

ANED country report on equality of educational and training opportunities for young disabled people

Country: Iceland

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The [Academic Network of European Disability experts](#) (ANED) was established by the European Commission in 2008 to provide scientific support and advice for its disability policy Unit. In particular, the activities of the Network will support the future development of the EU Disability Action Plan and practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.

This country report has been prepared as input for the Thematic report on the implementation of EU Equality of educational and training opportunities in European countries with reference to equality for young disabled people.

The purpose of the report ([Terms of Reference](#)) is to review national implementation on equality of educational and training opportunities for young people, and in particular the National Strategic Reports of member states from a disability equality perspective in education and training, and provide the Commission with useful evidence in supporting disability policy mainstreaming.

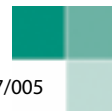


Section 1: Executive summary and conclusions

A number of key points have emerged during the compilation process for this report. The primary one is that there is a notable lack of information—both quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative research in Iceland focuses to a significant degree on children and youth with intellectual disabilities and as a result much less is known about the issues facing students with other impairments. The work, as important as it is, is uneven which makes it difficult to make broad, comprehensive statements about a region or the nation as a whole. In contrast, some of the reports emanating from the municipalities or the Ministry of Education may be larger in scope, but they tend not to include the subtle details of the experiences of education nor the critical approach typical of the scholarly work. Quantitative data is sorely lacking in many areas, whether it is outcomes or even basic numbers such as how many disabled students are pursuing education and training. Partly this is the result of organisations such as Statistics Iceland, as the collection of disability related statistics is not one of their strengths. The preschool and compulsory school systems are controlled by the municipalities, whereas the upper-secondary schools are governed by the national Ministry of Education. While much vocational training is embedded within the upper-secondary school system, some is private and the higher educational institutions are highly variable in their services and support for disabled students. Thus different levels of government and the private sector have information (or not) of varying quality and with different operational categories and indicators which makes it very difficult to answer some of the questions posed by the ANED project.

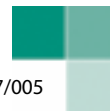
A key area our team identified is the need for more research in the transition phase after compulsory education and young adulthood. The preschool system and the higher education institutions such as the University of Iceland appear to be the most progressive and inclusive educational environments within Iceland, but it is this middle area—the ages from 6 to young adulthood—that seem the most problematic. Segregated institutions exist at the compulsory school level and special units and programmes persist within the upper-secondary school system. It is particularly notable that some support, such as with assistive equipment for educational and training purposes, cease at the age of 16, from which point individuals have to seek help from the grants available at the local Regional Offices for the Affairs of Disabled People that is, in our understanding, much more limited and restrictive. Very little appears to be known about the situations of young disabled adults seeking vocational training.

This report clearly demonstrates that the Icelandic education system is far from meeting the standards of the UN Convention regarding the right to education ‘without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity’ (Article 24). A policy of inclusive education is articulated by the Ministry of Education. In practice, however, a great many segregated programs can be found.



Although evidence of inclusive education practices can be found, the education system in general, including access to general university education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning, is far from being inclusive or without discrimination, and 'reasonable accommodation' and individual support is commonly up to the decision of individual schools or programs. A number of other key points are worth mentioning:

- It is quite common to see in reports emanating from the Ministry statements such as: "there is no separate legislation for special education at any of the four levels of education in Iceland." This is misleading and is contradicted by our review of the numerous special education-focused rules and regulations based on existing legislation.
- The Ministry regularly produces reports on the views of students in compulsory and upper-secondary schools. Very little mention of disability is ever made in these reports.
- To the best of our knowledge, there is no specific governmental or legal policy framework that concerns the rights and needs of young disabled people pursuing technical or vocational training.
- An official from the Ministry of Education admitted to a member of our team that they do not have any statistics regarding educational outcomes of disabled students in mainstream programmes because they are not differentiated from the general student populace. This raises interesting challenges for educational researchers. If these distinctions are not made at all, it is difficult to evaluate how disabled students are indeed faring within inclusive settings.
- During the information collection phase, our team noted that laws and regulations at the level of Ministry of Education pertaining to special needs are quite vague. While assertions are made that students will be supported and every effort is to be made regarding accessibility, the laws—particularly the set of *School Acts*—say very little about the exact support that is to be made available.
- There is a notable tendency within the legislation for the Ministry to refer to the municipality to interpret the laws and implement practices and, in turn, for the municipality to refer to individual schools and departments within schools to do the same.
- There appears to be a measure of variation between admission requirements, what is on offer and accessibility issues at different compulsory and upper-secondary schools, a point noted in much of the existing research.
- There are a number of small grants and forms of support available for students with specific impairments. Some impairment-specific organisations are well-established and have taken efforts to support young people in education and training. However, the question remains as to the situations faced by students with multiple-impairments, impairments that may be disabling or have disabling effects but are not severe enough to be included in an impairment specific group, or those who have an impairment for which no or limited support is available from NGOs.



Section 2: Legal and policy context

A comprehensive overview of the legal and policy context relevant for the educational and training opportunities for young disabled people has been compiled by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Mennta- og Menningarmálaráðuneytið) on behalf of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. The report can be found [here](#)¹. Much of this information has been updated as of March 26, 2010. However, while the members of our team agree that this is a fairly comprehensive report, a number of comments are warranted.

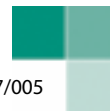
First, this report is compiled by the Ministry and, as such, is not particularly critical of the educational system for which it is responsible. The legislation that the report references generally concerns the School Acts at the national level, which omits a number of important laws and regulations from other ministries as well as the municipalities. The findings from scholarly research conducted on the issues within the educational system and outcomes and progress towards equal opportunities for young disabled people will be documented in Part Three of this ANED report. As such, the information provided by the Ministry to EADSNE mentioned above must be read with this in mind, as policy statements and objectives are often ideals that do not necessarily approximate practice.

The policy and legal framework covered by the Ministry for EADSNE deals with the formal, state sponsored education system: preschool, compulsory education, and upper secondary school. As the report notes, there is no state level legal framework that ensures that the rights and needs of disabled students are met with regard to higher education. Some higher education institutions, such as the University of Iceland, have internally developed regulations, committees and counselling services that address the needs of disabled students. Some basic research conducted by our ANED team revealed that there is a high degree of variability regarding other higher education institutions in Iceland concerning these matters, ranging from approaches that mirror the framework devised by the University of Iceland to the other extreme, whereby there is little evidence that the needs of disabled students are addressed to a significant degree.

Parallel to the case concerning higher education, to the best of our knowledge there is no specific governmental or legal policy framework that concerns the rights and needs of young disabled people pursuing technical or vocational training. Regulations and support appear to be determined on an individual institutional basis and there is often little consistency on these matters.

Lastly, it is unfortunately quite common to see in English language reports and translations emanating from Iceland that outdated terminology concerning disability is often employed.

¹ <http://www.european-agency.org/country-information/iceland>



For example, the information provided by the Ministry of Education to EADSNE uses such terms as ‘handicap’ and ‘mental retardation,’ while it is quite common to find ‘invalidity’ used by the Ministry of Health. The Icelandic ANED team wishes to make it clear that while such reports may be referenced, such terminology concerning disability is noted and not endorsed.

According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Mennta – og Menningarmálaráðuneytið) there are no policies or legal frameworks that specifically address the rights and needs of disabled people seeking education or training (EADSNE 2010: [Legal System Iceland](#)²). The national education system in Iceland operates under the principle of what it refers to as ‘Inclusive education – Education for All.’ This, in essence, means that children and youth have the ‘equal opportunity’ to attend inclusive education, but the needs of specific students are addressed on a case by case basis, often at the local level. While the School Acts discussed below are state level policies, the responsibility for implementation occurs at the municipal level. As such, at least according to legal statutes and regulations, it is often not clear as to what exactly disabled students have the right to in terms of services and support. Rather than specifying these supports, the laws refer to ‘flexibility’ and negotiations between the school administration, parents and specialists.

A common theme within the various School Acts is the right for individual institutions to refuse certain requests for support if they are considered to be too costly or logistically infeasible for specific institutions, while simultaneously asserting that students have the right to have their needs met. Under the rubric of inclusion, specific references to disability are replaced by the generalizing language of ‘special needs.’ Legislation concerning all levels of education was updated in 2008 and reflects this approach, but it is interesting to note that terms such as ‘disabled students’ (fatlaðir nemendur) begin to appear in policies and regulations that govern upper-secondary school, while such references are much less apparent at the lower levels of education. As such, in the opinion of our ANED team it is somewhat misleading for the Ministry of Education to assert that there is ‘no separate legislation for special education at any of the four levels of education in Iceland,’ when there do indeed exist ministry regulations based on this legislation such as the Regulation on the education of disabled students in upper-secondary school ([Reglugerð um kennslu fatlaðra nemenda í framhaldsskólum 372/1998](#)³), among other pieces of legislation from various ministries that mention disabled students and disability in general in the context of education.

At the preschool level, the local authorities are responsible for administration and general operations, as well as “special solutions” and “specialist services,” from which it may be inferred to refer to disabled students. Article 22 of [The Preschool Act](#)⁴ stipulates that “

² <http://www.european-agency.org/country-information/iceland/national-overview/legal-system>

³ <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/372-1998>

⁴ http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-pdf/Preschool_Act.pdf

Children who need special assistance and training according to evaluation by recognised diagnostic specialists are entitled to such services within the preschool. The service shall be carried out under specialist supervision according to decision by the preschool head teacher and the specialist services, cf. Article 21, with the parents' collaboration." The local municipal social services are also to be consulted to address these needs if warranted. The preschools are also eligible for additional funding depending upon the number of disabled students who are enrolled. For example, according to a regulation from the City of Reykjavík concerning the allocation of [support hours for students](#)⁵, disabled students are classified into three categories depending upon the type and degree of their impairments. The category which includes the most significantly impaired students is allocated an additional 4–9 hours of special education support per day, in the second (less significantly impaired) category, 2–6 hours per day and 1–4 hours per day for the remaining category.

The [Compulsory School Act](#)⁶ governs grammar school education in Iceland, which is generally inclusive between the ages of 6 to 16. This Act asserts the rights of students with special needs, and complements the [Regulation for Special Education \(no. 389/1996\)](#)⁷. Article 17 of the Compulsory School Act stipulates "Pupils have the right to have their special needs met regarding studies in compulsory school, without discrimination and regardless of their physical or mental attainment." Further, pupils with "specialised study problems" are also entitled to study support based upon an evaluation of their needs. If the parent(s) believe their child is not receiving adequate instruction at a particular school, they have the right to request further specialised instruction within the school or transfer to a specialised school. Disputes regarding these matters are governed by the 1993 [Administrative Procedures Act](#)⁸, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office (Forsætisráðuneytið). Article 20 of the Compulsory School Act concerning the school buildings mentions "Special provisions shall be made for allocation of space for specialist services for children with special needs and for staff facilities," though this does not specifically mention the issue of 'access' but rather that of 'space.' The 2009 regulation on the construction and facilities of compulsory school premises ([Reglugerð um gerð og búnað grunnskólahúsnæðis og skólalóða 657/2009](#))⁹ contains a reference to disability which asserts that compulsory schools should be accessible and have facilities for disabled people. This is considered to be a necessary minimum requirement, yet from this regulation it is not clear how accessibility is evaluated or enforced. Some research indicates that the school environment, particularly in terms of spatial arrangements, is a factor that influences participation (Egilson and Traustadóttir 2009). In terms of 'specialised services,' Article 40 of the Compulsory School Act stipulates that the allocations of space and facilities is governed and organised by the local municipalities. The individual schools are required to 'screen and survey' all pupils at the beginning of their enrolment to ensure that "they get adequate instruction and study support."

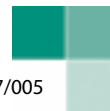
⁵ http://www.reykjavik.is/Portaldata/1/Resources/leikskolasvid/Serkennslustefna_-_lokaeintak.pdf

⁶ http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-PDF-Althjodlegt/Compulsory_school_Act.pdf

⁷ <http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/log-og-reglugerdir/>

⁸ <http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/acts-of-law/nr/17>

⁹ <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/657-2009>



Article 32 of the [Upper Secondary School Act](#)¹⁰ states: “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.” Article 34 refers broadly to “Pupils with special needs.” This includes students with disabilities according to the [Act on the Affairs of People with Disabilities, No. 59/1992](#)¹¹ as well as students with “emotional or social difficulties”—all of whom shall be provided with specialised instruction, support, assistance and facilities as deemed necessary by the Ministry. Inclusive education is noted as the goal: “Pupils with special needs shall study side by side with other pupils whenever possible,” in addition to the provision of special programmes of study and instructional material. This law also refers to some ongoing work in the Ministry that will be implemented at a future date: “The Minister of Education, Science and Culture may issue a Regulation further stipulating rights, instruction and studies in upper secondary schools. A Regulation shall also stipulate the rights of hearing impaired or deaf pupils to instruction in the Icelandic sign language.” Nothing in the Upper Secondary School Act refers to the physical infrastructure of buildings or addresses issues of access.

According to another regulation— Regulation concerning the education of disabled students in Upper-Secondary School ([Reglugerð um kennslu fatlaðra nemenda í framhaldsskólum](#)¹²)—the state requests each school principal to apply for additional funding for each disabled student in attendance. Students identified as having special educational needs are divided into four groups concerning their educational support (Sérkennsla 1–4) and three groups concerning support for activities for daily living (Athafnir daglegs lífs) ([Flokkun sérparfa í kennslu og ADL](#)¹³). For example, students who are deemed to need the least support are taught in groups of 8–12 for academic studies or groups of 4–6 for workgroups, each of whom are individually allocated 4–10 hours per week for daily support needs. Students who are deemed to need the most support (Sérkennsla 4/ADL 3), are to receive 1 to 1 educational support and 20–26 hours per week for daily support needs. The language implies that these disabled students are taught in segregated groups.

There is no state level legal framework that ensures the rights and needs of disabled students are met with regard to higher education. However, some institutions do have internally developed policies and regulations. For example, the University of Iceland—Iceland’s largest and oldest higher education institution—implemented a specific set of regulations concerning disabled students and those with special needs: [Reglur um sértæk úrræði í námi við Háskóla Íslands](#)¹⁴ in 2002. The University also has a committee ([Ráð um málefni fatlaðra](#)¹⁵) that meets to address issues concerning access, resources, technical matters and any issues that arise concerning the needs of disabled students.

¹⁰ http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-PDF-Althjodlegt/Upper_secondary_school_Act.pdf

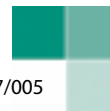
¹¹ <http://eng.felagsmalaraduneyti.is/legislation/nr/3704>

¹² <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/372-1998>

¹³ http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-pdf-eydublod/Serkennsl_frhsk_flokkun_kennslu.pdf

¹⁴ http://www.hi.is/files/skjol/stjornsysla/sertaek_urraedi.pdf

¹⁵ http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/rad_um_malefni_fatladra



A booklet has also been produced—[Háskóli fyrir alla: Aðgengi og úrræði við Háskóla Íslands](#)¹⁶ (University for all: Accessibility and Resources at the University of Iceland)—intended to inform enrolling students about the services and resources offered at the university and what they might expect during the course of their studies. The booklet contains different subheadings concerning a number of general impairments typologies and their associated resources as well as information regarding a number of relevant committees and counselling services that are available. Iceland is also a member of HEAG (Higher Education Accessibility Guide), a 2009 European initiative to provide practical information to students with disabilities who wish to study abroad and which includes some information on upper secondary education in [Iceland](#)¹⁷.

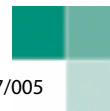
There is a regulation that concerns vocational training ([Reglugerð um vinnustaðanám og starfsþjálfun á vinnustað](#)¹⁸). However, this regulation mentions nothing concerning disability, but it does include a remark that the training contract may be severed if the student is unable to pursue his or her training due to health-related reasons. A very recent law from March 2010 concerning additional education ([Lög um framhaldsfræðslu](#)¹⁹) may also be relevant. One educational and training option for disabled people is to take short-term courses in subjects such as computer skills and accounting, often through disabled people's organisations. However, such training was not generally recognised as accredited education. With this new law, such training, as well as work within institutions, can now be valued as upper-secondary school credits.

¹⁶ <http://www2.hi.is/Apps/WebObjects/HI.woa/swdocument/1007175/H%C3%A1sk%C3%B3li+fyrir+alla.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/heag/country-pages/iceland>

¹⁸ <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/697-2009>

¹⁹ <http://www.althingi.is/altext/138/s/0850.html>



Section 3: Evidence of outcomes and progress towards inclusion

The best evidence to suggest that major investments are still being made in Iceland with regard to segregated learning institutions are the existence of three such institutions: [Öskjuhlíðarskóli](#)²⁰, [Safamýrarskóli](#)²¹, and [Brúarskóli](#)²². These schools are compulsory level schools from grades 1 through to 10. While the schools are located in Reykjavík, they serve disabled children from across Iceland. Öskjuhlíðarskóli focuses on children with intellectual disabilities; Safamýrarskóli on children with significant intellectual and physical disabilities; and Brúarskóli, focuses on students with behavioural, psychological, and emotional problems and those considered to engage in ‘high risk behaviour.’ According to Statistics Iceland ([Hagstofa Íslands](#)²³), as of 2009 there were 82 students enrolled in Öskjuhlíðarskóli; 12 students in Safamýrarskóli; and 18 in Brúarskóli. According to figures from the City of Reykjavík ([Endurskoðun fjárhagsáætlunar 2009](#)²⁴), these three schools accounted for 860,549 million ISK in budgetary costs. In comparison, 36 general compulsory schools cost the city nearly 14 billion ISK in the same year. As of 2002, there were 7 segregated learning institutions in Iceland and this number has dropped to 3 as of 2010. This is suggestive of the overall trend of the movement away from segregated to inclusive education. However, it is important to note that many of these general compulsory schools have segregated units or even entire departments for disabled students.

There are no segregated learning institutions within the upper-secondary school system. Disabled students take classes either on their own or with the assistance of a support worker within mainstream schools. However, depending upon the individual’s learning needs, the students may follow the general curriculum or a special segregated study programme (starfsbraut) but this can also be taught within the general student population, within a mix of mainstream and special groups, or within a special unit within a mainstream school. However, researchers have noted that these programmes most often are segregated in practice. While instruction may take place within the physical buildings of mainstream schools, students within these programmes rarely participate in mainstream classes (Björnsdóttir 2002; Bjarnason 2003, 2004). Students in the special study programme are those who are legally defined as disabled under the [1992 Act](#)²⁵, who previously have been in a segregated compulsory school or special department, or have been evaluated according to the criteria of the 1995 [Law on Compulsory Education](#)²⁶. Some of these units are impairment specific, such as units for students with autism, intellectual disabilities, and behavioural issues. In terms of the programmes specifically, the first two years cover basic education skills, while the latter two focus on vocational training.

²⁰ <http://www.oskjuhlidarskoli.is/>

²¹ <http://www.safamyrarskoli.is/>

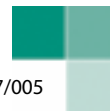
²² <http://www.bruarskoli.is/>

²³ <http://www.hagstofan.is/>

²⁴ <http://www.visir.is/assets/pdf/XZ623327.PDF>

²⁵ http://eng.felagsmalaraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/Act_on_the_Affairs_of_People_with_Disabilities_no_59_1992_with_subsequent_amendments.pdf

²⁶ <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/132a/1995066.html>



Statistics Iceland (Hagstofa Íslands) has information regarding the graduation rates of students from the special programmes (starfsbraut) in upper-secondary school. The most recent figures from 2008 indicate that 39 students graduated from these special programmes²⁷. However, it must be kept in mind that this number would not include students with disabilities who are following in the mainstream curriculum. The students within the starfsbraut programme also include students with social, emotional, and behavioural issues and who would not necessarily be considered as disabled.

In terms of adult or continuing education, the institution [Fjölmennt](http://www.fjolmennt.is/)²⁸—primarily intended for those over the age of 20 with intellectual disabilities or mental health issues who have difficulties entering other educational or training programmes—operates in 3 urban centres in Iceland. As of 2008, approximately 600 students were enrolled with Fjölmennt.

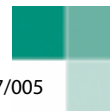
Researchers in the area of disability and education have long pointed out a number of ongoing issues concerning participation. All students who have successfully completed compulsory school have the legal right to enter upper-secondary school. But research has shown that different schools have different admission rules, some of which work to the disadvantage of disabled students, particularly students with intellectual disabilities (Björnsdóttir 2002; Marinósson 2007). In general, the participation of disabled students in terms of their experiences of education specifically, or inclusion in broader terms, is uneven and variable depending upon a number of contextual factors such as the specific school environment, the individual student's impairment type and degree, their school and home support network, and the attitudes of staff, administrators and fellow students, among others. This holds for compulsory school (see e.g. Egilson 2005; Pálsdóttir 2004; Marinósson 2002, 2007), as it does for upper-secondary school (see e.g. Björnsdóttir 2002; Atladóttir Þormar 2005). Some research conducted at the higher education level suggests an accommodating social and educational environment, but issues arise such as accessibility issues for physically disabled students (Bergsveinsdóttir 2007).

In terms of quantifiable participation rates, very little is known. Statistics Iceland collects some information on the special programmes, but these numbers would include some students who are not 'disabled' as generally understood. There is no indication that there are any centralised numbers concerning disabled students who are pursuing the mainstream curriculum, thus making it very difficult to produce information that compares the participation rate of disabled and non-disabled students at any level of education or training. Some data has been produced by the Ministry of Education on behalf of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education for the years 2006–2007²⁹.

²⁷ Internal communiqué. Ásta M. Urbanic, Hagstofa Íslands. 03.05.2010. *Brautskráðir nemendur af starfsbraut framhaldsskóla 2003-2008*.

²⁸ <http://www.fjolmennt.is/>

²⁹ <http://www.european-agency.org/country-information/iceland/iceland-files/ICELAND-SNE.pdf>



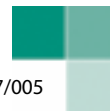
This report uses the concept of SEN (special education needs) and, as the report notes, SEN is not a legal definition per se and it is most likely the case that many students who receive some form of assistance due to behavioural or emotional issues, ADD or ADHD, dyslexia and so forth would not be classified as disabled under Icelandic law. Even using the concept of SEN, it is obvious (judging from this report) that statistical data is incomplete and sorely lacking. An earlier report from the City of Reykjavík ([Framtíð fyrir alla - Ungt fólk og brottfall í framhaldsskólum](#)³⁰ 2004) on drop-out rates in upper-secondary school indicates that learning difficulties rather than disabilities are the most common reasons for dropping-out. There are comparatively few students with multiple disabilities in the student body of upper-secondary school, approximately 3–4% in 2004, but little is known about their drop-out rates.

Given the lack of statistical data on these matters, it remains very difficult to make any comprehensive statements about participation rates, either at a specific level of education or training or regionally/nationally. The Ministry of Education is aware to an extent of this lack of information, as a member of our team is currently involved in producing data on the drop-out rates of deaf and hearing impaired students.

The same lack of information holds regarding educational outcomes and qualifications for young disabled people compared with non-disabled people. Simply, very little is known in a comprehensive and comparative framework aside from specific case studies of groups of students with specific impairments, or the data available from Statistics Iceland, the Ministry, the municipalities and individual schools which either focus on budgetary matters or on broad understandings of ‘special education needs.’ For example, a recent study on the social and educational experiences of young blind and visually impaired people in Iceland (Einarsdóttir 2009:118) noted a long list of missing data, including the drop-out rates of blind and visually impaired people from upper-secondary school. Other research (see e.g. Ragnarsdóttir 2005; Sigtryggisdóttir 2009) that focused on the transition of young disabled people from upper-secondary school to the labour market or further education notes barriers as well as reduced employment opportunities.

An official from the Ministry of Education contacted a member of our team and requested certain information be included in this report. This official said that, contrary to much of the work done in this field, she estimates that 90% of disabled students go on to upper-secondary school, but has no information as to why the remaining 10% do not. This official also requested that we mention that there were almost no drop-outs from the special study programme (starfsbraut) at the upper-secondary school level. However, those who are familiar with these programmes point out that this is not surprising in that they are individualised programmes which are linked to vocational outcomes and not evaluated at the same academic standards as the mainstream curriculum.

³⁰ <http://gamli.reykjavik.is/upload/files/Framt%C3%AD%C3%B0%20fyrir%20alla%20-%20Ungt%20f%C3%B3lk%20og%20brottfall%20%C3%BAr%20framhaldssk%C3%B3lum.pdf>

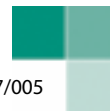


The Ministry admits that they do not have any statistics regarding the educational outcomes of disabled students in mainstream programmes because they are not differentiated from the general student populace. While this may be interpreted positively, in that distinctions are not made in mainstream schools between disabled and non-disabled students—echoing the goals of inclusion—this raises interesting challenges for educational researchers. If these distinctions are not made, it is difficult to evaluate how disabled students are indeed faring within inclusive settings.

With regard to how many young disabled people, from which groups of people, are participating in different types of learning, again very little is currently known. The data that exists, as discussed above, focuses on special needs or else the number of students in special schools or special programmes. Once students reach upper-secondary school, this information is even more difficult to obtain, as there are no segregated upper-secondary schools and not all disabled students would pursue the specialised programmes or curriculum. No publically available information exists that we are aware of which links students with specific impairments to different types of learning and training.

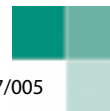
Of what is known, according to Statistics Iceland, in 2009 there were 42,929 students in Iceland in compulsory school, of which 112 students were educated within special schools and an unknown number of disabled students within mainstream schools, or specialised units within mainstream school. At the level of upper-secondary school, in 2009 there were 29,698 students in Iceland, of which 286 were pursuing a special needs programme. The number of disabled people in Iceland who are pursuing higher education has been increasing in recent years (Traustadóttir 2006). The University of Iceland keeps some information regarding its disabled students, which our team requested. According to these figures from the years 2008–2009, there were 557 students who required some form of assistance due to disability, illness, condition, or some kind of learning impairment. In the most recent semester (fall 2009–spring 2010), there were 650 students needing this assistance. It is important to note that there are quite noticeable differences in the kind of support offered. This support ranges from basic additional test time or a quiet environment, to more intensive practical classroom assistance. The majority of students who require some form of special assistance—approximately 50%—are students with dyslexia. In contrast, there were 6 students who used wheelchairs and a total of 52 who had some kind of mobility issues. The most detailed information we received is from the years 2008–2009: 300 students with dyslexia; 93 students with psychological/mental health issues; 62 students with chronic illnesses; 52 students with mobility restrictions; 22 students with ADHD; 15 classified as 'other'; 7 with visual impairments; and 6 with hearing impairments.

The question as to how many young disabled people are not in education, employment or training is difficult to answer at the moment. As mentioned in earlier ANED reports, it is very difficult to determine how many disabled people there are in Iceland in general.



This has been approximated by using the category of ‘disability pensioner,’ as this status serves as the passport for eligibility for a wide range of disability related entitlement and services. The State Social Insurance Administration keeps detailed information on disability pensioners, their incomes, marital status, numbers of children and other such demographic information, but to the best of our knowledge little publically available information exists on educational, employment or training status. One report we located was published by the Ministry of Education ([Menntun fyrir alla 2002](#)³¹) and which indicates that the educational level attained by disability pensioners is much lower than the general population. According to this report, the highest educational level attained for the majority of disability pensioners (56%) was only compulsory education (grunnskólapróf), whereas only 34% of the general population have not attended beyond compulsory education. Records exist on the number of pensioners who are not entitled to receive a pension due to income—who presumably are employed—but this is not linked to age. Pensioners may also work part-time or full-time but earn a low enough income to be able to receive a pension, but this is not reflected in the data, nor their status regarding education and training. It is quite evident during the compilation of this ANED report that much more research needs to be done in the area of the education and training opportunities for young disabled people.

³¹ <http://bella.mrn.stjr.is/utgafur/Dakarskyrsla.pdf>



Section 4: Types of support for students and trainees

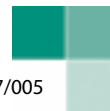
Types of support for young disabled people in education and training (summary points)

In Iceland there are two institutes that offer comprehensive teacher training in education: The University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri. According to the law on preschool, compulsory school and upper-secondary school ([Lög um menntun og ráðningu kennara og skólustjórnenda við leikskóla, grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla 87/2008](#)³²), teachers in compulsory and upper-secondary education are supposed to have completed an MA or M.Ed., though, in practice, teachers with a BA or B.Ed. are employed but at lower wages and with fewer rights and entitlements. In regard to the specific question as to the extent to which disability issues are included in the general curriculum of university training for school teachers, there are some courses or units within courses but not extensive training.

At the University of Iceland there is one 10 ECTS course called 'Inclusive pre-school' in the curriculum for pre-school teachers. Disability is mentioned within the description of other courses, like 'Development studies', but is more medically-based and focuses the 'normative' development of children. The only courses offered at the BA and B.Ed. level for training in the compulsory school system that touches on disability is a course on sign language instruction, and an optional course on children who 'deviate' from 'normal' development patterns (þroskafrávik) and one entitled 'Disability studies and inclusive schooling.' Very little is on offer at the MA or M.Ed. level that deals with disability aside from a master's programme for studies in special education (sérkennslufræði). It is a two-year theoretical and professional graduate degree. Admission requirements are a bachelor's degree in the field of education and pedagogy. Acceptance to the M.Ed. special education programme is also contingent upon two years of professional experience after completion of a bachelor's degree. Students are required to take two basic courses in inclusive schooling and at least 50 ECTS in the field of administration. At the University of Akureyri, very little appears to be offered at the BA or B.Ed. levels, but at the Masters level there is a course entitled 'Disability and Society' and another which focuses on special education.

Sections 4.1–4.3 that follow below detail the financial, practical and the accessibility features of the Icelandic education system as it applies to disabled children and youth. However, a few summary points can be made. During the information collection phase, our team noted that laws and regulations at the level of Ministry of Education pertaining to special needs are quite vague. While assertions are made that students will be supported and every effort is to be made regarding accessibility, the laws—particularly the set of School Acts—say very little about the exact support that is to be made available. Rather, at the preschool level this is to be worked out between the school administration, the teacher and parents with support from the municipalities if needed.

³² <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/136a/2008087.html>



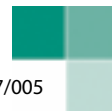
With such an individualised scenario it is difficult to detail the scale and scope of these supports in practice in any comprehensive way beyond the knowledge that can be learned from individual school websites, the knowledge of scholars in these fields, and personal experiences as parents or family members. It appears to be a somewhat daunting task for the parents of disabled children to find such information, when little centralised information appears to exist.

A second observation we make is that support for disabled children appears to be the most comprehensive at the preschool level. The general inclusive and supportive preschool environment, the close relationship of staff to the children and the individualised support for additional needs, as well as the close relationship of staff to parents appear to be considerations in the laws and regulations which govern preschool education. However, at the level of compulsory education (age 6 – 16) a shift in tone in the policy language suggests a greater reliance upon the role of experts and administrators and the lessening voice of parents. The language of segregation is also much more apparent than at the preschool level.

Third, there appears to be a measure of variation between what is on offer and accessibility issues at different compulsory and upper-secondary schools. Some older school buildings may indeed be exempt from the building codes which govern accessibility in public buildings, while other schools have developed a reputation for supporting disabled students, even specializing in supporting students with specific kinds of impairments, which appears to result in a level of unevenness throughout the school system.

Fourth, there are a number of grants and forms of support available for students with specific impairments. Some impairment specific organisations are well-established and have taken efforts to support young people in education and training. However, the question remains as to the situations faced by students with multiple-impairments, impairments that may be disabling or have disabling effects but are not severe enough to be included in an impairment specific group, or those who have an impairment for which no or limited support is available from NGOs.

Fifth, and perhaps one of the most important points, is that there appears to be a gap between the support available at the compulsory school level and the higher education level. While institutions such as the University of Iceland have explicitly taken into consideration supports for disabled students, this support is notably lacking at the non-compulsory upper-secondary school level (usually a four year education for students 16-20 years of age) that precedes university. For example, students at the compulsory school level are entitled to receive equipment for use both in the home and the school, but this does not extend beyond the age of 16—the age at which the transition from compulsory school to upper-secondary school is made. Students who need additional equipment are directed to the Regional Offices for the Affairs of Disabled People for grants for such equipment, but such grants contain numerous limitations and restrictions.



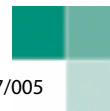
The lack of any particular legislation on support for disabled students in vocational training is also quite noticeable. In short, while there seems to be a focus on supporting disabled students at the early years and with regard to higher education, there seems to be a distinctive weakness in this support after the age of 16 and before the years when students pursue post-secondary education. This is particularly troubling, as this transition period from youth into early adulthood is a difficult time in general and is a notable weakness in the support system for disabled students in Iceland.

Lastly, for young adults over the age of 20 with intellectual disabilities or mental health issues—who do not have access to other educational opportunities—the Ministry of Education finances [Fjölmennt](#)³³, which consists of three Adult Education centres located in the capital city of Reykjavík, Akureyri in northern Iceland, and in Selfoss in the south. These centres are operated by two disabled people's organisations: [Landssamtökin Þroskahjálp](#)³⁴ and [Öryrkjabandalag Íslands](#)³⁵. As of 2008, approximately 600 students attended these three Fjölmennt centres. The centres offer a wide variety of programmes from languages, to art and music, to home economics. These are not accredited programmes. Fjölmennt also provides, for a fee, support workers who can assist their students with education and training in mainstream educational institutions.

³³ <http://www.fjolmennt.is/>

³⁴ <http://www.throskahjalp.is/>

³⁵ <http://www.obi.is/>



Section 4a: Financial support

According to the 1992 [Act on the affairs of people with disabilities](#)³⁶ (Lög um málefni fatlaðra 59/1992), the Minister of Social Affairs is ultimately responsible for policy-making and the administration of issues concerning disabled people in Iceland. According to Section XI Article 27 of this law, disabled people are entitled to: “the purchase of tools or equipment or other facilitation on account of work at home or independent activities after rehabilitation,” as well as grants “towards payment of tuition costs, which are not paid according to the provisions of other Acts.” However, the day-to-day implementation of policy and the delivery of services occurs at the regional level through the six Regional Offices for the Affairs of Disabled People located throughout Iceland, and this includes the administration and assessment of these grants under the auspices of guidelines established by the Minister of Social Affairs ([Reglugerð um styrki vegna námskostnaðar og verkfæra- og tækjakaupa fatlaðra](#)³⁷). There appears to be no funding directly available at the national governmental level for individual disabled people pertaining to education and training.

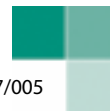
The Regional Office for the Affairs of Disabled People in the [Reykjanes](#)³⁸ area is perhaps one of the more reliable sources of information from these Regional Offices and as such our example in this regard. However, in the case of the Reykjanes Office the latest available information concerning these grants is from 2007. The individual applicant completes an application form which presents a budget as well as a plan which explains why the grant is needed and how the money will be spent. Usually this includes supporting documentation from a physician or rehabilitation therapist. In 2007, a total of 30 grants were allocated, which includes both the grants for tools and technical aids as well as educational grants. The funding allocated by these grants varies and is determined by the Regional Office on a case by case basis. As a result of our inquiries it was learned that in many cases these grants were valued at around 50,000 ISK (which amounts to about 325 Euros). According to information available from the Regional Office of Reykjavík, there were 135 applications for such grants, but it is not known how many were successful.

The next level at which financial support is offered is at the institutional level. As a reoccurring theme with other ANED reports concerning benefits and support for disabled people in Iceland, there is a high degree of variability between different institutions, municipalities and regions throughout the country. Our next example is the financial support for disabled students offered by Iceland’s oldest and largest university, the University of Iceland, but this level of support is not necessarily representative of other higher education institutions.

³⁶ http://eng.felagsmalaraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/Act_on_the_Affairs_of_People_with_Disabilities_no_59_1992_with_subsequent_amendments.pdf

³⁷ <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/550-1994>

³⁸ <http://www.smfr.is/>



One financial support for disabled students comes in the form of a tuition discount, which is discretionary on the part of each institution as opposed to state policy. As per 2010, students at the University of Iceland pay a registration fee of 45,000 ISK. This is reduced to 32,500 ISK for students who have been evaluated as fully (75%) disabled by the State Social Insurance Administration ([Tryggingastofnun](#)³⁹). Another higher education institution, the University of Akureyri, offers a 50% reduction of admission fees. Another financial support offered at the University of Iceland is the Fund [Þórsteinsjóður](#)⁴⁰, which is restricted to blind and visually impaired students, or projects that are intended to benefit blind people. This Fund was created in 2006 after a donation from the Association Friends of the Blind and is managed by the University of Iceland. This support is a maximum of 500,000 ISK (roughly 3,000 Euros) per annum to support 1-2 blind/visually impaired students to study at the University of Iceland.

There are a number of disabled people's organisations that offer some financial support for educational and training. One example is that of Blindrafélagið ([the Icelandic Organization of Blind and Partially Sighted](#)⁴¹) which offers support through the organisation's study fund ([Námssjóður Blindrafélagsins](#)⁴²). The ceiling of the awards from this fund is 50,000 ISK (325 Euros) bi-annually per individual and which is intended to be applied towards any education or training that is considered to increase one's employment potential. This award is restricted to the members of this organisation. According to information provided as the result of our inquiries, this benefits approximately 30 individuals yearly. Félag heyrnarlausra ([the Icelandic Association of the Deaf](#)⁴³) offers a number of small [grants](#)⁴⁴ for the purposes of education and study. These are divided into four categories: 1.) One grant for study abroad, valued at 75,000 ISK (about 440 Euros); 2.) Two grants valued at 35,000 ISK (roughly 200 Euros) each for those engaged in fulltime study in Iceland; 3.) Two grants valued at 25,000 ISK (roughly 150 Euros) each for those taking courses of greater than 40 hours in duration per semester; and 4.) Four grants valued at 10,000 ISK (about 60 Euros) each for those taking courses of less than 40 hours in duration per semester. There are also a number of small grants available from other disabled people's organisations, but the two detailed above appear to be the most significant. Our team was unable to locate any published evidence regarding the equity or effectiveness of this financial support.

³⁹ <http://www.tr.is/english>

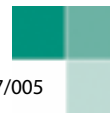
⁴⁰ <http://vefsetur.hi.is/sjodir/is/thorsteinssjodur>

⁴¹ <http://www.blind.is/en>

⁴² <http://www.blind.is/Felagid/namssjodur/>

⁴³ <http://www.deaf.is/Forsida/Umfelagid/English/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.deaf.is/Forsida/Umfelagid/Sjodir/Menntunarsjodur/>



Section 4b: Personal assistance, equipment and adaptations

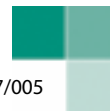
Practical assistance with learning

A key practical assistance available for young disabled people in early to later educational settings is the support worker (stuðningsfulltrúi). The support workers assist in a number of practical areas in order to make education within both mainstream and special schools possible. This includes, but is not limited to, such things as assistance within the classroom during the learning process as well as daily activities (eating, dressing etc.) and assisting with social activities with the aim of fostering inclusion. A more detailed description of their work (in Icelandic) can be found [here](#)⁴⁵.

There is an emphasis on the early 'detection' of impairments in the Icelandic education system which begins at the preschool level. By the time students are moved to the compulsory school level at the age of 6, the school administration is generally aware of the needs of many of these students. The specific level of assistance and other practical matters at the pre-school level is discussed and agreed upon between the director of the pre-school, special education teachers, support workers and parents, and as such it is difficult to specify the exact amount of assistance available as this is often tailored to meet individual students. Students within the highest needs category can receive 9 hours a day of one-to-one assistance. This can also include home visits to students who have long-term illnesses in order to prevent severing the student from the preschool system.

After consulting the laws and regulations discussed in the previous section, it is apparent that once students are moved into the compulsory school system less explicit mention is made of the role of parents in the decision-making process. There appears to be a greater emphasis upon the role of school administrators, special education teachers and therapists who decide on the level of support the individual student receives. At the compulsory school level, students again are able to receive one-to-one support within the classroom and school, one-to-one tutoring as well as instruction within specialised units within the school. The school principal, assistant principal, director of special education and/or a developmental therapist (proskapjálfi) are generally involved in the assessment of practical assistance, whereas special education teachers and therapists tend to be more involved with the parents regarding academic matters, such as individual learning plans, education materials and testing conditions. Education at both the preschool and compulsory school levels is funded by the municipalities. Individual schools are required to apply for additional funding, if needed, to cover the costs associated with supporting disabled students. Applications can also be made to an equalization fund if a particular school or municipality has to support a higher than average number of disabled students.

⁴⁵ <http://studningur.blogg.is/starfslysing/>



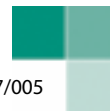
According to Article 4 of the Regulation concerning the education of disabled students in Upper-Secondary School ([Reglugerð um kennslu fatlaðra nemenda í framhaldsskólum](#)⁴⁶), the school head teacher is tasked to evaluate the needs of disabled students, in conjunction with input from the staff. Following such evaluation, support workers provide disabled students with a similar level of practical assistance as found within the compulsory school system. However, like many of the municipal and state laws and regulations governing the education rights and entitlements of disabled students, there is a good deal of vagueness as to what exactly the support entails in terms of specificity, amounts and limitations. A cursory evaluation of a sampling of the websites of Reykjavík area schools at all levels revealed a high degree of diversity in terms of the availability of information, what is available, and the extent to which the needs of disabled students appear to be a priority. None of this support is controlled by the student or parent, and the support workers are employed by the school.

At the level of higher education, the University of Iceland is perhaps the best current example of the most comprehensive system of practical assistance for disabled university students in Iceland. The counselling services in conjunction with the student decides upon the level and nature of support needed. While this support is paid for by the University, it is important to note that the University reserves the right to refuse specific supports if they are deemed to be too expensive or impractical. However, a committee at the University is currently at work revising these regulations. In terms of practical assistance, students can be provided with a wide range of support such as sign language interpreters, counselling, note-takers, long test times, in-class assistance and so forth.

In regard to technical or vocational training, to the best of our knowledge there is no specific governmental or legal policy framework that concerns the rights and needs of young disabled people pursuing technical or vocational training. Regulations and support appear to be determined on an individual institutional basis and there is often little consistency on these matters and there does not appear to be any entitlement for students to specific forms of support as found within the governmental educational system. The Regional Offices for the Affairs of Disabled People, as described in Section 4.1. of this report, offers grants for the purchase of technical aids for education, training and work, but these limited grants are not sufficient for the hiring of an assistance person that would enable some disabled young people to pursue fulltime vocational training. The key governmental legislation that concerns vocational training ([Reglugerð um vinnustaðanám og starfsþjálfun á vinnustað](#)⁴⁷) includes a remark that the training contract may be severed if the student is unable to pursue his or her training due to health-related reasons. As such, it is quite possible that some disabled students who may need a substantial level of practical assistance would not be admitted in some vocational training programmes at all.

⁴⁶ <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/372-1998>

⁴⁷ <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/697-2009>



Equipment and accessibility for learning

At the level of formal state-sponsored education, the [Preschool Act](#)⁴⁸, the [Compulsory School Act](#)⁴⁹, and the [Upper Secondary School Act](#)⁵⁰ say very little about accessibility and environmental adaptations regarding the physical school infrastructure. One possible reason for this is that according to Article 34 of the [Act on the Affairs of People with Disabilities, No. 59/1992](#)⁵¹ the municipalities are ultimately responsible for accessibility matters concerning public buildings, which would include schools. However, our team's perusal of the national level building regulations reveals a lack of specificity concerning accessibility matters, beyond general statements that accessibility should be taken into consideration. Most municipal governments have a committee that deals with accessibility issues. This committee deals with complaints, conducts research and makes recommendations that are passed on to the other municipal departments that oversee finances and manages infrastructure. A member of our team contacted a representative of one such accessibility committee who outlined a quite detailed and somewhat convoluted process. In this official's estimation, most parents of disabled students would likely seek out schools that are already accessible rather than initiate the rather complicated process of implementing new adaptations. A scan of the successful tenders accepted by the City of Reykjavík, for example, revealed that only one accessibility-related project was undertaken during the period from 2007 to 2009. This which was a project to improve the accessibility of a compulsory school's entrance for physically disabled students.

The Ministry of Social Affairs also maintains an operation fund for disability related issues (Framkvæmdasjóður fatlaðra) which, among other things, makes available 10% of its operating budget to improve the accessibility of existing public buildings.

The University of Iceland has developed a policy that specifically concerns disabled students and which addresses accessibility ([Stefna í málefnum fatlaðra](#)⁵²). Section 1 of this policy states that the university and its environment is to be rendered accessible and secure for disabled people, with due consideration to legislation that governs the preservation of historic buildings. The University bears the costs of any adaptations that are deemed necessary.

In terms of equipment, Sjúkratryggingar Islands (SÍ) (Icelandic Health Insurance) governs [Hjálpartækjamiðstöð](#)⁵³, a centre which allocates a wide range of disability related equipment based upon the assessment of individuals by specialists. This equipment is intended to reduce the disabling impact of impairments and to assist with the necessities of daily life for all disabled people.

⁴⁸ http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-pdf/Preschool_Act.pdf

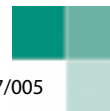
⁴⁹ http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-PDF-Althjodlegt/Compulsory_school_Act.pdf

⁵⁰ http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-PDF-Althjodlegt/Upper_secondary_school_Act.pdf

⁵¹ <http://eng.felagsmalaraduneyti.is/legislation/nr/3704>

⁵² http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/stefna_i_malefnum_fatladra

⁵³ <http://www.sjukra.is/lyf-og-hjalpartaeki/um-hjalpartaeki/>



The equipment remains the property of SÍ and the choices of particular pieces of equipment are generally limited to a pre-approved list put forth by SÍ.

According to Section 3 of the regulation that governs assistive equipment ([Reglugerð um styrki vegna hjálpartækja 1138/2008](#)⁵⁴), SÍ will purchase two identical pieces of equipment for 'children with significant impairments' (mikið fatlaðra barna) if it is deemed necessary for an individual child for use within the home and within the school. However, it is important to note that SÍ will not provide equipment for educational purposes for those 16 years and older, or for work for those 18 years and older. The cut-off age of 16 is significant in that this is the age at which students make the transition from compulsory education to upper-secondary education. In other words, SÍ will provide equipment deemed necessary for daily living, but will not do so for anything beyond basic, compulsory education. Those who are above these ages who require special equipment for educational, work or training related purposes are required to apply to a grant from their local Regional Office for the Affairs of Disabled People (as discussed in Section 4.1. of this report). These grants are limited in terms of the cost of the equipment in question and as well require the supporting documentation of a physician or therapist.

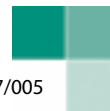
As mentioned previously, the University of Iceland is one of the better examples of supports available for disabled students pursuing higher education in Iceland. The individual and a member of the university's counselling services decides upon what equipment is needed, but this decision must be based upon supporting medical or rehabilitative documentation. An agreement is then made between the student and the university regarding this equipment and resources, which is then forwarded to the relevant academic unit. The university, however, retains the right to refuse some requests for equipment.

Examples of this range from sound amplification systems, coloured exam papers, books in alternative formats, text to Braille conversion, and so forth.

There are very limited supports for students seeking vocational training. Sheltered workshops continue to comprise a significant employment and training option for disabled people in Iceland, particularly for those with intellectual disabilities. While the goal of these programmes is to enable the transition to waged labour in the open labour market, only 4.4% of disabled people in Iceland received vocational rehabilitation and few disabled people benefit from active labour market policies⁵⁵. The grants that are available from the Regional Offices are intended to support educational costs that are not covered by other laws and ministries, but which have an emphasis upon rehabilitation. The student or trainee needs to be enrolled within a program and produce receipts in order to receive these grants.

⁵⁴ <http://www.reglugerd.is/interpro/dkm/WebGuard.nsf/key2/1138-2008>

⁵⁵ <http://www.disability-europe.net/content/pdf/15%20-%20ANED%202009%20Employment%20Report%20Final.pdf>



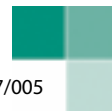
Section 5: Evidence of good practice

Our team has chosen as an example of good practice the University Diploma Programme for People with Intellectual Disabilities, offered now through the School of Education at the University of Iceland but initiated under the auspices of the then independent University of Education (which merged with the University of Iceland in 2008 and became its School of Education). While it has been possible for people with intellectual disabilities in Iceland to attend upper-secondary school for a number of years, upon graduation the only opportunities for higher education or training were to pursue some individual adult education courses or else training in sheltered workshops.

In 2005, a team of researchers and people with intellectual disabilities from Iceland, England, Ireland and Belgium met regarding a project on inclusive life history research. However, from the Irish team it was learned that a programme of university education for people with intellectual disabilities had been recently initiated in Ireland. Upon returning home, the Icelandic team, in conjunction with a parents' organisation and the Centre for Lifelong Learning in Reykjavík, approached the rector of the University of Education in Iceland with the plans for a similar project. It was well received by the Board and two years later the programme was in place. Information about this program is obtained from an unpublished report based on the action research that has been on-going from the beginning of this programme (Stefánsdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir, 2010), as well as an external review (Sigurjónsdóttir and Kristjánsdóttir 2009).

The programme was launched on October 1, 2007 within the Department of Social Education and its goal is to be inclusive. The students are not taught within a special unit but study alongside the general student population and take the same courses. The programme is organised as an action research-based development project for the duration of two years for 60 ECTS. There is a strong collaboration between instructors, support staff, and students to choose a work-related focus and coursework according to interests and educational needs. Each student is individually supported to identify goals and receives any needed assistance required to maintain their programme of study. The programme also includes a mentor system whereby each student may have individualised support from a fellow student. General students within the Department of Social Education, as well as other departments such as the teacher and early education, can choose a university elective course—a mentor course—which is tied to the diploma program where they become mentors for the disabled students. The students taking the mentor course meet once a week and participate in seminars and receive consultation from their teachers.

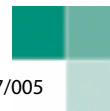
The Programme contains 2 required courses and 2 electives. The required courses are Academic Methods and Disability Studies. The former focuses on independence within the university context, awareness of academic demands, and basic library, computer and research skills. The latter focuses on different understandings of disability, the history of disability, disability rights and other such issues.



The electives consist of a wide variety of general education and practical skills, such as Icelandic language and literature, alternative communication, writing skills, art, drama, computer skills and health and well-being. Included as well is a Practicum component to the programme that is intended to, among other things, prepare students for the workforce through instruction about the demands of the labour market and worker rights, and provide intensive training in their practicum setting. The final project of the last semester is the diploma project. This project ties together the students' coursework and practical knowledge and the findings are presented in a student conference.

An internal review of the first group of students to progress through the programme—a total of 23 students—found that many of the students had anxieties about the higher educational setting as well as cooperative work with other students. Many were not used to inclusive educational settings as the result of their prior segregated experiences in special education school or specialised units within upper-secondary schools. One of the courses in the initial Programme was taken only by the students enrolled in the Diploma Programme. However, the rest of the courses they took were part of the mainstream university curriculum. Despite some isolated negative experiences that were reported, overall the students reported that they felt valued, respected and included by their fellow students at the university and had acquired new knowledge and skills. Most of the parents of the students reported that their sons and daughters appeared more self-secure and self-reliant, though some parents were somewhat sceptical about the idea of inclusive education in general (Stefánsdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir 2010).

The first cohort of the programme has graduated with only one person withdrawing from the programme. A new cohort has since begun, but the programme still retains its experimental status and is not fully integrated as a programme at the university.



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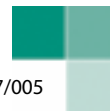
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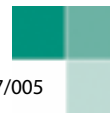
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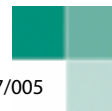
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