals in general in taking an active part in the democratic process (civic competencies). The second area seeks to encourage innovations that lead to the development of products and services, and to train the general competence of the students in the field of entrepreneurship.

- Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning

As already mentioned, the Education and Training Service Centre is a body founded by the Icelandic Federation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA). Through public funding the Centre will assist the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in developing ways and means to validate non-formal and informal learning for low-skilled people in the workforce. This work has already resulted in the official recognition of five non-formal study courses, making them relevant for validation towards studies at upper secondary level. Other initiatives have been taken that underline the significance of this work and the priority that it has been given by the Government of Iceland.

- Development of widely accessible lifelong guidance

One of the main projects of the nine LLL centres in Iceland is to create networks for LLL guidance. Their goal is to ensure that as many members of the population as possible have access to their services.

- Development of diverse learning pathways and open learning environments

Increased possibilities for distance learning both at the upper secondary and higher education levels open opportunities for continuing education for more individuals than ever. It has been carefully planned to develop education at the upper secondary level in an integrated way to allow the students to move easily between majors and build new courses of study on the foundation of the previous one.

- Integrated use of ICT in education and training systems

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's Action Plan for eLearning 2005-2008 entails information technology being utilised for the benefit of education and culture to create an advantage for the Icelandic nation in the economy of the future.

Efforts have been devoted to strengthening the premises for using the technology in education. The online educational gateway, www.menntagatt.is, was opened in 2003,

with information on the points of focus in education and information technology to be expanded and promoted by the Ministry.

- Investing in teachers' and instructors' training in the light of LLL requirements

The Iceland University of Education offers a postgraduate programme in adult education. The programme is primarily intended for those who have interest in adult education, education administration or knowledge management in schools, organizations and businesses.

- Disadvantaged groups

“Fjölmennt” is the name of a centre for adult education that serves the disabled, from 20 years of age and older. The centre enjoys financial assistance from the government. The role of “Fjölmennt” is built upon the organisation’s own declared objectives as found in its organisational agenda, as well as international accords such as the General Guidelines of the United Nations, the Salamanca Declaration (particularly articles 56 and 57) and objectives in current statutes on issues relating to the disabled. “Fjölmennt” offers diverse adult education and counselling with the purpose of enhancing the quality of life and general welfare, and safeguarding those individuals who do not have the option of receiving equivalent services in other settings. “Fjölmennt” does not replace other institutions nor does it adopt the responsibilities that rest upon them. The centre endeavours to offer services nationwide as funding allows.

- Learning throughout life

For the past few years a so called Continuing Education Week has been held in Iceland. During this period much importance is placed on the importance of LLL, and on getting continuing education programmes and motivational campaigns up and running. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture grants financial support to the campaigns.

- Developing flexibility

According to the law from 1996 on upper secondary education, there is a Co-operation Committee for Vocational Studies. The Committee is comprised of 18 representatives selected from as many sectors of industry as possible.

- Innovation in curricula and learning tools / methods

In order to promote innovation and initiatives of school employees, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture annually funds a number of projects on development and production of educational materials for compulsory and upper secondary schools.

- Promotion of LLL through partnerships and incentives

The latest wage contracts in the labour market include special stipulations for a specified percentage of wages to be channelled into continuing education funds for employees.

As mentioned above, Continuing Education Weeks are being held annually during which the importance of LLL is specially highlighted.

The Vocational Training Commission works via the Directorate of Labour. The focus of this commission is to service the economy and support the development of vocational training. Each year special awards are given to encourage further build up of vocational education.

In 2005, LEIKN, the Association of Adult Education Specialists in Iceland, was established. The job of this association is to encourage valuable discussions on continuing and adult education, expand sources of information, and increase communication and collaboration between Adult Education specialists and the government on one hand, and foreign cooperation on the other.

- LLL policies/strategies and the European work programme

In the years since the Copenhagen Declaration was adopted Iceland has focused on initiatives relating to validation of non-formal and informal learning. This issue has been taken forward in a decisive manner by the establishment in December 2002 of The Education and Training Service Centre (see 3.1.3.)

3.2. Obstacles and areas for further progress

The main areas of progress and obstacles:

- Growing understanding amongst the population, public authorities and the economy at large of the importance of LLL, plays an important role in the substantial increase there has been in the field of LLL in the past few years.
- Access to LLL has been improved dramatically in recent years, for example, by the introduction of the so called *FS-broadband* which links all upper secondary schools and the LLL centres through the internet.
- Increasingly the design of the curriculum is adapted to new ways of dissemination that suits LLL.
- Information centres for specific occupations have increasingly supported developments of LLL offers in their areas of concern.
- Observers' findings show that participation in LLL is very high in Iceland compared to other countries in Europe. Substantial increase in study offers is one of the most important facets for further developments within the field of LLL.
- Work is under progress on finding a means of applying credit from informal education to formal education.

No specific targets have been set to monitor the implementation of lifelong learning. However, data from the public continuing education system and from all the Lifelong Learning Centres (ref. 3.1.3) is available. The Education and Training Service Centre is presently developing a policy on how best to record participation in LLL that is offered by other providers.

4. REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION

4.1. Main policies/measures

4.1.1. European compatibility

Higher education in Iceland is regulated by the Universities Act adopted in 1997. As measures affecting this educational level even before 1997 have been largely consistent with the aims of the Bologna Declaration, there have been no major changes in policies for higher education, or in its organisation or structure.

As a general rule, studies offered at the HE level provide instruction leading to the following degrees: a) a bachelor's degree, which normally takes three years, b) a master's degree taking two years with few exceptions, and c) a doctoral degree, taking three to five years. Traces of the old professional degree system (Candidatus degrees of 4-6 years) remain; under this system the holder qualifies for a special office or profession in the fields of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

The national credit system, in which one credit is equivalent to two ECTS credits, is based on the same principles as ECTS and is used by all HEIs. A full programme of study normally consists of 30 national credits per study year according to the Universities Act, and shall reflect all student work and class attendance. Credits are attached to all courses in all degree programmes. The credits reflect all students' study efforts, class attendance, homework and examinations. ECTS credits are used parallel with the national credits by the universities for credit transfer and credit accumulation.

To improve international transparency and facilitate academic and professional recognition of qualifications, all HEIs will introduce the Diploma Supplement (DS) for all graduates no later than in spring 2005. In spring 2004 four HEIs issued DS to all graduates. The DS will be issued automatically and free of charge to all students at graduation. The DS is in English, but some HEIs issue it in Icelandic as well.

4.1.2 Competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education

Icelandic students have a long tradition of studying abroad for their higher education. In recent years an increasing number of students from countries, both within and outside the EHEA, have studied at an Icelandic HEI. Icelandic is the language of instruction in HEIs. However, in recent years most HEIs have started to offer courses where English is the language of teaching.

When Iceland held the chairmanship in 2004 of the Nordic Council of Ministers, a conference on the Global Educational Market - Nordic Participation took place. The aim was to look into the possibilities for Nordic countries to attract foreign students to their HEIs. Perspectives from the USA and Europe were introduced at the conference.

4.1.3. Advanced learning and innovation

The number of students in research studies has taken a sharp rise in the past few years, and applications for grants to the educational research fund have increased.

Research-related higher education is developing rapidly in Iceland, and among other things is central to the policy of businesses and institutions in recruiting new employees. The participation of young scientists and technologists in research projects supported by competition grants has long been high on the list of priorities for businesses and institutions.

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture has directed the Science Council to create a proposal in collaboration with stakeholders on how initial investments in research at the university level can be best utilized in the future, and to then submit a report on their findings. This is to be one of the primary responsibilities of the Science Council in the coming months. Furthermore, the council is to look into ways of organising Doctorate and research-related Masters programmes with an eye toward best utilizing manpower and services available in Icelandic universities and research facilities that have shown exceptional work and that have the capacity to shoulder international collaboration in scientific education.

4.1.4. Promoting structural change at universities

Access to quality education at all school levels is one of the most important facets in the development of communities. It is imperative that the entire population benefit from scientific research, technological development and innovations within the economy, along with the meeting of specific regional needs.

Rural knowledge centres have been considered by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture in connection with reinforcing university education and by the Ministries of Industry and Commerce in encouraging innovation and economic development. Other ministries have also considered launching operations outside of Reykjavik. The idea behind knowledge centres is built on the same concept as industrial parks, though their focus is smaller in scale. Knowledge centres in specific regions that are built up as neighbourhoods and collaboration between regionally-bound specialists' centres, economic and university research centres can more easily fill regional needs for research, continuing education and areas of basic education at the university level via distance learning.

4.1.5. Promoting quality assurance and/or accreditation

General provisions for the assurance of quality in higher education are laid down in the Universities Act of 1997 and in Regulations from 1999, revised in 2003 that were set on the basis of the Act. According to the Regulations it is the responsibility of each HEI to set up a formal internal quality control system. The Regulations also state that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture can take the initiative to conduct external evaluations of defined units within the institutions or of the institutions as a whole. The Ministry is responsible for the planning of external evaluations at the HE level. External evaluations are conducted by independent experts outside the Ministry. The Minister of Education determines when an external evaluation shall take place, as stipulated in the Regulations, and what the focus of the evaluation shall be.

The external evaluation procedure at the level of higher education consists of self-evaluation by the institution, a site visit by external experts (including international experts), and the publication of a final report.

A three-year Action plan (2005-2007) on evaluation of HEIs has been decided upon. The plan stipulates what kind of evaluations will be executed within the time frame. It includes programme and institutional evaluations.

4.1.6. Higher education and the needs of LLL learners and non-traditional students

Higher education institutions are responsible for selecting students for admission. According to the Universities Act students entering a university are required to have passed the Icelandic matriculation examination, have finished other equivalent education or have, in the view of the higher education institution in question, acquired equivalent maturity and knowledge. In some cases, applicants with substantial work experience who have not completed matriculation examinations may be admitted. For vocational and technical courses in higher education institutions, practical experience in an appropriate field of study is often required. The admission of mature students to higher education institutions on the basis of professional qualification and work experience without further tests is in the hands of each higher education institution

On the basis of laws on individual higher education institutions, these institutions may run continuing education institutions and offer distance-learning programmes for adults. Most HEIs run institutes that offer courses in continuing education, and distance learning courses are widely available and cover an increasing variety of subjects. Many of these programmes and courses are offered as study combined with work.

The Lifelong Learning Centres offer a variety of continuing education courses including distance education at the higher education level by providing technical and organizational facilities (see chapter 3.1.3).

4.2. Obstacles and areas for further progress

The possible main challenges in the coming years are:

- to formalize the processes for accreditation and recognition
- to further strengthen the national QA system
- to integrate the learning outcome perspectives in HEIs
- to further increase and improve opportunities for doctoral studies
- to develop a system of evaluation of research at HEIs for financing purposes.

5. INCREASING THE QUALITY AND ATTRACTIVNESS OF VET

Quality in VET has been enhanced by the active involvement of social partners in decision-making and identification of skills needs in the labour market. This involvement has led to initiatives that might very well lead to groundbreaking changes in the basic structure of the VET system in Iceland. Here we are referring to an ongoing pilot project that is expected to end in 2005, in which partnerships in the field of in-company training have been struck in order to lay bare learning processes at company level. The purpose of this project is to move forward in the field of practical training, make training more visible and transparent, and make teaching and training more effective. Furthermore, social partners are highly involved in the work of occupational councils, analysing qualification requirements and developing curriculum guidelines for initial vocational education and training at the upper secondary school level.

5.1. Main policies/measures

5.1.1 Implementation of the tools developed under the Copenhagen process

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has directed the University of Iceland's Research Liaison Office (which also runs the Icelandic NA for the Leonardo da Vinci Programme) to operate the National Europass Centre. Working alongside the Research Liaison Office to set the NEC into motion will be a consultancy group consisting of representatives of the main stakeholders who will ensure that it takes firm and wide root and that it becomes as familiar and visible as possible. Special attention has been placed on the development of a web site with information on transparency and acknowledgement of diplomas and certificates. Encouraging the use of the Europass CV in concert with education and occupation counsellors is on the agenda as well.

For the past two years a task force consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Education and Training Service Centre, described previously in chapter 3.1.3, has been working to assess individual seminars offered by various parties. The experience gained from this project is used to define criteria and to create general rules for evaluation of non-formal and informal education.

5.1.2. The needs of low-skilled and disadvantaged groups

The greatest challenge by far in this area is the establishment and operation of the Education and Training Service Centre. The Ministry intends to publish guiding rules on the evaluation of non-formal and informal education as a part of the curriculum guidelines of VET. This is to build a bridge between the labour market and VET at the upper secondary education level. A number of courses where work experience is transferable as credit units have been identified and are being organized. In addition a general course of study at the upper secondary level is meant to build a bridge between compulsory and secondary education, especially for students who are inadequately prepared to begin their education in the ordinary courses of study. Each school is responsible for the organisation of a general course of study in accordance with the needs of the target group in question and the local resources and conditions.

5.1.3. The image and attractiveness of the vocational route

In the past 15 to 20 years much emphasis has been placed on the promotion of vocational education and training in the education policies of the government. This shows most clearly in the upper secondary education act implemented in 1996 and in the work that has been done in its wake. The following methods are intended to make vocational education and training more attractive and thus improving its image.

- Flexibility in the scope and development of training. Additional emphasis has been placed on multilevel organisation of VET with a basic course common for different branches of vocational study in the same occupational field and graduated courses within each branch with identified qualification requirements at each level.

- Requirements for additional education for completing matriculation examination after the completion of vocational study, of at least two years duration, have been defined, where vocational training is for the most part assessed as the equivalent to general academic study, though studied through school or through the workplace. For example, one week in the workplace equals one credit in school. These requirements are published in the National Curriculum Guidelines.

- Students in vocational training have the option of taking a student loan from LÍN, the Icelandic Student Government Loan Fund. This option is not open to students enrolled in general academic branches of studies for matriculation.

5.1.4. Linking VET with the requirements of the labour market

At the foundation of upper secondary school act 80/1996 is a standing committee that reports to and guides the Minister on the overall policy of vocational training. On the basis of the same act there are also Occupational Councils representing 14 occupational fields. It is the responsibility of these Councils that the proposals that are put to the Ministry on intentions and organisation of vocational training courses are in concert with the needs of the labour market for the competences of the employees in the given field. The social partners have the great majority of representatives both in the standing committee and the Occupational Councils.

5.1.5. Competence development of older workers

The employment in Iceland is generally very high, or well over 80%, of which over 60% of the employed are between ages 55-74, according to Statistics Iceland. This is probably the reason why public authorities have not paid much special attention to the educational needs of the elderly in the workplace.

In the years around 2000, lifelong learning was the focus in contract negotiations for those in the work force, and many trade unions negotiated for involvement in continuing education funds, which acted as incitements and greatly increased the opportunity of labourers to take part in seminars and courses which strengthen their occupational competences.

5.1.6. Reduction of barriers between VET and general education and increased progression into higher education

Since comprehensive upper secondary schools were established around 1980, students in both vocational and general academic branches of study have studied side by side and often in the same courses. One of the main purposes of the credit-unit system is to create flexibility and remove obstacles and dead ends.

It is fairly common for students to complete first their matriculation and then begin their vocational training. Students who have completed vocational training are now more and more often working to prepare themselves for higher education by taking into consideration the rules in the National Curriculum Guidelines governing this type of supplementary education, noted previously in section 5.1.3.

There is now an ongoing discussion on whether there is a need to build up a special educational level (ISCED 4) between upper secondary and higher education level to better meet the needs of the labour market.

5.1.7. Specific learning needs and changing role of vocational teachers and trainers

Equivalent educational requirements are in place for the training of both general academic and vocational teachers. They must complete a half a year to one year teachers training in addition to professional education instruction, and it is assumed that they regularly take part in continuing or in-service training in their field. Insight into the instruction of students with special needs is part of teachers' education. In addition, advanced training in the utilization of information and communication technology is important, in Iceland as elsewhere.

No special educational requirements are made for the trainers in companies, with the exception of masters of regulated crafts and trades who must have completed their Master in Trades exams to be licensed to instruct apprentices, as that programme includes a unit of methodology for vocational instruction. In the pilot project mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, there is an ongoing experiment in the organisation and development of workplace education, in which training of trainers takes place. Growing emphasis on defining the objectives, tasks and environment of in-company training as a part of the overall planning of VET calls for training of trainers in general.

5.1.8. Early identification of skills needs and planning of VET provision.

Since the Occupational Councils were instituted in 1998, the Ministry has requested that they focus on analysis of the labour market, resulting in research into occupations, the need for skills and knowledge, the availability of VET in each area, and the need for new branches of VET to fulfil the needs of the labour market for educated workforce. This work is ongoing and will hopefully lead to the availability of new and more diverse branches of vocational study of different scope than before.

5.2. Obstacles and areas for further progress

Despite the aims of the government and actions already described, the percentage of students in vocational training has lessened in the past three decades. There are various reasons for this, but it is most often noted that vocational training does not hold the same respect as the general academic branch of studies. The general academic education tradition has deep roots in Icelandic culture. The current Minister of Education, Science and Culture has begun preparation for a special campaign to make VET more visible.

The greatest challenges to the Icelandic VET system relates to the costs involved in maintaining a diverse curriculum for a sparsely populated and rural country where most courses of study have relatively few students. Due to the small size of the Icelandic labour market, vocational training courses are often more generalized than in

neighbouring countries. It is quite common in Iceland for a single technical or career description to include two or three specialised ones found abroad. Relatively few businesses in each career field have the resources to offer comprehensive instruction, and thereby to encourage vocational training in school as opposed to apprenticeship training/in-company training. This increases the state's expenditure in educational housing, equipment and facilities, in addition to raising the cost of school based training for small groups of students. Creating textbooks and other instructional material for such a limited market is a very specific problem in Iceland.

Decentralised studies and distance learning with help from the ICT, which has solved the big problem of offering education to those in rural areas, specifically general academic education, does not serve to work as well in more technical fields of study. In the field of vocational training, it was decided to build up one strong school in Iceland for each main occupational area, *kjarnaskóla* or core school, that have priority in developing instructional methods and materials for specialized courses of study, and that assists other institutions offering branches of study in the same field. A number of these core schools have been instigated, but it has yet to be seen whether they can successfully serve the purpose for which they were developed.

6. CONSOLIDATING THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Participation in educational mobility has always been the reality of relatively large group of Icelandic students, and through participation in the Community programmes this has been made possible for a wider range of people. It is the policy of the national authorities to support that development and to increase student and teacher mobility, be it through participation in organised programmes or by facilitating individual or virtual mobility. This policy is supported by the social partners.

6.1.1. Administrative and legal obstacles to mobility

Since Iceland gained access to the EU mobility programmes, no specific measures have been taken to change legislation, as legal obstacles to mobility have so far not been detected. On the other hand and to a large extent as a direct consequence of our participation in these programmes, a substantial effort has been made to put in place services that facilitate education mobility⁴. This includes measures to facilitate recognition of qualifications both professional and academic. Recognition of studies or training conducted abroad is generally deemed satisfactory. The framework for academic recognition is explained in chapter 4. The Europass Training Document is the only organised certification of skills and experience gained through mobility. Other certification that could be used by a wider group of people is still at discussion level. No European supplement is currently in use in vocational schools. Some experiments have been made in upper secondary schools with giving credit units for participation in mobility. National reference points for information on national vocational qualification have been identified. The development of solutions for recognition and transparency of informal learning is imminent. Some decisive actions have already been taken to meet that challenge, as has been explained elsewhere in this report (see 3.1.3 and 5.1.2).

Financial obstacles are generally not in the way when it comes to the mobility of Icelandic students. In addition to mobility grants, the Icelandic Government Student Loan Fund provides financial assistance for Icelandic students who opt for conducting a part or all of their university studies abroad. In general education the main hindrances encountered are either of motivational or social origin. As regards VET, see 6.1.4.

6.1.2. Organisational framework for quality mobility

The organisational framework for participation in education and training mobility is set by national agencies established by EU programmes and other related service units. Regular monitoring takes place at the European level of the work conducted by these bodies.

The Icelandic national authorities together with the NAs have and will continue to cooperate with the Commission with the aim of promoting quality in mobility through promotion of good practice and adherence to quality criteria in the selection policy for mobility grants. Several measures have been taken by the NAs to reduce cultural obstacles both for incoming and outgoing beneficiaries of the programmes.

⁴ The main bodies being: Information Office for Studies Abroad, National Agencies for the EU Programmes, NARIC/ENIC office, Euroguidance Centre, National Europass Centre, EURES, SOLVIT, Innovation Relay Centre, Euro Info Office.

6.1.3. Policies aimed at increasing the mobility of teachers and trainers

Several problems for the short-term mobility of teachers and trainers have been encountered, including job replacement, lack of funding, language barriers and other organisational issues. Student teachers and teachers are, however, two of the most active groups in Iceland that take part in European mobility. The most effective action that has been taken in order to promote teachers' mobility in Iceland concerns teachers participating in Erasmus. Following a decision to raise substantially the mobility grant for outgoing teachers, the demand increased immediately. Iceland in fact shows the highest relative increase of teacher mobility (46%) within the EU18 since 1997⁵.

6.1.4. Promotion of mobility of people in VET

In the field of vocational education and training, mobility has not been a large factor and mainly takes place through the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The limited participation in mobility within VET is of concern. Due to the limited ability of the national VET system to cater to the needs of the labour market in some areas (see 5.2) it is very important to open up possibilities to gain work experience outside the country.

6.1.5 Obstacles and areas for further progress.

Means for recognition and transparency of informal learning need are being developed. The organisation of study programmes in VET should be systematically looked into with regard to integrating mobility actions. Mobility actions need to be an integrated part of the forthcoming work on future prospective for the organisation of teacher training in Iceland

Consolidate the European dimension of education

6.2.1 Policies to encourage a European dimension of learning

As a part of the European Dimension, European history and geography are taught in Iceland at every level of the school system. In the teaching of these subjects, emphasis is placed on introducing the culture of the various European nations to Icelandic students and on the importance of communication between European nations. These aspects are also stressed in various parts in the National Curriculum Guidelines.

Iceland has a population of around 290.000 and co-operation with other countries is providing important and valuable impact. As a result, great emphasis is placed on having a good command of foreign languages. The teaching of foreign languages is very important at all levels of the school system, and at the end of compulsory education, pupils are expected to have acquired considerable competence in at least two foreign languages, i.e. English and one Nordic language. English has recently succeeded Danish as the primary foreign language. At the upper secondary level, students preparing for matriculation examination must add at least one other foreign language, usually either German or French. At the university level all the Nordic languages are taught as a subject, as well as most EU languages, in addition to other languages.

⁵ ERASMUS Student and Teacher Mobility 2003/2004. Overview of the National Agencies' final reports 2003/2004. Commission report - NA0505.

At the primary education level international features, including European, are gradually introduced. This is done through different subjects such as geography, history and of course teaching of foreign languages at the later stages of the primary education level. At this level there is a specific subject called Life Skills. The major aim with this subject is to improve the ability of the young pupils to face the different challenges of growing up, to teach them to have respect for themselves and their own life and for other people, their culture, religion etc, including those who are disadvantaged in any sense. The pupils at the primary education level often participate in joint projects with classes of similar age in other countries. This may result in mutual study visits.

At the upper secondary education level there is stronger emphasis put on language learning, European history, geography, etc. Social sciences and Life Skills courses are also emphasized at this level of study. Co-operation with students in other countries on well-defined projects is also quite common.

6.2.2. European and inter-cultural dimension in the training of teachers

In teachers' education in Iceland, international co-operation is quite extensive. The HEIs that offer teacher training participate in international programmes and cooperate with a number of institutions abroad. Such cooperation includes student and faculty exchanges and international projects. The language of instruction in HEIs is in general Icelandic but courses taught in English are increasingly available for both Icelandic and international students, especially at the masters level.

6.2.3. Obstacles and areas for further progress

In connection with the shortening of the study period prior to matriculation exams, there have been discussions about strengthening the foreign language curriculum with the goal of helping Icelanders to reach greater proficiency in international relations.