

Policy-making for **LIFELONG** **LEARNING**

**The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the context of
Europe**



MENNTAMÁLARÁÐUNEYTIÐ



Education and Culture
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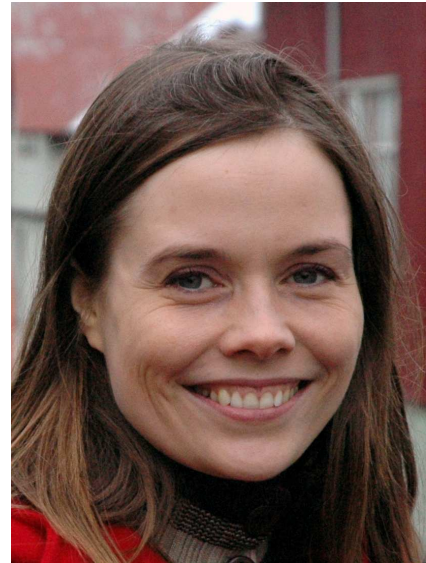
The foundation for the future

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Minister of Education

Conference guests,

The 13 year old son of my colleague said that lifelong learning did not sound good, **Lifelong Learning** sounded like the name of a horror film.

Attitudes to learning have changed and they change with age. I think young people are asked less frequently today what they intend to *be*. One of the advantages of modern times is that enrolment in school is not necessarily a decision, not in the sense that one is deciding what one will do for the rest of one's life. We know and we expect that we will review regularly what we do and how we wish to use our capabilities. Lifelong learning is part of tending to oneself, a part of being more prepared for unforeseen changes. Lifelong learning is in fact a component of feeling good.



I would like to offer you a sincere welcome to this conference, which deals with educational policy currently being developed in Iceland after the passing of the new legislation covering all school levels and teacher education. The only thing lacking for the legislation to cover all aspects of education is legislation on continuing education, but that is covered by a bill currently before the Althingi.

Iceland is among the countries in Europe that has been reviewing its education system during the last years. We have set a course for lifelong learning like most European countries. The EU encouraged this review, both as a measure to ensure that developments in education would keep pace with developments in technology and in the economy, and as a measure to ensure that each individual could better enjoy his talents and would have access to lifelong learning.

The conference today is part of the EU project called “Education and Training 2010”. Icelanders have, like other EFTA states within the EEA, participated in the project since 2002. This project differs from the EU framework programmes for collaborative projects with which we are familiar in that this collaboration uses a different methodology. The methodology is known as open cooperation which is presented later by Ágúst Hjörtur Ingþórsson. The project is based on free cooperation between countries and on the assumption that educational systems vary, as do the solutions and emphases chosen by the countries. The aim is for a European education area where each retains his distinctive characteristics, but where students find it easy to have their education evaluated between countries.

In the autumn of 2007 an offer was received from the EU of a grant to prepare and hold a conference within the project, entitled “Education and Training 2010”. The bill for the review of the education system and of teacher education was then ready in draft form. It was decided to use the grant to discuss key matters related to preparation for implementing the reviewed education policy subsequent to the passing of the legislation. It was kept in mind that these key matters also related to the work at European level.

In the autumn, five working groups commenced operations. They had received the following matters to discuss: A qualifications framework for lifelong learning, dropout, the strengthening of adult education, development of teacher education and the strengthening of vocational education. In the working groups there were representatives of the Ministry of Education, stakeholders' associations and others interested in education. In the conference documents there is a draft working groups report. The report will be completed after the conclusion of the conference where the comments made at the conference today will be taken into consideration.

If one looks at the section about the group that discussed the qualifications reference framework for lifelong learning, one can see that the idea of such a framework was well-received, both in the formal school system and in the labour market. The qualifications framework is based on the learning outcomes methodology, which has already been introduced at university level. This work is not completed but Ólafur Grétar Kristjánsson and Björg Pétursdóttir provide more details later today. It is certainly worth noting that in all likelihood Iceland will be one of the first countries in Europe to introduce the qualifications framework for upper secondary school, continuing education and for nonformal learning.

The working group dealing with dropout considers it necessary to research further the causes of dropout, such that it will be possible to organise preventative measures effectively. The dropout group is very varied and the reasons for dropout are many, as will be later detailed by Sigurður Sigursveinsson. It is pointed out that in many countries the formation of a support system to help students at risk of dropout, has proved successful.

In the working group that dealt with continuing education it came to light that effective work was being done by those providing education, that the system is flexible and can adapt to social circumstances. It was however noted that it was important to improve services for various marginal groups such as the disabled, handicapped and immigrants. Attention also needed to be directed at those with the least education, e.g. by strengthening career and study advisory services. Effective real skills evaluation is also important for those at a disadvantage. Stefán Stefánsson will provide more detail on this later.

The teacher education working group refers to the new legislation on teacher education that was passed last year. The group considers it important that the lengthening of the education prescribed by the legislation should be used to increase vocational training for student teachers. Teacher education should be aimed at the varied roles adopted by teachers depending on school levels and subjects. The importance of retraining is also highlighted as Sigurjón Mýrdal will elaborate on later.

The group that discussed the strengthening of vocational education indicates that the opportunities offered by the new upper secondary school legislation should be used to increase variety in vocational education. The legislation offers e.g. the possibility for schools and companies to collaborate on curriculum development. Good relations with the employment sector are emphasised and it is pointed out that in many instances it is most efficient to carry out vocational training at the place of work, where the machinery and professional knowledge are in place. Þórir Ólafsson will give more detail on the group's proposals.

From what I have mentioned here it seems clear that the day's discussions will be lively and productive. All proposals presented at the conference will be used in the work currently in progress in the Ministry of Education, following the changes in legislation.

The education system is the most important thing that any country has. Foundations for the future are laid in such systems. A child who starts pre-school today will be graduating from university in the fourth decade of the 21st century. We may never forget that the education system concerns that child, that student. It is about the future and therefore important that the education system is good, progressive and democratic.

I wish to thank all those that have participated in preparing the conference and would like to underline the importance of having as broad and good cooperation as possible with parties outside the Ministry when forming educational policy.

Introduction

In the space of a few years, all Icelandic legislation on education has been reviewed. In 2006 new legislation on universities was passed and in the spring of 2008 the Althingi passed new legislation governing pre-schools, compulsory education, further education and on the education and appointment of teachers and school managers. Now there is a bill before the Althingi governing continuing education and bills are expected that will introduce amendments to the laws governing music education and agriculture. Considerable changes have taken place in the institutional structure within the school system e.g. with the merging of universities, changes in operational models and with the introduction of new institutions that deal with continuing education.

The new educational policy behind the new legislation was developed in cooperation with many local players including teachers' organisations, municipalities and parties to the employment market. The policy-making also referred to the main emphases in educational development at an international level, not least within the EU. Participation of Icelandic representatives in those various policy working groups established to implement the Treaty of Lisbon and that are open to members of the EEA, has been beneficial to this process.

Education and training are important elements in European Union policy for growth and the creation of employment. This is known as Lisbon Process. Part of the policy relates to general policy aims for education and training that are scheduled to be achieved within the European Union by the year 2010. With transparent cooperation, the development of quantifiable metrics and indicators the intention is to lay the foundations for evidence-based policy. In May 2007 the Council of Ministers agreed on 16 core indicators for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. The indicators are as follows:

Participation in pre-school education - Special needs education - Early school leavers - Literacy in reading, mathematics and science - Language skills - ICT skills - Civic skills - Learning to learn skills - Upper secondary completion rates of young people - Professional development of teachers and trainers - Higher education graduates - Cross-national mobility of students in higher education - Participation of adults in lifelong learning - Adult skills - Educational attainment of the population - Investment in education and training.

Icelandic Education policy touches most of these indicators and in many instances Iceland's position is rather good. As far as the other indicators are concerned there may be work to be done and the current debate in Iceland includes a focus on these aspects. The report presented here describes the conclusions of the working groups that have deliberated specific subjects that all relate to Icelandic educational policy seen in the light of the emphases of the European Union policy on education. Lifelong learning and the emphasis on the skills gained by students are pervasive themes.

Icelandic education policy in European context

Arnór Guðmundsson, director at Ministry of Education

A total review of the legislation governing the Icelandic education system has taken place over the last few years. In 2006 the Althingi passed framework legislation on universities where clear references were defined in the context of the development of learning at university level and of assurance of its quality. In the spring of 2008 the Althingi passed five bills that marked the future path for all school levels and for the education and appointment of teachers. These were the acts on pre-school, compulsory education, upper secondary schools and on the education and appointment of teachers and school managers along with the act on public universities. Now there is an act before the Althingi on continuing education.

Behind all of this legislation lies the policy of lifelong learning where the whole education system is seen as one whole from pre-school to university and continuing education. Emphasis is also placed on the non formal education that takes place outside the school system and on evaluating the worth of the competence that the individual has gained through life and work. Knowledge, knowhow and skills are seen not only from the point of view of the school system but also from the needs and wishes of individuals and of society. The education system's response to rapid changes in social behaviour is to offer opportunities and choice in education, in the wider sense of the word, lifelong, and thus meet changing needs at any given time.

The educational policy marked by the new legislation in many ways echoes the emphases of the EU in education and training. Here one could mention emphases on lifelong learning, key competence, learning outcomes, qualification framework, reducing dropout from learning, increasing the quality of teacher education and enhancing the relationship between education and the employment sector, including with real skills evaluation. These elements appear clearly in the legislation on school levels and on education of teachers, where it is planned that they will be further developed in curricula, in regulations and in the implementation of the legislation. Further policy development in the implementation ahead will be marked by these common emphases but at the same time take into account the circumstances in this country and current views.

If one considers the indicators that have been set for progress towards the objectives set by the EU for the year 2010 it comes to light that much could have been done better in this country. Though opinions differ as to whether these are the true indicators of results in the education system, it is unavoidable that we take seriously the indications, such as of declining reading skills and of significant dropout from education. New policy and legislation in the Icelandic education system is intended to create the prerequisites for strengthening the Icelandic education system in these and other areas. The implementation of the new education policy and legislation that is ahead will have to be subject to evaluation against such indicators of results, while each step taken in the coming months will be monitored to see where they lead. Thus the process of implementation, execution and quality assurance will have to be followed continuously.

Now when thoughts turn to deciding the emphases to set for education in Europe for the next ten years, a certain impatience is clearly manifesting itself among public and politicians, not least in the light of the economic depression. Is the education system really meeting the needs of individuals and society for education? Are the indicators set for results in education too narrow, e.g. with regards to competence in creativity, communications skills, ethical maturity and so on. It is essential to seek answers to such questions, both in Iceland and at European level and in such an endeavour, in the debate, evaluation and execution lies the burgeoning shoot of continued progress in education.

“Softness in education”

Thought on the “open method of coordination” and on soft and hard governance techniques in the domain of the European Union¹

Ágúst H. Ingbórsson, Director of the University of Iceland Research Liaison Office

Conference guests,

The initial intention was that the speaker at this point in the conference would be Gordon Clark, who has long led the work in Brussels of which our work here today is a part. This was not possible so the decision was taken that I would deliver a lecture on the methodology of cooperation in education, or more specifically on the “Open Method of Coordination”. I have long followed and participated in European cooperation, as many of you know, but certainly fewer of you know that I am also working on research that is part of my doctoral studies at the University of Iceland, which includes an examination of Iceland’s participation in European cooperation in the field of education, research and innovation.

There are four issues I would like to cover: Firstly there is the background to the open method of coordination at EU level in education; secondly a short explanation of the phenomenon “the open method coordination ” from the point of view of theory of administration; thirdly a discussion on how open method of coordination is one of the governance methodologies at EU level, classified as one of the soft governance tools employed by the EU, and finally the fourth matter is an evaluation of how much success there has been in achieving objectives in education, particularly using open method of coordination , both at EU level and in the participation of Iceland.

The background to the open method of coordination between the EU countries in the field of education is the Lisbon Objectives from 2000 with which most people will be familiar. To refresh one’s memory, at their meeting in Lisbon in 2000 the leaders of the EU states set the overall objective that Europe would become “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Council, 2000).

For many there has been an irresistible temptation to make fun of this objective and in all likelihood a more modest definition of objective would have been more appropriate where the expression “more competitive” might have been used etc. – rather than set an objective that clearly could not be achieved while the EU was growing and tackling new and more complex tasks. But despite such ostentation, and possibly because of the manner in which the matter has subsequently been handled – the setting of this objective has had a major influence in my opinion on work done at European Union level, which in turn has influenced policy-making and implementation in some fields, in individual member states. There were actually instructions on the way in which the objectives should be achieved, that the leaders had agreed on. In the long declaration one can find, among other things, directives to the Commission and the Parliament about laws and regulations related to the internal market, actions to promote development of the information society in Europe and the establishment of the European science and innovation area.

The open method of coordination as a methodology

To follow up the setting of objectives in Lisbon in the field of education, research and innovation, and in employment and social affairs, the leaders emphasised the use of the open method of coordination. In a statement from the leaders this methodology is said to comprise four main elements:

¹ The speech is published here as it was delivered at the conference, as its form indicates. Only the most necessary references were added. This is therefore not an academic treatment of the matter in hand, nor a presentation of the results of the author's research on this subject. That will come at a later date.

1. Set fixed objectives in each matter and make a time plan specifying when it is planned to achieve the objectives both in the short and in the long term;
2. Set *benchmarks and indicators* as a basis for internal comparison between European states, and not least for a comparison between EU performance and the best performance elsewhere (where comparison with Japan and the USA is normally highly significant, particularly when it comes to competitiveness);
3. Elaborate in each country and in each field, special objectives that are adopted in policy-making, that take into account regional special characteristics.
4. Perform periodic monitoring of performance, evaluation, and peer review, organised as a mutual learning process. (European Council, 2000 see paragraph 37)

If we look at this from the point of view of the theory of administration, one can identify five important elements that should be distinguished between, but that nevertheless form a whole.

Five important elements in the open method of coordination

Firstly there is **framing** which is the process of defining policy and setting objectives, putting issues on the agenda and making time schedules. One could say that this means defining a **frame** that encompasses the whole process that resulted from the leaders' declaration as a whole and also of its individual constituent parts.

Then there is **quantification** of the subject which involves setting **indicators** (i.e. the elements we will measure – e.g. dropout in the 20-24 age cohort is an important indicator in education) and **outcomes** (i.e. that which is an acceptable quantified result – and in our example above the outcome would be that 85% of the age cohort would complete upper secondary school education). This quantification is the prerequisite for the next three elements.

In the third instance the concept **result** is introduced. A regular process is set up to **report results**, “monitoring” in the words of the ministers, which is at the same time a process to **evaluate results** (which means in practice that each country reports results in differing categories which enables a whole range of internal comparisons, then the results are combined to form a total result for the EU which is then compared with e.g. results in the USA as a whole but with particular reference to certain specific categories).

In the fourth instance there is **policy learning** – which was rather difficult to translate into Icelandic – the process where all use the same indicators and compare their results. Evaluating performance encourages learning, each from the other's official policy. The basic idea is very simple. By identifying and highlighting **best practice** one is providing ideas about how to proceed and at the same time good ideas become models that act as a catalyst for change at home. I would like to make the point here, though there is insufficient time in this instance to elaborate, that here the Commission has had an important role to play and that varying approaches to this element by different directorates of the EU that deal with differing issues, has had a lot to say in how effective the implementation of the open method of coordination has been in each instance.

In the fifth instance there is **social sanctioning** – a limiting process which in the case of the open method of coordination could be called **peer pressure**. The general definition of social sanctioning is that groups have control of their members by showing social approval/disapproval which either encourages or discourages the individual regarding a specific kind of behaviour. The behaviour of nations is of course a much more complex matter as it is the combined behaviour of many different individuals, but the group of “European nations” can influence the behaviour of individual states in an indirect manner by showing - e.g. with comparison of results - approval/disapproval which lies in the figures themselves, where deviation from the benchmark implies a judgement. This supervision works such that it is always individuals that represent their countries and when they get together the social pressure is generated in the peer group. In this way the leaders of European countries compare themselves with each other, so when ministers handling particular policy areas such as ministers of education meet, then this social factor can have an influence, and not least when civil servants meet and even those whose job it is to implement official policy – such as managers in school systems.

Framing is key concept here - where the leaders set the frame and the appropriate ministers elaborate the objectives, then the civil servants elaborate the ways to meet the objectives but need to do this within the frame

that has been set and with the outcomes and indicators that have been specified. This then means (1) a process to define where people stand in relation to the frame, both as a whole (i.e. the whole Lisbon process) and in specific fields (e.g. education), (2) a process to enable people to learn from each other regarding both the elaboration of a policy and about how to implement the policy, each in his own domestic area and finally (3) social control at all levels of administration, which is achieved by comparing people's performance with the objectives and outcomes that they themselves have agreed to, and in the comparison itself there is an implied approval/disapproval depending on an individual's performance. The social pressure is thus applied both to the civil servant and to the politician – except of course Icelandic politicians who are mostly positioned outside the political component in this process.

Soft governance techniques

Now let us turn to how the open method of coordination is part of the coordination between states at the EU level – and my words on social supervision are actually a contribution to this discussion. This whole procedure as I have described it is characterised more than anything by what is called soft governance, which is the opposite of hard governance where laws and regulations are imposed by executive and judicial power – the traditional picture we have of how individual states are governed.

But why the open method of coordination rather than other more traditional and harder governance techniques to achieve the immensely ambitious aims of the EU leaders? There are generally two arguments for this, while in the case of education and possibly of other domains there is a third argument. The first arguments are clear and simple. It is manifest at the EU level that the Union as such does not control many policy areas in the sense that it cannot make laws and regulations at this level, but rather the jurisdiction is in the hands of the sovereign states. Education is clearly one such policy area where there is thus no possibility of hard imperative governance, but rather a need for parties to find other ways of handling issues.

The second argument relates to the distinction one can make between policy areas according to their nature. Soft management techniques are appropriate where there are no clear right or wrong answers to given questions or clearly correct solutions to given problems. In the same way, hard governance techniques apply where there are right and wrong answers, right and wrong solutions. This is best illustrated with examples at EU level. Take the case of food – some is healthy while other is unhealthy, then there is a host of substances that are almost or even actually life-threatening. If I ingest too much of heavy metals or of certain colouring agents then in the end I will die. To control food producers in the EEA, the EU has created a huge regulatory package where almost all known substances under the sun are specified and statutory restrictions recorded on their use for various purposes, including in the production of food products. Should parties not comply with this then they can be brought to court and eventually prevented from operating and even be imprisoned where this is justified by the nature of the infringement.

There is however no single right answer to the question of what proportion of a nation should have a university education - what then to the question about the "right" educational composition of a nation. So it would be ludicrous, even though the EU had control of the policy area, to issue such directives or regulations. That would be no more appropriate than issuing a directive that all citizens of Europe should eat one apple a day, or be fined, though it is clear to all that it is healthy to eat one apple a day. In this case it is irrelevant who has control, some policy areas are by nature soft in the sense that legislation and formal supervision of compliance are not appropriate governance techniques. So another approach to governance is needed – in the traditional sense of the concept "to govern", meaning to directly influence the behaviour of an individual, company or institution and to make a framework of what is permissible.

The third point I would like to dwell on is the concept "consultation", which is crucial in education. [translator's note: *The author here discusses the meanings of the concepts "co-ordination" and "open method of co-ordination" and the possible translation into Icelandic and how "co-ordination" can relate to the management of policy areas in the EU where there European countries differ significantly.*] The concept (consultation) also

implies what could be called “harmonisation” which is rather more than “co-ordination”. When emphasising the open method of coordination, the EU leaders were aiming for more coordination and harmonisation between EU countries in policy areas that are not controlled by the EU, but that clearly exert a great influence on Europe’s competitiveness. The prerequisite for coordination and harmonisation is consultation, which I believe is the reason for the choice of official name, in 2005 or even before, “Ópið samráð” for the concept of the open method of coordination in Icelandic in the context of Europe.

In a policy area like education and training there is no less need for domestic consultation, harmonisation and coordination than between countries, as the initiated doubtless know and as we know from personal experience. The big task ahead in the Icelandic education system is in the opinion of many to harmonise better the differing school levels, the work of differing education players and so on, such that the system works as a whole. That is an important element in implementing new or newer legislation that deals with education throughout our whole lifespan - though the final part of the legislative package is still lacking i.e. adult education. These major tasks will not be tackled without stakeholders being seriously involved. In policy areas such as education the boundaries between official policy and the implementation of the policy are not clear, as one could say that the policy does not gain full meaning until it has been elaborated and implemented.

To illustrate this one only needs to refer to part of Article 2 of The Upper Secondary School Act:

The upper secondary school prepares pupils for employment and further studies. It shall strive to strengthen its pupils’ skills in the Icelandic language, both spoken and written, develop moral values, sense of responsibility, broadmindedness, initiative, self-confidence and tolerance in its pupils, train them to apply disciplined, autonomous working methods and critical thought, teach them to appreciate cultural values and encourage them to seek further knowledge (The Upper Secondary School Act, 2008).

The role is so wide-reaching and in reality open in the official policy expressed in the Act that it is not easy to set practical operational definitions of what should and should not be done. This will only be done in the work itself.

One final point before I proceed to the conclusion. The concept “open” in “Open Method of Co-ordination” at EU level implies that no nation is obliged to participate in this process, beyond the social compulsion that may be inherent in situations where civil servants and ministers attend joint meetings and are always bottom of the class. But is this really open? We know that in matters relating to education and indeed also to science that there has been wide variation in the extent to which EU states have been active in individual sub-committees - but the question cannot be avoided as to whether EU members really have much choice as to whether they strive for the objectives that their own leaders have set.

Evaluation of overall results

Now we have come to discussion about the level of success that has been achieved. It is clear that the big objectives set in Lisbon in 2000 will not be met. The overarching objectives were very unrealistic, which was actually stated in 2004 in the famous report on the review of the Lisbon process, under the leadership of the Prime Minister of Holland (European Union, 2004). Many of the statistical indicators or limitations that were set have also proved unrealistic. In the area of research e.g. the goal was set that total funding for research and development within the EU would be 3% of GNP in the year 2010. This is a long way from being realised and the concern is rather that of not maintaining the funding share as it was at the beginning of this century.

Does this journey that started in Lisbon then lead nowhere? This is an issue on which people do not agree. In order to answer the question one has to look deeper than the naïve declarations of national leaders about their aim to be largest and best, and one may not look only at the statistical indicators – but rather also at policy development and at the process as a whole. In this case the overarching approach is no less important than specific policy areas such as education.

Following the policy definition in the year 2000, a kind of executive board was established for what was to follow – the phenomenon that was soon to be known as the Lisbon Process. Progress in many sub-areas is monitored regularly – as the main objectives were divided into smaller objectives that were quantified where

possible. Every two years the individual member countries send their progress reports and finally an overall report is presented to the leaders every two years about the progress – which varies according to the elements in question. The research with which I am familiar concludes that the progress that **has** been made, is not least attributable to this process and to the determined manner in which it is monitored and in which information on results or lack of results is disseminated by individual states and by the EU as such. One could say that the Lisbon Process as a whole is by nature an open coordination process of EU states about keeping in step in their social development during the first decade of the 21st century. The least one can say is that it is an experiment in such concerted development.

The results of the open method of coordination

We know that results have varied greatly by policy area, but if we look particularly at education and training then in my opinion it can be argued that the open coordination methodology has worked best in education of those policy areas where it has been applied at EU level. The Norwegian academic, Åse Gornitzka, has presented convincing arguments to support the contention that the policy work done by the EU in education that we call Education and Training 2010 marks a watershed in the development of European policy in education (Gornitzka, 2006). What she means is that the policy area has now gained political standing at EU level that it did not enjoy before. Here are two things that are important: In the Lisbon Declaration, education and training are boldly presented as key issues for competitiveness and thus are part of economic policy. open coordination in education has subsequently led to increased coordination and harmonisation in the field of policy making. Both have pushed this policy issue higher up the list of priorities in European politics.

My own research deals with Iceland's participation in two policy areas that Iceland has had access to and in which it has had some involvement: Education and Training 2010 on the one hand and cooperation under the aegis of the EU Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST) on the other hand. I can affirm that there is a great difference between these two policy areas – both regarding Iceland's participation and the results of the work at EU level.

In education and training, expert evaluation indicates the process as such has worked well and representatives of the states feel that it has delivered results, even despite the fact that some of the quantitative indicators that were set have not been reached. Iceland's participation in this work has had a direct influence on policy making in Iceland. For example one could mention that we elaborated our first overarching policy for lifelong learning in 2006. The fact that our participation in this work implied the "requirement" that we delivered our report to the Commission, like all the others, put pressure on presenting an overarching policy document in this policy area.

The two projects that have been completed in this country with the support of the "Education and Training 2010" initiative, have increased coordination beyond what it otherwise would have been. I consider that this coordination returned results in 2006 in that there was a rather good consensus that a holistic approach was necessary and this view found its way into the parliamentary bill on the three school levels that was presented in 2007 and passed in 2008. From this experience one can assume that it is likely that the cooperation that has now taken place could promote a common vision on how we could implement the policy that had been put forward in the new legislation and also prepare us for new tasks that face us in the light of a changed economic environment.

In the area of science and research the situation is quite different. There the results at EU level are meagre by comparison, and I am first and foremost referring to performance in quantifiable results – which is poor.

The explanation of the difference between these two policy areas is at EU level as at the level of Iceland's participation. In education the Commission has been active in facilitating cooperation between countries and has ensured that those working groups that are established meet and deliver some results. The Ministry of Education has in the same manner played an active role in this work and has managed it in an organised manner such that the participation was distributed on ministry staff and efforts made to ensure that the knowledge gained from the cooperation was in the picture during policy making.

In the area of science and research the Commission was much more reticent and the process there was operated by one of the Council of Ministers committees. For this reason it was a matter of chance how active the working groups were that were established – this was decided by the interest and energy of the leaders of the groups in question, all of them of course busy people working in administration in their own countries. Neither was there the same structure for reporting progress in the work nor for reporting results, and the comparison of results was feeble. The result was therefore unsatisfactory in the opinion of many representatives of states and currently a new approach is being discussed to restart the process – but hopefully not with the 2010 objectives in mind but with a view further into the future. Iceland’s participation was neither focussed nor harmonised in any manner, nor linked to the internal work of the Ministry of Education and Science and Technology Policy Council on policy making in this area. There was minimal return from Iceland’s very limited participation.

Using the tools

The lesson to be learned is not new – but vital nonetheless. **A good craftsman never blames his tools.** The methodology of open coordination is in fact nothing more than that – a **methodology** that can be applied, either well or badly. In policy making and in implementing improvements in education and training it has been well used in my opinion, but badly used in the area of research.

Finally this: If one combines what I have said here with what Arnór said, then the conclusion is that education policy in Iceland has developed in the context of Europe and is now in its mould. The whole conference bears witness to this as can be seen from its subtitle. For this reason the absence of a representative from the EU Commission may be excellent. There is no one here **from abroad** to force anything upon us, but rather we are jointly participating in forming and elaborating educational policy in Iceland - and we are doing it in the context of Europe.

.. in the sense that we are informed of others’ objectives, benchmarks and indicators;

.. in the sense that we ourselves choose what we wish to use from others;

.. in the sense that we are not indifferent as to how we perform in comparison with other countries. We have a healthy ambition to do well – and in the area of education and training the concept of “doing well” is always defined with reference to those who perform best.

As a member of staff of the University of Iceland Research Liaison Office, I trust that our work will not be in vain, but that it will be a contribution to doing even better in education and vocational training in Iceland.

Key competences and learning outcomes in curriculum development

Emphasis on competence rather than content

Björg Pétursdóttir specialist, Ministry of Education

New legislation governing pre-school, compulsory education and upper secondary schools was passed in the summer of 2008. Work is now in progress in writing the National Curriculum Guide for Pre-School, National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School/ General Section and National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary School/General Section. In all of them great emphasis is placed on the aspect of key competences. The curricula are scheduled for publication in 2010.

The basic idea was to develop an Icelandic version of the EU eight Key Competences. The Icelandic competences are broadly equivalent to the EU competences, but are still in the development phase. The idea is that the Icelandic key competences will be the backbone that extends through the whole school system from pre-school to upper secondary school and even to university level. They reflect emphases and objectives within general education in pre and compulsory school, academic learning, arts education, vocational education and education for the handicapped in upper secondary school education, both within the formal and non formal lifelong learning.

Eight key competences

European	Icelandic
1. <i>Communication in the mother tongue</i>	1. Expression and communication in Icelandic as native language
2. <i>Communication in foreign languages</i>	2. Expression and communication in foreign languages
3. <i>Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology</i>	3. Everyday mathematics
4. <i>Digital competence</i>	4. Nature Science and technology
5. <i>Learning to learn</i>	5. Learning to learn
6. <i>Social and civic competences</i>	6. Creative thinking and applying knowledge
7. <i>Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship</i>	7. Culture , art and creativity
8. <i>Cultural awareness and expression</i>	8. Social skills and civic awareness

The new legislation on upper secondary schools mean major changes in the Icelandic school system where it is no longer a function of the Ministry of Education to set curricula, define their content and issue descriptions of courses. Instead the upper secondary schools are to make proposals for curricula (arts education, academic, vocational, education for the handicapped) and write descriptions of courses. The Ministry of Education presents learning outcomes and templates for the construction of curricula, based on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) where each curriculum is defined according to the competence level that it provides for the student. Additionally, all schools shall specify a competence level for each course. The intention is that one of the conditions set by the Ministry for endorsement of the upper secondary schools' curricula, regardless of whether it is for arts education, academic, vocational, education for the handicapped, is that the curriculum description specifies where and how the students following the curriculum gain basic competence in the eight key competences. These conditions, template and outcomes are still under development and a conclusion is expected at the end of 2009.

Since August 2008 there has been an extensive promotion of the competence concept within the upper secondary school sector. It has been generally well-received but academic teachers find it more difficult to become accustomed to it. In addition to promoting the competence concept there has been open coordination on the development of learning outcomes and of templates for curricula that are based on competence.

The objectives of the qualifications framework are to assist schools with curriculum development and also to:

- emphasise student competence on graduation, i.e. competence oriented presentation
- to remember all the key competences we wish the student to have
- to ensure progression in learning
- to redefine the learning offer

The Ministry of Education aims to support many development projects this spring within the upper secondary school sector, all of which relate to developing emphasis on competence in school work, producing examples of competence-oriented curricula and to competence-oriented courses and experimental teaching. All projects will be implemented in summer 2009 and in the following winter 2009-1010.

Project Manager Address

Sólrun Jensdóttir project manager at the Ministry of Education

On closing the conference it is fitting to look both to the past and to the future, to say a few words about “Education and Training 2010”, about the work to the end of 2010 and the proposals from the Commission for emphases in the period 2010 to 2020.

As has been said, the project “Education and Training 2010” is based on a decision of the leaders of the EU in Lisbon in the year 2000. Then the objective was set that the Union’s economy would be the most powerful in the world in 2010, but despite good intentions and much work it was soon clear that this would not be, and the likelihood has not increased after the world’s economy fell into unexpected turmoil.

Icelanders have played an active role in “Education and Training 2010” through participating in many EU working groups and through work in this country in defining policy for lifelong learning. When decisions on our participation in this project was decided, the guiding principle was to take part in working groups that dealt with issues that were prominent in this country. This applied particularly to the total review of the education system that took place here and culminated in the passing of new legislation. Cooperation within “Education and Training 2010” has also been highly productive in preparation for the implementation of the new educational policy, as has been pointed out in this conference.

This is the third conference held in this country under the banner of “Education and Training 2010”. It is important for the EU that the project be promoted in participating countries and they have provided grants for this purpose. The conferences and their preparation result from this.

The first conference was held in 2003. The EU project was then in its early stages, but its main objectives were presented. The conference bore the title An environment that encourages learning and the presentations were about various elements of such an environment. The next conference was held in 2006 and was entitled “Education & Training 2010 – The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the context of Europe”. Much has been achieved since as the policy for lifelong learning has now been defined by legislation. Concepts such as real skills evaluation, open coordination , qualifications framework for lifelong learning, key skills and learning outcomes were probably heard at the 2006 conference but now they have gained meaning.

It is the Ministry of Education that receives a grant from the EU, but the Ministry has assigned the University of Iceland Research Liaison Office to manage the preparation and running of the tasks in cooperation with ministry staff. The conclusions of the conference will be published in a report both in Icelandic and in English. The discussions at this conference will be taken into account in the report.

The year 2010 is approaching rapidly and as the objectives set in “Education and Training 2010” at a European level have not been achieved, the Commission has presented proposals for action during the last two years of the project, until the end of 2010 and is already discussion a extension of the project to the year 2020.

Up to the end of 2010 the main emphasis will be to ensure that all participant countries have developed a policy for lifelong learning. The qualifications framework, that has been explained here today, will be in operation and teacher education will be adapted to rapid social change.

Within “Education and Training 2010” focussed efforts have been made to limit dropout, but results have not been forthcoming, so increased emphasis will be placed on that work. Other areas where the level of progress has been disappointing will receive attention, such as the relationship between students and teachers, the development of new competences to tackle innovations at the work place and it is still thought that cooperation is lacking between the employment sector and school activities.

Last spring the Commission initiated wide-reaching coordination between participating countries about the future of the project up to the year 2020. In accordance with the results the Commission presented draft proposals. Firstly, attention will be paid to establishing policy on lifelong learning. Emphasis will be placed on mobility of students and teachers between countries, to increase people's competence in tackling various jobs and promote adaptability.

Secondly, it is considered necessary to increase quality and to improve the results of the educational system, by measures such as serving better those with little education, strengthening language skills and by making education's contribution to the employment sector more targeted. There is also emphasis placed on increased equality in the school system and democracy in school activities.

There is emphasis on strengthening innovation and creative thinking and there will be teaching on entrepreneurship at all levels. The year 2009 is the European Year of Creativity and Innovation and the debate that this will generate will be used to prepare further action.

In the Commission's proposals it says that the current focus on solving today's economic problems should not be allowed to draw attention from the setting of long term objectives, and that this is the only way to ensure that Europe does not fall behind other parts of the world.

The EU objectives for the future harmonise with the policy being developed in the Icelandic educational system and given the results of the cooperation to date it seems axiomatic that it should be continued through to the year 2020.

Finally it is proper to thank all those that have participated in this conference and its preparation and who have contributed to how successful it has been.

Project implementation

This report is the product of a working procedure that employed the open coordination methodology. In the first instance this coordination was through the medium of two review meetings with about 20 participants in each meeting, specialist from various parts of the employment sector, from education and from stakeholder associations. Secondly there were five working groups who prepared proposals, each on its own domain, 7-8 in each group. Five meetings were held in each group and in addition the members of the groups worked between meetings. Thirdly a conference was held with more than 80 participants and their contribution part of the report. This work procedure was managed by the University of Iceland Research Liaison Office.

One could say that this procedure is part of altered work procedures where the emphasis is placed on coordination and overarching policy. The report is not least a reference source that should be used in the long term project of continuing to develop educational policy and giving it meaning in the implementation.

The conclusions of the working groups are discussed in the five following chapters. Each group defined the main challenges and presented proposals for ways to make improvements, in addition to discussing the policies of the EU and of the Ministry of Education in each domain. At the end of the discussion of each group the reactions of advisors are summarised along with other discussion from the conference that was held on 26 February. Finally there are appendices containing the main documents that could shed further light on the groups' work.

Working groups winter 2008-2009

From autumn 2008 until the conference in February 2009, five working groups were working here in Iceland. They have discussed qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning, dropout, the strengthening of continuing education, development of teacher education and the strengthening of vocational education.

The aim of the work of the working groups is to cast light on the current situation in Iceland comparative to the development elsewhere in Europe. Various matters of opinion have been discussed with the aim of encouraging open debate on the development of education in this country.

The groups were manned as follows:

Group A – EQF for LIFELONG LEARNING

Ólafur Grétar Kristjánsson Ministry of Education, chairman
María Kristín Gylfadóttir Research Liaison Office, University of Iceland
Frímann Ingi Helgason Technical College
Heimir Jón Guðjónsson Breiðholt College
Hildur Elín Vignir Iðunn
Ingibjörg Elsa Guðmundsdóttir Education and Training Service Centre
Sigurður Albert Ármannsson Association of Employees of Financial Institutions
Sigurður Sigursveinsson Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Group B – Dropout

Sigurður Sigursveinsson Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
Jón Karlsson Directorate of labour
Björg Birgisdóttir Icelandic Academy of the Arts
Þorbjörn Jensson Fjölsmiðjan (work training for young people)
Atli Lýðsson Efling Trade Union
Hulda Anna Arnljótsdóttir Starfsmennt
Maríanna Traustadóttir Icelandic Confederation of Labour

Group C – Strengthening of continuing education

Stefán Stefánsson Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, chairman

Stefanía Magnúsdóttir VR Trade Union

Emil Björnsson The East Iceland Knowledge Network

Bryndís Þráinsdóttir Farskólinn North East Iceland Centre for LIFELONG LEARNING

Irma Matchavariani Mímir LIFELONG LEARNING

Atli Harðarson FVA - West Iceland College

Guðrún Eyjólfsdóttir SA-Confederation of Icelandic Employers

Sigrún Jóhannesdóttir The Education and Training Service Centre

Group D – Development of Teacher Education

Sigurjón Mýrdal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, chairman

Ari Ólafsson Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences – University of Iceland

Þór Pálsson Technical College of Hafnarfjörður

Svandís Ingimundardóttir Union of Icelandic Local Governments

Júlíus Björnsson Education Evaluation Institute

Guðmundur Kristmundsson University of Iceland School of Education

Guðrún Ebba Ólafsdóttir Laugalækjarskóli School

Group E – Strengthening of vocational education

Þórir Ólafsson Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, chairman

Baldur Gíslason College of Technology

Gylfi Einarsson Iðunn

Hafdís Helgadóttir artist

Hrönn Ríkharðsdóttir Grundaskóli School

Margrét Jóhannsdóttir University of Iceland Research Liaison Office

Sigríður Anna Guðjónsdóttir Federation of Trade & Services

Þóra Sigurðardóttir College of Technology

Sigurður Guðmundsson from University of Iceland Research Liaison Office, Dóra Stefánsdóttir, Ástríður Guðlaugsdóttir and Eyrún María Rúnarsdóttir worked with the groups.

The conclusions of the conference of 26 February 2009

In processing the discussion that took place at the conference the aim was to highlight the main lines of thought and important themes in the presentations, in coffee break discussion groups and in panel session.

The panel discussions were about questions that arose in the five “coffee break” groups. The debate was lively and many matters of immediate interest were discussed. The first topic was the lengthening of teacher education to 5 years and how this extension would be implemented. It was said that work on the implementation had started at the teacher education institutions. The question of dropout was discussed and how the compulsory school level would need to be changed in order to serve the needs of all students to protect them from dropout at the upper secondary school level. Following this the discussion focussed on practical subjects in compulsory schooling and the panel agreed that this element needed to be increased. The third topic discussed by the panel was the recognition of non-formal learning. In this connection there was some discussion on the usefulness and limitations of real skills evaluation. Finally the importance of education gained at the work place was underlined and how it indicates how well educated a nation is in reality.

Particular themes came up again and again at the conference, both from speakers, in advisors' reactions, in discussion groups and in panel discussions. These themes were related to the work in all the groups and the threads were interwoven particularly in the following areas:



Skill building and education at the work place

Conference guests considered the picture given by statistical comparison with Europe regarding dropout and the proportion of people on the labour market that have little education. According to these figures it is clear that Icelanders are not a well-educated nation. It was accepted that things could be done better here but that it was dangerous to ignore the uniqueness of Icelandic society.

Though many had little formal education the nation was not badly educated. Here there is a high level of participation in employment and to date there has been no shortage of work. This meant that young people postponed their education and went to work. The question was asked: Is the level of education attained through working underestimated when the nation's level of education is evaluated? The simple answer from the conference guests was yes. The skill building that takes place in work should not be underestimated and real skills evaluation was welcomed as a way to evaluate such skills.

Qualifications framework and real skills evaluation

There is wide consensus on the value of qualifications frameworks and not least of real skills evaluation. This was discussed particularly in connection with continuing education and dropout. It is thought that with these methods it will be possible to get good information about the nation's real level of education.

Conference guests also considered the effects of qualifications frameworks on learning content. There were already indications that work on skill descriptions could cause such changes. It was also considered dangerous to see real skills evaluation as a panacea. It has to be ensured that quality indicators are clear. Concerns were voiced that these methods might not work in vocational education as testing by the employment sector e.g. through apprenticeship, worked well.

In other respects the discussions revolved around the elements that were deliberated by the five groups that are elaborated in more detail in the chapters on the groups' work.

Working Group A Report

- qualifications framework for LIFELONG LEARNING

1. Introduction

In the Ministry of Education interim report on the development of educational policy from 2006 it is proposed to examine the advantages of introducing into Iceland a system analogous with European Qualifications Framework – EQF which has been developed for the European Commission - Education and Training. EQF categorises the learning objectives of upper secondary and university education in steps (vertical categorisation) and uses horizontal categorisation for objectives in skills, knowledge and competence (horizontal categorisation). With the new laws governing upper secondary education from 2008 and with the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework – NQF in Iceland, an effort is made to develop a single integrated education system with the ability to adapt to changes in society and that emphasises that an individual's learning lasts all his life.

It is essential to gain recognition for non formal learning. In this way people who have dropped out of education find it easier to start again. There is a pressing need to increase participation in learning by removing unnecessary obstacles, by meeting the needs of differing individuals and by highlighting the knowledge people have gained in their work. An important tool in this effort is a new presentation of learning outcomes, or simply of learning. This new approach is based on the fact that it is not possible to run many non-aligned education systems in this country.

2. Position

European Union Policy

The European states agreed in 2006 to introduce a unified and varied policy on lifelong learning. Lifelong learning relates to learning at any age, from pre-school to the elderly and in a variety of contexts, including formal, non formal and informal learning. Such policy implementation is a challenge, but a milestone was reached in the process when the EQF was introduced which in turn was the impetus for comparable work in frameworks for education systems in many countries. The basis for such work is a new presentation of learning objectives in the form of learning outcomes. With the increased transparency achieved through the EQF, students and people on the labour market can more easily move between countries while the Framework also increases their access to learning throughout their lives.

The work is far from completed and flexibility is not considered sufficient in European school systems, e.g. between vocational and university level. Universities need to open their doors more effectively for students who have followed untraditional paths in their learning and need to evaluate more effectively non formal education. Learning should be attractive and accessible for all and to this end the aim should be for increased cooperation between varying institutions that provide education and training, other institutions and stakeholders. Should people wish to move between countries, whether for study or work, it should be facilitated and EU projects demonstrate how lifelong learning supports this development. Mobility between countries increases communication between individuals and groups and improves people's position on the European labour market.

The European states and the EU Commission prioritise the following educational issues:

- **LIFELONG LEARNING:** Complete the introduction of lifelong learning, with special emphasis on evaluation of non formal and informal learning.

- **Qualification Framework** To connect the national qualification frameworks (NQF) with the EQF and to support the application of learning outcomes in evaluating methodology, in maintaining quality, in evaluating completed credits and in composing curricula.
- **Mobility in Learning:** To remove obstacles and increase the possibilities for students to move between countries in their learning, at university level as at other school levels.

The following chart is from the EU Commission report *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training* from 2008.



Source: Report of the Commission of the European Communities Data: Eurostat Statistics from 2006 instead of 2007: Croatia, Iceland, Norway. Statistics from 2002 instead of 2000: Hungary

Chart 1 Proportion of European citizens in the 20-24 age group that have at least a qualification from upper secondary school in 2000 and 2007

Here it can be seen that there some way to go before Iceland reaches the objectives set for proportion that have at least a qualification from upper secondary school, with a little under 50% achieving such a qualification. Almost all other countries covered by the measurements have a higher ratio. This position certainly arouses concern but one should also point out that the statistics do not tell the full story. On the one hand there is the fact that Icelandic schools are flexible and offer their students the opportunity to return at a later date and complete their learning at an older age than the range in this survey covers. On the other hand the group is not measured that

has completed a significant part of upper secondary education without having completed a defined qualification. The NQF and real skills evaluation are some of the actions designed to improve this group's position. It is also positive that Iceland's participation in continuing education is among the highest in Europe and that Icelandic authorities have, in the opinion of the Commission made significant progress in introducing a comprehensive continuing learning policy.

Development of Ministry of Education policy

In the new legislation on upper secondary schools (no. 92/2008) that took force on 1 August 2008 provisions can be found that concern both NQF and real skills evaluation. There it states that the Ministry of Education issues a regulation on categorisation and division between levels of learning in accordance with the skills and learning objectives of the learning (Article 23) and that a student who enrolls in upper secondary school education has the right to real skills evaluation (Article 31) and that the Minister set rules on real skills in the main curriculum. This is on the one hand a decision to introduce a national qualifications framework that can be connected to the European Framework EQF. On the other hand it is established that a real skills evaluation system will be implemented that offers adults the possibility of a broad evaluation of their previous learning, formal and non formal and of their work experience that can lead to shortening their studies towards an upper secondary school qualification.

In the new legislation the role of the trade boards is changed. The schools take over from the trade boards the role of writing curricula, while the boards prepare a needs analysis for the curricula and provide comments on specific vocational training programmes. The schools are not bound to follow the needs analysis though this is advised and the expectation is that there will be cooperation between schools and the employment sector on the development of training programmes. Training boards provide their view on the effectiveness of specific ways to objectives.

Real skills evaluation and NQF

A higher level of education in Icelandic society will result in the perception of a large proportion of the nation that it is normal and a matter of course to learn throughout one's life. Access to information is increasing and at the same time the requirement that individuals have the skills to both seek and process information. It is important in these circumstances to create the incentive for all to use and have the opportunity to use the opportunities they have to learn. Today these possibilities are widely available, both within the formal school system and outside.

Formal and non formal education are and will be separate systems that gain better opportunities to communicate when the result of courses is described in learning that is possible to compare. In the same way it will be easier to navigate from one system to the other. The knowledge gain that takes place outside the formal school system receives increased weight with this change. Thus efforts are being made to create and gain consensus for the thinking or framework that can accommodate both the academic system, vocational training or tradition and also the knowledge and build-up of competence that comes through life and work.

The working group has observed that the idea of NQF has been well taken both in the formal school system and in the employment sector. It seems that the philosophy dovetails nicely with the thinking of those who care about the nation's education. One cannot however avoid the fact that the philosophy calls for a new approach. Traditional academic learning has been the norm in recognition and assessment of learning and provides for this purpose formal learning and grades. There is no unified system of registering learning at the workplace. The NQF with its learning outcome methodology and real skills evaluation are tools to use in response to the call for fairness and efficiency.

Real skills evaluation is the confirmation and assessment of an individual's true skills, irrespective of how or where the skills were acquired. There are five steps in real skills evaluation. An advisor helps the person and provides guidance with completing the assessment. Initially the aim of the evaluation, the role of the evaluators, possible results and individuals' rights are explained. The next step is to register real skills that have been acquired through work, study and leisure pursuits. The third step is analysis where an individual and a professional go over the registered details and come to a joint decision on whether the real skills warrant recognition whether and to what extent the real skills fulfil learning outcomes. In the fourth step real skills are tested or confirmed. Confirmation of real skills involves comparing real skills and the learning outcome skills. Finally the evaluation is registered in the individual's learning record.

One of the things that has inhibited real skills evaluation is that it has proved difficult to get evaluation of the skills learned in the workplace.

3. Challenges

The aim of the system changes that are now taking place include that of creating conditions for bringing formal and non formal learning together. This is possible by describing and evaluating the individual's skills and competence with reference to specified aspects and thus create a skills profile, rather than specifying how many years the person in question has attended school, as has been done to date. The challenge is to present skills descriptions that most parties can accept and these descriptions need to be made in cooperation with schools, workers and employers.

The NQF and the real skills evaluation are based on a new thinking that must be disseminated in a clear manner. It calls for a change of thinking in those involved in these matters. One of the challenges is to find a way to put pressure on the formal school system and to introduce real skills evaluation to academic learning.

Cooperation between schools and the employment sector

It is a challenge to create a basis for cooperation between schools and the employment sector on the basis of new work procedures, A number of issues have to be taken into consideration in this context. The changed role of the trade boards calls for a need to ensure that they have sufficiently strong support in their sphere to be able to fulfil their function as a party to which matters are referred for consideration. The schools, which take on the writing of curricula , are also variously suited to adopt this role. It is likely that some will need support for the task.

There are examples where curricula are produced on the basis of proposals from the employment sector that few students are interested in following. There are also examples where curricula popular with the students have not given them jobs on the labour market. One example of this is the lack of educational solutions for retail staff. It has been difficult to establish education in that field.

Testing by the industry have given good results where it is practised but the danger is that quality standards will not be maintained where such testing is not carried out. When new curricula and shorter curricula are introduced it is important that they meet the quality standards of the employment sector. A key issue is that execution and monitoring are not with the same party.

4. Ways towards improvement

1. An information campaign in cooperation with all stakeholders

The NQF has been well-received where it has been presented. Certain fundamental work has been completed and the time has come to inform more people and to establish the philosophy and the concepts. It is important that the NQF become the “property” of the whole educational community in Iceland and become an important guide for lifelong learning.

2. To ensure implementation

The implementation of real skills evaluation needs to be ensured. It has to be presented in such a manner that everyone trusts that it is coordinated and the same between parties. Clear administration and implementation that enjoys consensus of all stakeholders is important in this context. Staff of schools and lifelong learning centres need training in the new techniques and it is desirable that real skills evaluation be included in teacher training. The administration and the schools must be able to handle the system.

3. Quality control

Credibility of the real skills evaluation system must be assured. An important aspect of real skills evaluation is that attention must be paid to ensuring that demands are not diluted in the evaluation. Targeted monitoring must ensure that student skills that have been accredited are visible, assessable and/or measurable. It should be possible to refer matters of contention to a recognised arbitration process which returns a final assessment. Here it is important that processes are clear and that there is consensus on how they are channelled.

4. Cooperation between schools and the employment sector

A clear platform for cooperation must be found such that schools use the needs analysis from the employment sector when developing curricula. The responsibility for collaboration needs to lie with both parties and it is desirable that the government contribution be on condition that collaboration and cooperation have taken place and that the opinion of the employment sector has been delivered.

5. Reactions and discussions at the conference

Expert reactions

Ólafur Jónsson, Iðunn

After a review of the main features of the qualifications framework and its role in strengthening the Icelandic school system, Ólafur talked of Iðunn’s experience in working with the qualifications framework. There they have been working on putting the cooking curriculum into the framework. The group’s experience of this work has been positive and interesting. The group experienced participation in the project as rewarding and that it gave the curriculum a stronger foundation. The idea behind the cooking curriculum seems to be well-suited to the qualifications framework. Ólafur felt that this example showed the capability of the qualifications framework and said that Iðunn staff were very interested in the new way of thinking that the qualifications framework brought.

It is however important to look at the hurdles that can appear in the process of introducing the qualifications framework. The first point to be mentioned is cooperation, as without this it is unlikely to work as planned. It has to be ensured that the qualifications framework suits the whole education system and not just the formal school system. The non-formal system probably needs to be given increased weighting so that the goal of lifelong learning be achieved. The conditions that have to be fulfilled for learning to meet quality expectations need to be considered. Ólafur thought that the qualifications framework’s levels needed to be examined carefully, how

many should one have and how each one should be elaborated. One could ask if students have completed the first level at compulsory school and what an individual's position is when he has completed studies for the 4th level.

Summary of discussion at the conference

1. Useful tools

Real skills evaluation is considered important for evaluating learning that adults have done variously in the formal and non formal system so that they do not have to take the same units again and again should they commence formal learning. It is also equally important to evaluate the experience that has been gained through work. There was much discussion about the dropout group that leaves the formal school system early but then gains considerable skills and knowledge through work. In this way education accumulates that must be evaluated in order to have a clear picture of the level of education. The duration of formal education does not tell the whole story. This would improve the statistics when comparing Iceland with other countries with reference to dropout and level of education.

2. Technical skills or overall competence

One may not view real skills evaluation as a panacea. There must be a common understanding of what kind of tool it is. In real skills evaluation the skills an individual has learned from various sources is registered. Such skills are valuable but one should avoid seeing them as the same as the competence gained when an individual has completed a whole curriculum. The person with good skills in a limited area is often not competent to take decisions or evaluate more complex tasks. The example was given that an individual trained in bathing and home help does not have the background to evaluate and diagnose skin problems, wounds etc. from which the people he is serving suffer. A person with another kind of education would be needed for this purpose.

3. Tasks ahead

Skills descriptions were particularly discussed. In many areas this work has not commenced and there is some way to go before it will be possible to apply real skills evaluation and the qualifications framework. Then one needs to come to a conclusion on the "qualification" concept which is broader in meaning than the "exam certificate" used in Iceland. People also talked a lot about the status of the non formal system with respect to the qualifications framework and were afraid that it would not be possible to link the two. This was an important task and linking the formal and non formal school systems was a key task. This work could be delicate, particularly because the various areas of education were based on differing values and culture.

Working Group B Report

- dropout from education

1. Introduction

Throughout the years much statistical research has been made on dropout. It can however be complicated to compare figures for dropout as the definition varies. In research by Jón Torfi Jónasson and Kristjana Stella Blöndal the dropout group has been defined as those individuals that have not continued after compulsory education or that have dropped out of upper secondary education. Their conclusions showed that more than 40% of those born in 1975 had not completed upper secondary school education at the age of 24 (Kristjana Stella Blöndal and Jón Torfi Jónasson, 2003).

It is the general view that everyone should achieve a level of maturity and that it is important that individuals complete the education that they embark on. Iceland is one of the few countries where people do not lose the right to study after a given age and here it is not considered unusual that students take a temporary break to work for a while. Part of the dropout group is likely to complete his education later.

Though the dropout figures do not give an exact picture of the situation in this society it is clear that dropout in Iceland is much more than is acceptable and that it is not in accordance with objectives in the school system.

2. Position

European Union Policy

Dropout is a complex concept and the EU has set two new goals in dropout issues up to the year 2010. On the one hand “Early school leavers” and on the other “Youth education attainment”. Broadly the difference between these two concepts is that the former refers generally to those who have only completed compulsory education at the age of 24 while the latter concept refers to those who have completed upper secondary education at 24.

Regarding the latter goal it is the policy of the Commission of the EU (2008) to 2010 that 85% of 22 year olds shall have graduated from upper secondary school. There is some way to go before Iceland achieves the goals as under 50% of the 20-24 age cohort had completed such education in 2006. There are various explanations for this percentage. In the first instance it is likely that some students will continue their studies some time later than the age group allows for and the group is not measured that has completed a significant part of upper secondary education without having completed a defined qualification. In the third instance there could even be a formal educational qualification that does not fit into this comparison. According to The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), a student is considered not to have completed upper secondary education if he has completed a course of studies that is one year shorter in duration than a traditional curriculum for matriculation. In this way a student who has completed a regular curriculum in commercial education (2 years duration) is included in the dropout group in this context as the curriculum for matriculation is defined as having a duration of four years. In neighbouring countries however a two year curriculum is considered sufficient for the completion of upper secondary school in the context of this debate on dropout.

In 2008(b) Iceland Statistics published its research on the educational status of those born in 1982, 24 years later, i.e. in 2006. The results were as follows:

In Iceland there were 4,352 births in 1982. The education and completion of education of these individuals is examined in the student and examination registers of Iceland Statistics to the year 2006. In that year the

individuals reached the age of 24. The results show that 62.1% of the year group had completed some kind of education in Iceland in 2006. Most had graduated and about 60% of the completions from upper secondary school were from academic curricula. Those who are considered to have an upper secondary school education, i.e. those who can proceed to the next school level above, were 53% of the year group. More females completed than males. Thus 65,8% of women have completed upper secondary school against 51,4% men. More inhabitants of the capital city area completed education than those from other parts of the country. A total of 62,4% of those living in Reykjavík in 1997 completed upper secondary school against 48,3% of those living in South West Iceland and in the West Fjords. In this age cohort 1,427 have continued their education after completion of compulsory education without having completed in 2006. Of this group there is a little under one quarter that is still studying in Autumn 2006 (334 students). In the cohort there are 224 individuals that did not continue education in Iceland on the completion of compulsory education, which is 5,1% of the cohort.

The former goal of the EU Commission concerning dropout is that the ratio of young people in the 18-24 cohort that have neither completed a qualification from upper secondary school or that are not in fulltime education or training will not be higher than 10% in 2010. The following chart shows this ratio for the years 2000 and 2007 in the European Economic Area.



Source: EU Commission report: *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training*. Data: Eurostat

Chart 2. Dropout from education 2000 and 2007 in the European Economic Area

According to the chart Iceland, at 30%, is among the countries that have the highest dropout rate. It is again right to keep in mind the flexible nature of the Icelandic educational system.

As said above there are various ways of measuring dropout. In *Education at a Glance - 2008* it is reported that in the last eleven years, the proportion of students graduating from upper secondary programmes, i.e. the ratio of upper secondary graduates to the population at the typical age of graduation was 90% in Iceland which was in eight position of 28 countries, one seat below Norway which had a higher ratio. Iceland had a higher ration than both Denmark and Sweden and the OECD average was 83%. The year before, Iceland's ratio had been 80% and Iceland in 18th position. It is not established whether this indicates that dropout according to the criteria above is on the wane but 353 more students seem to have graduated in 2006 compared to 2005.

Development of Ministry of Education policy

It is only in the context of Europe that dropout is a concern. For a long time it has been clear that in this country too many drop out of upper secondary education without recognised graduation. The first general legislation on upper secondary schools (no. 57/1988) implied among other things the adoption of the policy that upper secondary colleges should be for everyone. This resulted in an increase in attendance. According to figures from Iceland Statistics (2008c) this was 89% in 1999 (i.e. the ratio in the age cohort in question in upper secondary schools on 15 October of each year) and increased steadily to 94% in 2005 but was 93% in 2006 and 2007. The indication is that in the first months of upper secondary school 1-2% drop out as registration figures have shown that 94-95% of each year cohort commence studies in an upper secondary school.

The review of legislation in 1966 (The Upper Secondary School Act no. 80/1996) meant among other things that clear requirements were made for entry into specific curricula in the upper secondary schools, in addition to which specific upper secondary schools were given the task of developing 1 -2 year general curricula for those who did not fulfil entry requirements to certain curricula in upper secondary schools. In parallel, result management agreements were introduced in specific upper secondary schools where financial settlements with the schools were based on how successful they were in bringing pupils to the end of term examinations. The purpose was precisely to endeavour to lessen dropout in the school system.

During the last three years, legislation on schools in the country has been reviewed. A new Act governing universities was passed in 2006, governing pre-school, compulsory education and upper secondary schools in 2008 and on teacher education in 2008. The Althingi (parliament) is currently processing a government bill on continuing education. The main attribute of the new legislation governing upper secondary schools is the major increase in devolved school management in matters concerning curriculum development and the opening of the possibility of integrating practical and academic education towards graduation more than was previously possible. One aspect that distinguishes the education system here from those of neighbouring countries is that fewer here are in vocational education, and also that many complete it after their teenage years. In the both the legislation governing compulsory and upper secondary school education the student's right to curriculum and employment advice from competent specialists is defined as it is clear that with increased choice available to the students and flexibility in school organisation the need for advice increases.

The Althingi passed a bill in March 2007 on strengthening curriculum and career advisory services where the Ministry of Education was empowered to appoint a committee that should among other things examine the validity and value of increasing curriculum and career advisory services in compulsory and upper secondary schools as a measure against dropout in upper secondary schools. The committee was appointed and its report presented to the Althingi in the Autumn parliament 2008. Among the committee's proposals was one that allowed for a further examination of the status of curriculum and career advisors in compulsory and upper secondary schools as a precursor to restructuring with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of curriculum and

career advisors. Then it was proposed that the Ministry of Education should prepare a clear policy regarding objectives and execution of curriculum and career advisory services in compulsory and upper secondary schools.

Dropout

There are many reasons for dropout. Some feel that dropout is a process rather than an event and that the decision to drop out of school is seldom a snap decision. Students seem to go through a specific process to in the end leads to them to dropping out. Specialists in the working group maintain that it is not possible to predict as early as in compulsory education whether an individual will later drop out. In order to prevent dropout there are targeted preventative actions that are lacking along with varied and comprehensive measures. Various parties are developing measures and methods within the education system and some are returning good results. Curriculum and career advisory services are important in this context as is other specialist service. This aspects could be better supported and employed more effectively to find and help those who have problems within the education system. In this context one could also mention the work of Hugarheill (a health and mind course) which certainly returns results, but only some pupils in compulsory education receive this service.

It is proper to emphasise that dropout is not an isolated problem of school authorities but also a social and health problem, so it is necessary that many parties work together and seek ways to limit dropout. These parties are e.g. the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs along with municipal administrative institutions. It is clear that one student dropping out can be expensive for that individual and for society.

Recognition of learning is very important for students. One of the attributes of Icelandic society is that a significant part of the employment sector does not demand school learning. One example of this is the retail trade. Various curricula have been tried, such as clerical studies and fisheries studies but they have not been recognised by the employment sector and have thus withered. It would be positive to further strengthen cooperation with representatives of the employment sector through developing shorter curricula and establishing a larger number of recognised learning possibilities.

Support, interest and encouragement from parents and other family of children and young people are key factors in their learning. Parents are not equally suited or prepared to fulfil this role. There could be various reasons for this e.g. illness or irregular lifestyle. There is reason to mention particularly parents of foreign origin who often find it difficult to support their children because of language difficulties and because of a heavy work load. In some cases support and help fro parents can make all the difference while in other cases help with school work for the child has to be found outside the home. It is also proper to indicate problems resulting from unemployment, which is now increasing. It can be assumed that increased unemployment creates pressure on many families and worries and stress diminish those parents' capacity to support their children in their learning.

Gathering information

The working group agreed that further research on dropout in Iceland was necessary. The reasons for dropout must be examined thoroughly for it to be possible to prepare preventative measures in a targeted manner. Aspects that it is worth examining more closely in the opinion of the working group are as follows:

- Composition of the dropout group
- Number of dropouts by reason i.e. difficulties in school, personal reasons, at risk groups, students in support teaching or those that just decide to drop out on their own initiative.
- How much dropout can be traced to handicap (e.g. depression) and to inappropriate curricula, social isolation, bullying and exclusion.

- The costs to the individual and to society and the benefits of decreased dropout. In such a study one must differentiate between dropout that can be attributed to an informed decision by the student and to that where he has found himself in circumstances that he cannot handle and that he is not happy with.
- The social circumstances of those who drop out.

3. Challenges

The dropout group

The dropout group is a homogeneous group so when working with individuals who are at risk of dropping out of school one has to use a variety of measures that require tailor made solutions. The working group decided to try to view the dropout group using the following division:

1. Students who have problems in the school
2. Students who want to be in school but who cannot for personal reasons (e.g. need to work)
3. Students in an at risk group (indifferent, low grades, poor attendance)
4. Students who need special assistance, special teaching.
5. Students who just decide to drop out on their own initiative(e.g. because of work)

Students who have problems in the school

This includes students who find it difficult to meet the requirements of traditional academic learning. There are also students of foreign origin in the group.

The challenge lies in finding these students early in their school careers and providing them with targeted and systematic support. Teaching content and methods need to suit differing students while one should also offer curricula and learning opportunities appropriate for the group. Support for parents and guardians is very important in this instance.

2. Students who want to be in school but who cannot for personal reasons (e.g. need to work)

In this group are students who do not have the opportunity to learn what they wish to learn e.g. because of financial constraints, family circumstances or sometimes the curricula they want is not on offer in their home area.

The challenge here is to have on offer more opportunities such as learning at the workplace and to offer personal guidance and financial help. In some cases it is necessary to seek out those that do not have the initiative to ask for assistance.

Students in an at risk group (indifferent, low grades, poor attendance)

This is normally the largest group and one probably needs to apply more than one method to get results with this group. The dropout group includes students who cannot pursue their studies because of various health related reasons, those who have suffered bullying or exclusion.

The challenge lies in finding these students early in their school careers, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and creating for them an appropriate solution. These could involve support from parents and guardians, appropriate curricula, better information on careers, learning at the workplace and a system of motivation.

4) Students who need special assistance, support teaching

In this group there are students with special learning difficulties.

This group is probably quite well-served but it is important to find the group at an early stage, work with students and parents from the time they start school such that most can keep pace with their classmates in a normal school. These students need tasks appropriate to their ability. More learning opportunities that carry credits need to be developed and shorter curricula comprised of units, that can benefit these students as the first stages of a longer period of learning.

5) Students who just decide to drop out on their own initiative (e.g. because of work)

Here there are probably two kinds of circumstances that result in a student dropping out of school. Though there is no available study on this it is likely that part of the group has chosen a curriculum that they subsequently discover is inappropriate for them. The other group has quite a special position as there are students in this group that are not necessarily dissatisfied with the school or curriculum but are dropping out because another opportunity has arisen. The flexibility of the Icelandic education system is part of the explanation as this group is likely to aim to continue learning later. The danger is that the decision to drop out is not always taken after careful consideration. Though it may sometimes be positive that students who have not found a path for themselves in school, take a break from learning, it often proves more difficult for these students to return to learning.

A key issue here is that the best possible information about curricula, learning opportunities, career, skills and requirements are available to students. Varied curricula should be on offer in students' home areas.

School working methods

At the compulsory education level students need to learn about themselves, to know their own strengths and what and how it suits them to learn. The influence of teachers and the learning environment is very important at this time. Class size and heterogeneous pupil composition make great demands on teachers. It is well known that it is often a relatively small sector of a class that demands most attention from the teacher. There is a danger that under these circumstances some of the pupils will receive little attention and among those could be pupils who are likely to apply themselves badly to their schoolwork and are at risk of becoming dropouts. Increased demands on schools are that children do not fall by the wayside and be left to fend for themselves. To this end, working methods need to be reviewed and solutions need to be found for this group. The school needs to be able to apply non-traditional methods and environments to reach those who do not fit in with the group and they need staff that are more capable of reaching such pupils than traditional teachers. It should be investigated whether it is possible to increasingly use the method of building a team of family and therapists to find solutions for the most difficult cases.

4. Ways towards improvement

Many ways have been tried to prevent dropout, some proving better than others. In very many countries various kinds of support groups have been formed to help students complete their studies. Despite varying methods to prevent dropout there does seem to be a common underlying pattern in most of them. Firstly to identify students at risk of dropping out before it happens. Secondly to enlist the participation of parents, teachers, school authorities and educational institutions in even further cooperation. Where parents participate in school activities it is more likely that they will give their children more support and show more interest in their learning. Research conclusions have shown that parental support with learning and parental expectations of their children's learning are those factors that weigh heavily for students at risk of dropout. In the third case to establish powerful support within the schools that includes support teaching, curriculum advice, group and individual advice, support system and more measures that directly help students to feel better and to raise their self esteem.

For it to be possible to support individuals at risk of dropout it is crucial to identify them before they drop out, provide them with support and help them develop their own vision for the future. Here a number of points that the working group emphasised as priorities for urgent implementation will be listed.

1) Regular screening from the first days of school

The problem needs to be diagnosed at an earlier stage, with screening, where the emphasis is placed on screening at 2 -3 year intervals. A very important component is to identify student needs and not least skills and strengths to build on. Appropriate support must be provided. This is where the curriculum and career advisors play a major role along with other specialists that are consulted. Schools are challenged to take the initiative in this area.

2) Support for the family

Family and guardians are not equally suited or prepared to fulfil the role of supporting their children in their learning. It is proposed that special work procedures, work methods and courses should be initiated to help and teach parents how to participate more actively working with and helping their children. In those cases where children do not have access to help at home, special attention should be paid to getting help from other sources. Here the school should play a coordinator role and could seek help and solutions from social services and from other sources.

3) Short curricula

Student failure to keep on track in their education must be prevented. Teaching material and teaching methods should aim at a variety of students and specialised and appropriate learning solutions need to be prepared. Those not suited to long formal education should be given the opportunity to achieve in shorter recognised education that can both be used at work and as the first stages in longer education. It should be ensured that varied learning opportunities are on offer in students' home regions.

4) Increased vocational education

It is important to inform students about careers and about the various skills needed and demands made in varying jobs. A support system should be set up where personal advice is provided, group advice, financial assistance and guidance on how to apply for financial assistance. Curriculum and career advisory services in the employment sector is an interesting initiative and there is every reason to support and further develop this work. In this work, emphasis has been placed on the necessity to seek out those that do not have the initiative to ask for assistance.

5) Strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation between the employment sector and education

The working group proposes that the various levels of education place more emphasis on cooperation in bridging the gap between educational institutions, educational levels and companies. In this manner students will have more opportunities to visit schools and workplaces or even attend sessions or try working at those workplaces the student would like to get to know better. At the same time it is important to further facilitate student mobility between educational institutions throughout his learning career. The opportunities for continuing education through learning at the work place or in schools that offer a different approach are too limited. Work should be done in cooperation with the labour market to increase the offer and to investigate whether labour market training funds could be better leveraged.

5. Reactions and discussions at the conference

Expert reactions

Ingibjörg Elsa Guðmundsdóttir Education and Training Service Centre

To start with Ingibjörg talked about the “horror story” told by the Icelandic statistics on dropout. There is an increase in the number who start school but do not graduate so the conclusion must be that school is not for

everyone. If one looks closer one can see that the dropout is from school but not necessarily from learning as employment figures are higher than elsewhere and there is much learning done at the work place. It is important to look at strengths and use them. Icelanders also perform well when it comes to participating in lifelong learning of various shapes and forms. The problem is not that the nation is uneducated, but rather lies in the evaluation of the learning that goes on in various places in society. For this we have important tools that are real skills evaluation and qualifications framework.

The upper secondary school seems to be in competition with the employment sector for people. Ingibjörg Elsa asks whether it would help to shorten upper secondary school, and also whether there is cause to speed up development of the qualifications framework and the use of learning outcomes in evaluating learning. Then one needs to identify more effectively those at risk of dropout and find varied solutions to meet their needs, such as strengthening study and career advisory services and increasing variety in curricula. These curricula should keep routes open to further education and should equally offer work opportunities.

Academic subject prove to be hurdles for some. Evidence of this is seen in the real skills evaluation. The doors of the school system must be really open to people and their experience should be evaluated. Care should be taken to adapt the teaching to the group in question. The approach and learning environment appropriate for adults are not the same as for teenagers. Continuing education should have parity for credits with formal education and real skills should be linked to the upper secondary schools. It is important to have active cooperation, to work together to find a solution as a joint effort makes all the difference.

Summary of discussion at the conference

1. We do not know enough

Much emphasis was placed on the view that better information on the nature and reasons for dropout was necessary in order to tackle the problem. It was stated that people had ideas about possible factors, but it was difficult to form policy and work on preventative measures if there was no information supported by argument on which to build. Research needed to be done on assessing the effect of the high participation in employment on dropout and postponement of education among young people. Better information was needed on the influence of health and social circumstances. The schools were discussed and the effect of expectations and encouragement in schools. In this context it was considered important to map out better the indicators for dropout risk that appear, including absenteeism and poor academic performance,

2. The responsibility of schools

It is important that the school community as a whole be made responsible for preventing dropout. Conference guests pointed out that although the schools here should be for all, education does not necessarily suit everyone. It is possible that students' strengths and weaknesses are not being identified as well as they might be. It is known that teacher expectations affect the results and diligence of students. Then there is the fact that school years are a delicate phase in forming one's self awareness and self esteem, so it is a key issue that students receive positive and fair rewards. Students in Icelandic compulsory education and in upper secondary schools are a varied group and it is a challenge to meet the needs of each one. Such a task is not within the capabilities of a single teacher so teamwork and cooperation is needed.

Working Group C Report

- strengthening continuing education

1. Introduction

Surveys in Iceland and abroad have shown that the longer an education an individual has the more likely he is to seek further education. There is a plentiful offer of courses and educational opportunities for adults in Iceland. Upper secondary colleges and universities have been open and flexible and there is a plentiful offer of courses outside the formal education system. According to international studies the general adult participation in courses is among the highest in OECD countries. The pattern is however the reverse when it comes to those with the shortest education. In 2005 31% of Icelanders in the 25-64 age cohort have not completed formal education beyond the compulsory level. This ratio of people on the labour market with a short formal education is among the highest found in Europe. According to the declaration by the government on 17 February 2008 the aim is that this ratio will be reduced to 10% in 2020.

This report does not consider challenges in education for those who have completed upper secondary or university education. There is general consensus that this group gets its continuing education as required and the plentiful offer of such education ensures that all those interested in such can find something appropriate to their needs. Registrations for various courses and for continuing education for the school year (2008-2009) indicates that this is still the case. But it could well be that increased unemployment will change this situation, and that a push will have to be made to reach e.g. those who become employed for an extended period. It does not seem the right time to tackle this issue. The proposals of the group address first and foremost those that have less education – the continuing education part of adult education.

There currently a bill before the Althingi (no. 291 - 216. item in 136th session 2008-2009) that would introduce a clear and simple legislative framework for the education that is referred to in the bill as *continuing education*. This concept means any education designed to meet the needs of individuals with short formal education, and that is not organised on the basis of legislation governing upper secondary schools or universities.

Adult education as it has developed in past years at the Education and Training Service Centre, at Centres for Continuing Education and with other educational players, has first and foremost targeted those on the labour market with the shortest education. This activity has expanded considerably in recent years. The working group feels that on the whole adult education in Iceland is developing well but certain areas of implementation have room for improvement and that there is a particular need for improving services to certain peripheral groups such as the disabled, immigrants etc.

2. Position

New policy development at the EU level

In recent years work has been done at OECD level on analysing access of adults to education, their participation in language and the necessity to provide them with more encouragement to participate in learning. Work started recently on behalf of the EU on this issue on the premise that improved education for the unskilled would benefit companies and the economy and would improve the quality of life of those receiving the education.

There is consensus among those who deal with vocational training for adults that if it is to deliver the intended results it has to be given accreditation. Evaluation of real skills plays a key role here, but most if not all of

Iceland's neighbouring states have placed great emphasis on developing such evaluation in their countries. It is a matter of urgency that adults should have access to individual advice on learning and learning opportunities, in addition to solutions for learning problems should they arise. It is important that adults have access to a varied curriculum, appropriate to each individual's ability and learning status.

At the EU, policy development in continuing education has not received much emphasis to date. An action plan for continuing education was however agreed in the Autumn of 2007, followed by the forming of a working group in 2008 by the Commission that deliberates this plan (The Commission of the European Union, 2007a). Iceland participates in this working group.

The above-mentioned action plan targets those groups that with the shortest education and who are most disadvantaged on the labour market, both economically and socially. The groups that fit this category vary from country to country but they can include people with reading difficulties, immigrants, senior citizens, the disabled etc. There is a clear need for high quality accessible adult education if the nations of Europe are to get to grips with the problems facing us in the coming years.

The five main priorities of the plan are:

1. analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training in Member States on adult learning;
2. improve the quality of provisions in the adult learning sector;
3. increase the possibilities for adults to go "one step up" - to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before;
4. speed up the process of assessment of real skills;
5. improve the monitoring/assessment of adult learning sector.

Iceland has achieved good results in meeting the Lisbon for adult participation in continuing education. The five main priorities of the EU action plan harmonise with the emphases in Iceland in recent years. The following chart shows a comparison of the participation of Europeans in the age group 25-64 in continuing education for the years 2000 and 2007 (2006 from several countries including Iceland).



Source: Report of the Commission of the European Communities Data: Eurostat (EU Labour market survey)
 Figures from 2006: SE, UK, HR, IS

Chart 3. Participation of citizens in Europe in the age cohort 25-64 in continuing education 2000 and 2007

Iceland is among those countries with the highest participation in adult education and these figures also show an increase among those covered by the statistics. In the Commission's report it is considered that lifelong learning is reality in countries with the highest participation. These countries are Sweden, the UK, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Another six countries are close to these results but totals for the whole show that only a little under 10% of adults in the EEA participate in continuing education. As was indicated in the introduction, Icelanders are however among those countries where the ratio of those who have not completed formal upper secondary school is highest. This is partly explained by the fact that many upper secondary school students have jobs, which delays their graduation, by the relatively few shorter curricula at upper secondary school level and by the difference in definitions between countries of when graduation takes place.

Development and organisation in Iceland

In 1992 legislation on general adult education 47/1992 was introduced by the Ministry of Education. The laws were repealed in 1996 and legal authority in the legislation governing upper secondary school colleges was granted to these institutions to run adult education departments and retraining courses and to cooperate with adult education centres. In 1992 legislation governing vocational education on the labour market, no. 19/1992.

was introduced, see Article 4 which states that vocational education on the labour market is under the Ministry of Social Affairs while vocational training in the fishing industry is under the Ministry of Fisheries. Legislation on vocational training in the labour market is still in force and on the basis of this legislation the vocational training funds have awarded grants for various development projects in upper secondary school and vocational education. There is currently a bill on upper secondary school education before the Althingi.

There are many parties involved in continuing education in Iceland, both associations and private parties.

The Education and Training Service Centre (FA) was established by the Icelandic Federation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA) on the basis of a declaration by the government on 13 December 2001. Its role is to be a centre for cooperation on adult education and vocational training in cooperation with other educational institutions working under the auspices of the founders ASÍ and SA. Its objective is to give employees on the general labour market that have not completed upper secondary school education, the opportunity to gain a formal education or to improve their status on the labour market. The FA agreement with the Ministry of Education includes the development of new methods to enhance the knowledge and skills of participants in the labour market and the coordination of projects.

The nine Educational and Lifelong Learning Centres across the country were mostly founded in the period 1998-2000. They create a network around the country along with the centres and learning laboratories connected with them. There are also centres operated in Reykjavík and in neighbouring municipalities such as Mímir Lifelong Learning. The Ministry of Education made an agreement with FA on various development projects and the supervision of tasks that the nine Educational and Lifelong Learning Centres, Mímir and the two trade learning centres are implementing. This involves among other things holding courses according to a curriculum designed by FA and endorsed by the Ministry of Education. Such courses can be assessed as credits for upper secondary school and this process is handled by the administrators of the school in question. There is also curriculum and career advice, which is a major part of the operations. Development and supervision of real skills evaluation is also a growing part of the work at FA. Outside that agreement the centres also handle specialised learning offers such as various kind of leisure learning and the centres for lifelong learning outside the capital city conurbation also provide services for university students on distance learning courses at the country's universities.

In addition to this companies and trade unions have built up a solid vocational training fund that provides individuals and companies with grants for holding courses and with training needs analyses.

The Icelandic Federation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA) took the initiative in founding Virk, a fund for vocational rehabilitation, which has on its agenda the organisation and financing of advice and services for employees that suffer long term illness or that have diminished work capacity following an accident. The fund's main task is to organise and supervise the work of advisors that are generally working on behalf of the trade unions' medical funds and that will assist employees when they need rehabilitation. The fund is intended to pay the advisors' salaries and to monitor and supervise their work and to provide them with professional support. Early intervention at the request of the fund is intended to ensure that people who have the capacity to work do not disappear from the labour market, but that they receive appropriate help and roles (Employment Rehabilitation Fund. (e.d.).

A large number of adults are enrolled at the country's upper secondary schools. The adult education departments were a groundbreaking development in this context when they were founded. In recent years there has been a drop in demand for the adult education departments with a correspondent rise in demand for distance learning.

The bill on continuing education

In the bill on continuing education it is stated that opportunities effort shall be systematically directed at creating educational opportunities and encouragement for people on the labour market with limited education. The

funding for lifelong learning and continuing education appropriate for people on the labour market shall be increased in the coming years.

The main features of the bill:

The Icelandic educational system has grown strengthened and flourished in recent years. The Althingi recently passed legislation on the four levels of education, pre-school, compulsory, upper secondary and university. Should the bill on continuing education become law, a fifth level will be added to the basic structure of the educational system. The main objectives of the bill are listed in Article 2 and they are:

- to create appropriate learning opportunities for those individuals on the labour market who have short formal education and to make it easy for them to start learning again.
- to give the individuals the opportunity to strengthen their work competence and to adopt responsibility for this competence,
- to create leeway and solutions to meet the needs of the labour market for increased competence and knowledge in employees,
- to provide individuals with increased opportunities for more active participation in society,
- to gain recognition for the value of learning that takes place outside the formal upper secondary and university education,
- to support that learning and experience gained outside the formal education system is properly valued and
- to enhance the level of education in the country and its educational system.

3. Challenges

1. To protect and strengthen flexible continuing education and career and study advisory service.

The main challenge is to maintain the impetus of the good work that has been done despite the recession and the pending changes on the labour market. It is important to preserve the flexibility in continuing education such that is possible to react to unemployment, which is now increasing in leaps and bounds. *career and study advisory service has returned results.* A lot has been achieved in reaching those with the shortest formal education in recent years, by methods such as providing career and study advisory service in the lifelong learning centres. The working group emphasises that this effort should be maintained. The vocational training funds have also offered advisors on loan, a methodology that shows promise. Attention needs to be paid constantly to the quality of adult education on the labour market and to make it accessible. When referring to learning that it to increase an employees skills one does not least have to consider learning that provides a learner with fulfilment and enjoyment such as various kinds of hobby courses. This has e.g. proved a good way to get people back to learning.

2. Shorter curricula

The offer of shorter curricula has to be ensured. One of the biggest challenges facing the Icelandic educational system is to increase the number of people whom complete recognised curricula at upper secondary level. The objectives of the new legislation on upper secondary school colleges is in step with this need and provides more shorter curricula than before. The working group applauds these opportunities. real skills evaluation provides support for increasing the number of graduates. It is of key importance that the education system and the labour market march in step. Efforts have to be made to ensure that there is strong cooperation between the labour market and schools in development of new curricula.

3. Improving services to peripheral groups

It is important that the system can adapt to target groups. Various measures to meet the needs of disadvantaged individuals and groups have been launched. Job rehabilitation has been established at many locations around the

country. Information about this group is inadequate so the need must be better analysed. The employment capabilities of immigrants are not harnessed as they might be and they find it difficult to get their home qualifications recognised here. real skills evaluation is a tool that might be used more in this connection and there are also great possibilities in connecting study of the Icelandic language with vocational learning.

4. Access to distance learning

Substantial and well designed distance learning is important. People's opportunities for education are not equal, particularly in the country's sparsely populated areas. A good offer of distance learning is important for this group. The methodology applied in distance learning must be looked at more carefully and this measure must be developed such that it suits a wider group of recipients. Work is being done on this at several locations and every reason to give this work good support.

4. Ways towards improvement

The working group agrees that much and good work has been done in adult education in recent years. The main tasks for the coming years are to continue this work and support it.

1. To protect and strengthen flexible continuing education and career and study advisory service.

The system that has already been developed in continuing education should be supported. It is important that the adaptability and flexibility of the system be assured in order that reaction time can be short when changes occur on the labour market. Study and career advisory services have proved valuable in supporting and encouraging those with least education. real skills evaluation is useful for collecting and having an overview of the learning a student has completed. Ways must be continuously sought to reach and involve more of the group with least formal education.

2. Shorter curricula

The upper secondary school should offer a wider variety of graduation options with shorter curricula and should increase the number that complete recognised learning. In parallel to this it should be assured that those graduating from shorter curricula should be valued at merit. Support should be given to strong links with the employment sector when curricula are developed.

3. Improving services to various peripheral groups

The most complex group to deal with in upper secondary school education is the disadvantaged or those who have some kind of health problem to deal with. There are about 14 thousand handicapped individuals in Iceland, of which a large proportion needs to be offered additional and individually appropriate educational opportunities. One must expect when the employment rehabilitation fund is fully operating that information on people's educational needs will become more accessible, and that it will be possible to react in a more targeted manner.

4. Increase accessibility to distance learning

Distance learning should be organised in a manner such that more people can use it. Here the pedagogy for adult education can be applied in order to improve the system. The offer of education at university level through distance learning should be increased and teachers should be better trained in applying distance learning techniques.

5. Reactions and discussions at the conference

Expert reactions

Sigríður Anna Guðjónsdóttir Federation of Trade & Services

In her comments Sigríður Anna agreed with the general conclusion that continuing education has progressed recently through a hugely increased offer of courses from various players in the labour market such as from her own association. Sigríður Anna talked about the state of the education being provided in the employment sector and used staff in retail and services as an example. She said that despite the increased offer, the information flow was inadequate as she found in her sector that managers were not aware of the offer of courses available to their staff. There was also a lack of motivation as education did not ensure higher pay. A specific problem in the Icelandic school system is that the duration does not match the indicators in Europe such that students that complete a two year commercial curriculum are classified as dropouts according to the reference.

As with many others Sigríður Anna discussed the importance of recognising non formal education and the possibilities offered by real skills evaluation in this context. This would be a great help to those people working in the retail and service sectors.

Then she discussed the challenges defined by the working group for continuing education. She agreed with them and emphasised cooperation between the school system and the employment sector for shorter curricula. Distance learning suited many people and would probably be very useful for those people working in the retail and service sectors.

Summary of discussion at the conference

Conference guests agreed that the state of continuing education in Iceland was good. Discussion developed however on a few issues where improvements could still be made.

The significance of continuing education

continuing education plays an important role in society. It targets not least dropout groups. There is great demand for courses and the system is well-used. The conclusion at the conference was that through continuing education, Icelanders were responding well to those people who wished to return to formal education, or add to their knowledge in the non-formal system. The cost of dropout from learning to the community and to the individual was discussed and it was concluded that emphasis should be placed on reaching this group and on providing it with custom made learning opportunities. The importance of raising the knowledge level of unskilled workers was also discussed and it was noted that continuing education had a key role in this.

Adult students

At the conference a certain concern was voiced that continuing education was not always appropriate for the student group, i.e. adult students. At the continuing education level adults often learn side by side with teenagers which is not always positive. It is of some urgency that the adult education theory should be enhanced and that distance learning should be examined in this context and methodologies and techniques should be developed that best suit adult students.

Evaluation of Real Skills

Qualifications framework and learning outcomes are of great importance in this area. At the conference there was discussion on how non formal education should be mapped into the qualifications framework. There was some fear that it would not be properly achieved and the need for it to be done carefully was emphasised. It is

particularly significant for those who wish to have non formal learning evaluated for credits before they commence studies in the formal school system. To date, the fact that adults that wish to add to their education have had to take "unnecessary" courses to reach their goals, has been a hindrance to these people. This refers to courses that are not relevant to his aims or that are what he has already learned. The advent of real skills evaluation means that there is now a tool to change this. In the evaluation it is possible to decide which courses are completed and which are not.

Working Group D Report

- development of teacher education

1. Introduction

New legislation governing the education and appointment of teachers and school administrators in nursery, compulsory and upper secondary school education (no. 87/2008) was passed by the Althingi in the Spring of 2008 and came into force on 1 July that same year. The new legislation makes a degree at masters level a prerequisite for teaching certification at all school levels. These laws shall be fully implemented over a period of three years, i.e. by the year 2011. These additional educational demands made to Icelandic teachers are in accordance with the immense social changes facing us at the beginning of a new century. They also confirm that the nation makes demands on its teaching force, to educate the generation that will inherit the country and to successfully prepare this generation to meet predictable future changes in natural resources, technology and culture. We need well-educated teachers in the 21st century, for all schools and at all levels of education in a new, progressive, varied and flexible education system.

Improvements in the education system depend on well-educated and motivated teachers which means that teacher education must keep in step with changes in society as a whole. In recent years there has been considerable discussion on the relationship between teaching methods and learning performance. It seems that new times require that the student “learn to learn”. The working group’s task concerning teacher education was to discuss the various challenges in this issue. The group was required among other things to discuss 1) the connection between compulsory education and teacher lifelong learning 2) the importance of teaching practice in teacher education 3) the education of teachers of vocational subjects, both those working within the education system and at the workplace 4) the need for the application new methods in science teaching and 5) increased professional assistance for teachers.

2. Position

EU Policy on teachers and teacher education

The European Commission summit at Lisbon in 2000 it was decided to prioritise policy-making in education where it is clear that education and research are the key to future policy in the EU. In the Lisbon Declaration the EU set itself the objective of making Europe the most competitive economy and the best equipped knowledge society in the world by the year 2010². It was clear that in order to achieve this ambitious objective it would be necessary to invest in education and to improve the quality of education systems This method recognises the fact that countries have differing education systems, with varying emphases and solutions, and situated at varying points on the development continuum. It was deemed important to harmonise education systems and the exam certificates they generate to a certain degree, e.g. to support the free flow of labour within the EEA. The guiding light is the principle of building on what exists in each country, on exchange of information on successful solutions and that ways should be found to disseminate them. In the spirit of the open method of co-ordination, the EEA/EFTA states were invited to take part on an equal footing in the task of strengthening Europe’s education systems.

² ” *The European Union must become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.*” (European Council, Lisbon, March 2000)

A plan of work in this vein was agreed at the 2002 European Commission summit in Barcelona. In the work plan 13 objectives were presented which are further divided into key issues. This work procedure was given the umbrella title *Education and Training 2010* (European Commission, n.d.).

One of the main components of this plan aims to improve the teacher education and Icelanders have participated in this work from the outset. The working plan defines four key issues in teacher education.

1. Identify teacher competence with reference to their changed role in the information society.
2. Improve teachers' working conditions and support for them in the information society, both in compulsory education and in lifelong learning.
3. Review entry requirements for teaching positions, at all levels and cross-discipline, while at the same time strengthening teachers' professional development and making the teaching profession a more attractive option.
4. Support renewal in the teaching profession by facilitating entry for people with experience in other professions.

The Commission published its policy on teacher education on 3 August 2007 (European Commission, n.d.). There the emphasis is placed on the teachers being faced with new demands and roles and will thus need to avail themselves continuously of lifelong learning. Equally, the member states need to build teacher education that allows for such lifelong learning. Subsequently the Commission made a resolution on the quality of teacher education on 15 November 2007, where particular emphasis was placed on support for teachers at the beginning of their careers and on strengthening teachers' professional development (Council of the European Union, 2007).

The European Parliament agreed a resolution on 23 September 2008 on teacher education where heavy emphasis was placed on the importance of the teaching profession in the social development aimed at by the EU, and where many issues were highlighted where the EU or individual member states needed to make efforts in order to support teacher professional education, compulsory education and lifelong learning.

During recent years Icelanders have taken part in the *Cluster on teachers and trainers*, within the project entitled "*Education and Training 2010*". The work in this project has been carried out in the spirit of the EU policy in education. In addition to regular meeting conferences on specific themes are held, e.g. on *Peer learning activities, PLA*. Individual participant countries offer a form of workshop where plans or innovations are presented for critical debate.

The cluster dealing with teachers and teachers' education has discussed a multitude of issues related to the above-mentioned EU resolution on the teaching profession. Issues addressed particularly have been the content of teachers' education and its status, but the school level under discussion in each instance varies from country to country. There has also been considerable discussion on education of vocational teachers, as it seems that teaching professional practices vary considerably between vocational education and academic learning. Art education can be subject to quite different principles. Part of the vocational training happens at the work place, as is well known, so there are often particular views on the education of teachers of vocational education.

In the peer learning PLA workshops on teacher education subjects under discussion have included, lifelong learning and job development, the role of school administrators, cooperation between schools and businesses on learning at the workplace, the role of teachers in a multicultural society, teachers real skills evaluation, relations between the teachers university and schools in teaching practice, support for new teachers in their work (European Commission, n.d.).

The main task being currently handled in the cluster concerns the induction of new teachers and teacher lifelong learning, as their consensus for the view that a teacher's vocational learning never ends. Significant results can be expected from this EU cooperation on professional development in the teaching profession and in teachers' education.

New teachers' education

At the conference *Education & Training 2010 – National Debate in Iceland 2006*, held at Reykjavik Energy on 26 October 2006, the proposals of the Ministry of Education working group on future organisation of teacher education were presented (The working group's proposals for teacher training, 2006). The proposals presented there were subsequently the basis for a review of legislation covering teacher education. A bill on the education and appointment of teachers and administrators in nursery, compulsory and upper secondary schools was put before the Althingi in the autumn of 2007, along with bills on nursery, compulsory and upper secondary schools. The bills (no. 87/2008) were passed by the Althingi in the spring of 2008 and took force on 1 July of the same year but will not be fully implemented until 2011.

The new laws on the education and appointment of teachers lays the foundation for radical changes to teacher education and to teachers' working environment in this country. The main impetus of the legislation is to make more demands on professional education for teachers. The most over-reaching innovation is that in order to be awarded accreditation as a teacher in nursery, compulsory and upper secondary schools the condition is that one has completed a degree at masters level from an institution that has been recognised by the Ministry of Education in the academic domain to be taught for the school level in question.

Work is now in progress on issuing regulations based on the new legislation. These regulations will include reference guidelines for the content of various types of teacher education and frameworks for the accreditation process and for the issuing of teacher certificates. The legislation includes provisions that facilitate accreditation for a teacher to teach at more than one level. In addition to this, work is in progress in at least five Icelandic universities in accordance with the new legislation.

In the review of teacher education in Iceland and in the making of the policy that appeared in the new legislation, the international debate on teacher education and on the working environment of the teaching profession was always taken into account. One could say that there is ongoing debate in many places in the world on the roles of teachers and work being done on improving teacher education. Icelanders, for example, play a full role in the policy-making concerning teachers and their education that is currently taking place at EU level, and that is referred to elsewhere in this report.

The work being done at CERI, the OECD research and development institution on education and policy-making in the educational system has also been closely monitored. Icelanders participation the new TALIS (OECD, n.d), research on the working environment and teaching methods in 23 countries. This year a survey was carried out at compulsory school level where teachers and head teachers expressed their opinions on matters including their jobs and job development, their views on teaching and teaching methods, their conditions of employment and the reward they receive for their work. Various other aspects relating to leadership, management and the work place were also surveyed. The data is processed abroad and the first results are expected in the autumn of 2009. It is expected that it will now be possible to compare the working conditions of Icelandic teachers in a meaningful manner with those in other countries. The aim is to conduct a similar survey of upper secondary school teachers in 2011.

Icelanders also participate in the Nordic Ministers Council's comparative survey of teachers' education in the Nordic countries. Legislation and regulations covering teachers, entry requirements for teacher education are compared and a check is made of whether the organisation of teacher education is such that it spans the whole breadth of the work of the teacher. A compare and contrast analysis is made of Nordic teacher education. A report on this comparison has recently been published (Nordisk Ministerråd, 2009) and the plan is for continued cooperation between the Nordic countries in this field.

These changes in teaching education in Iceland are thus in line with increased demands on the teaching profession and development of Teacher education in the countries we compare ourselves with.

The new legislation on the education and work of teachers has a special meaning for Icelandic pre-school teachers, as their job title is now legally protected for the first time. This is a significant recognition of pre-school as the first level of schooling and of the important role of the pre-school teachers in supporting the broad development of children and in preparing them at the start of their schooling.

Those qualified teachers at compulsory schooling and upper secondary school levels will of course, when the new legislation comes into force, retain full rights and parity with those that gain accreditation for teaching at compulsory schooling and upper secondary school levels under the new legislation. In addition to this, pre-school teachers with the baccalaureate diploma in teaching theory and practice from a recognised teacher education institution, or other analogous education completed by examination that was recognised for teacher accreditation before the new legislation took force, will retain their rights.

3. Challenges

Rapid sociological changes during recent years change views of learning and teaching and bring new demands on schools. When the debate on learning and teaching and on Teacher education is summarised there seems to be three salient aspects. The student needs to be able to gather information and to process it in a critical manner. Literacy (reading and writing) and critical thinking are the main concepts. To achieve this, teachers need to apply flexible techniques and to direct their work and subject matter at students' individual needs and at the social context. The teacher needs to instill in his students an interest in and a need for learning and an understanding of its importance such that he will become able to adapt himself to a continuously changing society and equally become an active participant in its development.

There has been some discussion on the results of international research that shows poor reading comprehension among Icelandic students. The importance of images in daily life is increasing and reading skills now call for literacy in images, sound and in the integration of different media. There is a need to redefine or to update the concept of literacy in the light of the above. This also calls for changes in teaching material, in the content of Teacher education and for changes in teaching methods. The teacher must have the ability to judge the type of material suitable for each student. Teaching of reading takes place one way or another in all lessons at the compulsory school level, but there is also a need for teachers specialised in the teaching of reading in each and every school.

Nursery, compulsory and upper secondary schools and universities and varying subjects within the school levels call for varying training and competence of teachers. Teaching also takes place in many instances in the employment sector, in lifelong learning and in art and vocational education.

The demand that all students shall reach some kind of maturity is prominent, as it has been throughout the last decade. With parents having enjoyed more education than was the case before, they have become more aware of the importance of good education and have made more demands for the education of their children. Cooperation with parents and PTAs has thus become more important along with increased cooperation between on the one hand schools and teachers and on the other hand the health and social affairs authorities. Emphasis needs to be placed on such manners of communication and management in schools needs to be strengthened with wide-ranging responsibility of teachers and other staff.

Emphasis needs to be placed on organising lifelong learning for teachers such that it contributes well to their jobs. In some instances this is not the case. The debate sometimes hinges on differentiating between lifelong learning designed to improve the morale in student groups (such as measures to combat bullying) and the lifelong learning designed to improve the teacher's competence in his teaching subject. The challenge here is to integrate the two as it is clear that a happy student works better at school and vice versa. One could mention resource centres as useful in this context.

4. Ways towards improvement

1. Secure the implementation of the new legislation governing teacher education

It is proposed that the lengthening of Teacher education prescribed by the legislation should not least be used to increase practical teacher education among student teachers.

2. More varied teacher education

This means getting a more varied group to enter teacher education and the definition of varying roles of teachers according to school levels and subjects. Variety in the composition of the body of teachers ensures specialisation. One also needs to differentiate between the differing groups each teacher is teaching. What are the needs of each group of students at varying school levels and in differing subjects. There is a need for varying vocational education and competence depending on the school level and the subject being taught.

3. Improve lifelong learning and support for teachers

Make demands on teachers that they participate in lifelong learning and at the same time ensure that there are sufficient possibilities on offer. It is important that lifelong learning is normal and necessary to maintain and improve a person's job competence.

4. Support for new teachers who are commencing their careers

The guidance part of teacher education must be strengthened, particularly at the beginning of a teacher's career. In this respect it is no less important to look at teacher education within the schools than teacher education outside the schools.

5. Communications with parents and family

Emphasis must be placed on enhancing and strengthening teachers' and trainee teachers' communications and cooperation skills when dealing with students, parents or guardians, professionals and other parties involved with teaching and school operations.

5. Reactions and discussions at the conference

Expert reactions

Gunnar Gíslason, Director of Education, Akureyri Town

Gunnar felt that there was little on teacher education in the report and pointed out that work was in progress in various places in connection with the new legislation and expressed his approval of the work being done by the teacher education institutions in this context.

If one examines the role that the teacher is expected to have then in short one could say that the teacher should be able to do everything and be everything. Very varied demands are made on the teacher. The demands relate largely to the human element, the relationship between teacher and student, parents and colleagues. Gunnar emphasised strong cooperation between teachers. Results are more likely when teachers can cooperate in order to fulfil the many-faceted role they are given. Teachers' communications with parents causes them considerable anxiety and that is a cause for some concern. Here is a task, and teachers need to be strengthened in communications skills, interviewing skills and in other skills that relate to managing communications with parents.

Gunnar talked about the kind of objectives we should set in our schools. Now we are looking to Finland as their results in international tests is good, but it has come to light that Finnish children are not particularly happy.

Icelandic children on the other hand are very happy in school but do not score as well. Is it only possible to achieve results in one of these?

Finally Gunnar talked about the importance of teachers having the possibility of learning from their own work experience and wondered whether in general they worked with their experience.

Summary of discussion at the conference

Communications

The competence needed by teachers in professional communications was discussed at the conference. It was stated that communications with parents was the element that caused most anxiety among teachers and one might ask why this is. The attributes a teacher is expected to have in his work with students, colleagues and parents all come down in the end to communications. Here it is important to distinguish between the communications skills required to be amenable with people, show consideration and find common solutions on the one hand and the broad competence that the teaching job requires of a professional. The teacher needs to be able to manage communications, whether in the class, with parents or in cooperation with colleagues in school. It was emphasised that it was not sufficient to simply read about good general communications practices but that direct training on site was necessary.

Variety

It was stated at the conference that “teacher education shall be varied as we wish to have varied teachers”. It was also said that in teacher education to date most attention has been directed at academic learning and at teachers of academic subjects. Now when work is in progress on integrating the formal and non formal systems, a need emerges for pedagogy for adult education and to direct more attention to pedagogy for vocational teachers.

Real skills evaluation is as relevant to teacher education as to other learning. It was said at the conference that one can assume that instructors with long teaching experience will request real skills evaluation. It is also likely that real skills evaluation and the making of competence descriptions will influence teacher education.

Vocational training

Conference guests emphasised the importance of vocational training in teacher education, i.e. teaching practice, and the request was made that 20% of the new 5 year teacher education learning should take place on site. The discussion was directed at the function of the schools and their role in training new teachers. There was also discussion about continuing education and lifelong learning and the necessity to strengthen the schools such that they were well prepared to provide vocational training and lifelong learning.

Working Group E report

- strengthening vocational training

1. Introduction

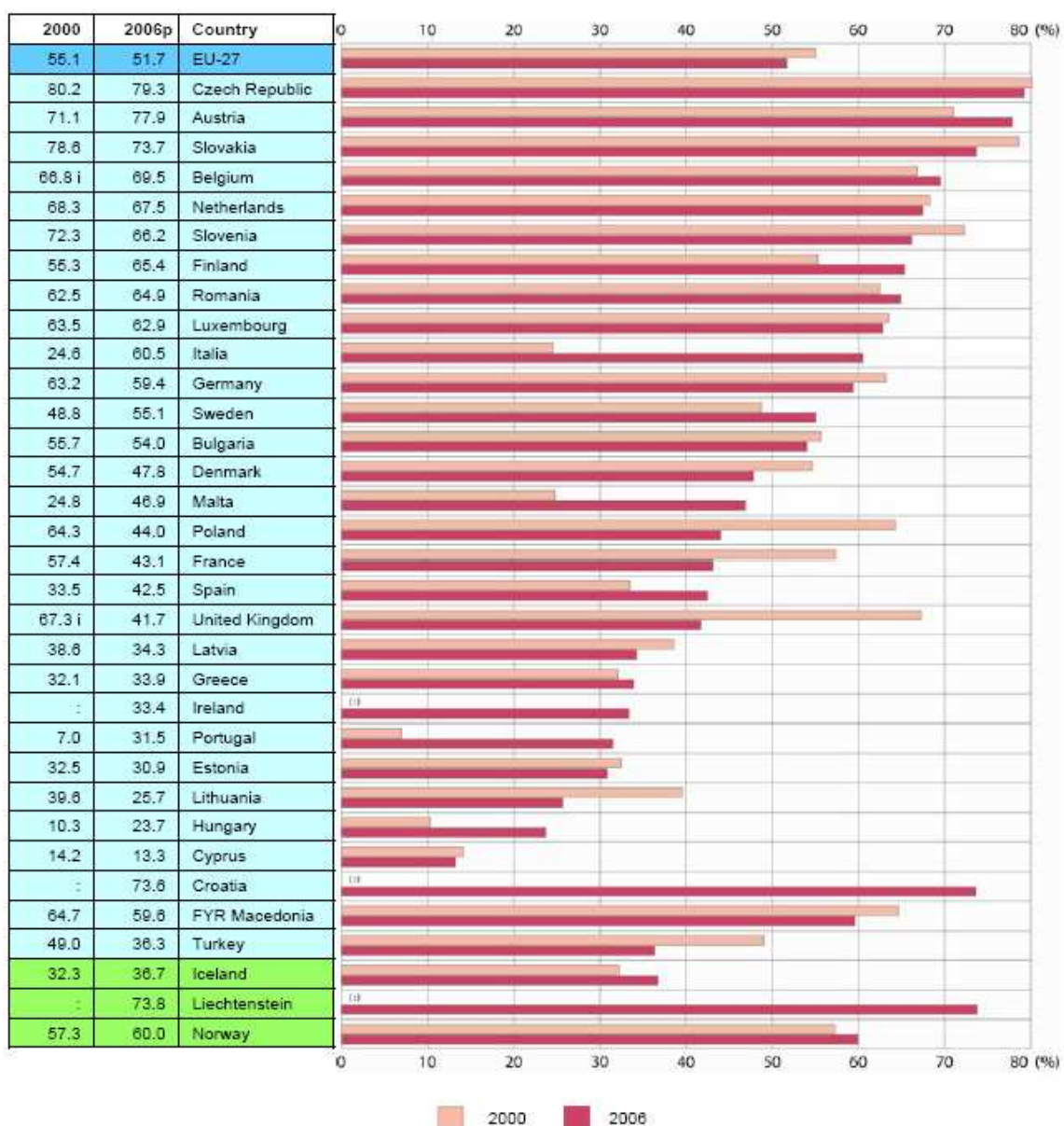
It has long been thought an advantage and a compliment in Iceland should someone be said to be a good carpenter, and when describing a person, such a quality was usually mentioned, even when his official role was that of a bishop. For centuries, practical work skills were respected but were never quite on a par with knowing Latin and being a government official. Even today in Europe, academic learning and vocational learning are clearly differentiated. The Icelandic education system has its roots in the European system and the same attitude to academic learning and vocational learning seem to prevail here.

The new upper secondary school legislation and the new vision for education that follows the emphasis on learning outcomes instead of a given length of curriculum or specified examination level, arouse hope that it will now be possible to redefine values and to enhance respect for vocational education such that it will be on parity with knowledge in academic subjects.

2. Position

European Union Policy

The Commission report *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training* from 2008 and indicates the extent to which the EU objectives in education and training are being reached. In the report it says that many European countries have increased the attraction of vocational education by improving access for students to university education. A large number of students do however learn according to curricula that only culminate in qualifications for certain jobs. The following chart shows the students in vocational learning as a ratio of all students at upper secondary school level in the EFTA countries.



Source: Report of the Commission of the European Communities Data: Eurostat (UOE)

Chart 4. Students in basic vocational education in the EFTA countries in 2000 and 2006.

A relatively small proportion (under 37%) of Icelandic students at upper secondary school level were in vocational education in 2006. Eight of 32 countries are behind Iceland in this respect. The group of students under discussion here are at the ISCED level 3 or at upper-secondary level. The ISCED levels are specified using the criteria of the nature and difficulty of the education and not from age, but one can assume that the majority of students in Europe in ISCED 3 are in the age range 14/15 -17/18. The average age of students in vocational education in Iceland is higher than in Europe and at the same time, the vocational education ends much later than with vocational education students elsewhere in Europe. The categorisation of vocational education is also unclear and not always comparable between countries. So there is every reason to take care when interpreting statistics and one can assume the situation to be better here in Iceland than the chart indicates.

Icelanders are parties to the European Union Education Programme through the EEA agreement and have been active participants in the Leonardo programme since 1995. During the past years about 200 people have gone to other European countries for vocational education for stays of varying duration. Such experience has been

rewarding for the individuals in question and it strengthens the labour market when students learn the techniques employed in other countries.

A few upper secondary schools have made student participation in European cooperation a permanent component in their work, an initiative that is important to strongly support. In European Union policy making emphasis is placed on mobility between countries and increased transparency in vocational education is a priority in this context as are methods to enable cross border recognition of vocational education.

Ministry of Education policy

New legislation on upper secondary schools took force on 1 August 2008. Work is being done on their implementation. The laws aim to bring about considerable changes in curricular structure in the upper secondary schools e.g. through dividing the curriculum into steps with emphasis on final objectives and assessment for credits where the student's work contribution is evaluated. In general terms the aim is to strengthen vocational education and to give it parity of esteem with academic learning. The following emphases in the legislation should affect the organisation and offer of vocational education with this aim in mind.

- Instead of centrally controlled curricula, the initiative will shift to schools and to the labour market.
- With flexible and devolved curriculum development the prerequisites will be created for a more heterogeneous offer of vocational education in cooperation with schools and companies. One can expect new curricula with cross-disciplinary subjects that are to answer new demands from the labour market.
- The boundary between academic learning and vocational learning will become less distinct and graduation on a basis of vocational education will become more varied.
- upper secondary schools will be able to offer additional courses that offer special or additional rights. There lie the opportunities for the offer of new curricula in vocational education.
- Vocational training at the workplace or work based learning will receive a more solid footing in vocational education. The duties of parties providing education with regards to ensuring students a learning contract, are increased.
- The labour market should provide students with targeted vocational education in companies.
- Companies shall be supported in order to ensure that vocational education fulfil given quality reference standards. Ways shall be found to finance learning at the workplace.
- real skills evaluation will strengthen the state of knowledge and training that is acquired on the labour market.
- Harmonisation with the laws on compulsory school level: The discontinuation of the nationally co-ordinated examinations in the 10th grade opens ways for new emphases in the offer of curricula, e.g. to give students the opportunity of starting vocational education in the final grades of compulsory education.

Major changes on the labour market in recent months show in a nutshell the problems facing vocational education. The criteria for the choice of a curriculum, based on expectations of developments in a particular area of employment, are no longer valid. It is difficult to guarantee a normal learning path for students. Curriculum development may be too cumbersome and thus difficult to adapt to changed circumstances.

3. The most important issues

1. Vocational training at the workplace

Companies and schools work together on the issues concerning learning at work through the professional training boards and it is necessary to strengthen this cooperation. Ways must be found to elicit and hone joint

responsibility of companies and schools for the education and training of students. Companies must perceive participation in these matters as being to their advantage. The interests lie in opportunities to mould future employees, to teach them work procedures and to disseminate their culture to the students. The teaching process itself strengthens those who handle the teaching and training of students. The part played by companies in training is important and in many instances it is more economical for teaching and training to take place at work. The machinery is there, as are professional knowledge and realistic tasks that can be tackled by the students. However, companies today do not always see the advantage of taking students in for vocational training. It is costly and requires that there are experienced trainers among staff, which is not always the case. A key issue in this working as it should is sufficient funding and professional capacity within the company, in addition to competent trainers. In this respect it is important to train the staff that is involved in students' vocational training, by offering courses for trainers in companies where emphasis is placed on the pedagogy of teaching adults.

There is considerable debate on the quality of vocational education and the competence of those qualifying. In many trades, efforts are made to improve quality with assessments, journeyman's examination, but this is not a sufficiently widespread practice and representatives of the labour market are afraid that demands will be lessened to those following short curricula.

2. Cooperation between schools

On completion of compulsory education, students seldom have fully formed ideas about future learning and choose those curricula that keep most options open. The view appears prevalent among students (and parents) that academic education gives most possibilities. So it is important that students have the opportunity to try differing ways in vocational education and have the option of being able to change their mind and navigate between departments and schools. In the new legislation on upper secondary schools, provisions are made for increased cooperation between schools and the labour market. The working group applauds this emphasis and expects results in this area. Interest has increased recently in design and art studies and it should be investigated whether such studies could form the basis of or part of vocational education and continuing studies in a arts at university level.

3. Visibility of jobs

Art and vocational education are disadvantaged in compulsory education, a situation that must be changed. Students must be ensured an insight into the variety of art forms and of vocational education through closeness and through strong experience. It is necessary for students to realise that there are ways to view the world from new perspectives and thus gain the ability to tackle unexpected situations and be able to start a creative process. These issues are best handled in cooperation between schools and companies.

Places of work are not as open to children and young people as they were before. So they have fewer opportunities to get to know jobs, trades and skills at first hand before they decide the direction they are going to take. The working group considers that students are not well enough informed about vocational education and that they even get confusing information about income, employment prospects and further education. The result is undecided students choosing academic curricula. Vocational education needs to be made more visible and learning and skills games are one way of arousing students' interest. It is important that the educational authorities and companies join forces to organise and operate learning games. Company staff visits to schools can also provide encouragement and can arouse students' interest.

4. Cooperation between vocational education institutions

Institutions involved in vocational education are not sufficiently in step with each other. It should be kept in mind that the vocational education system is complex though it is based on three main pillars, the schools, companies and government. In the system there is teaching that leads to final examinations in tens of trades or professions. This picture will not be simplified when the new upper secondary school legislation has been implemented. So it is important that those who organize, run or support vocational education and vocational learning coordinate in drawing a clear picture of the structure and possibilities within the vocational education system and of the opportunities that vocational education has to offer. Cooperation of this kind should take into

account the interests of the students and not the narrow interest of the schools, companies or professional organisations.

5. Cross discipline learning

The number of students graduating from upper secondary school during 1996-2007 shows there is little change in the number completing the journeyman's qualification in legally recognised trades, while there is a huge increase (503% - 58 individuals in 1996 and 350 in 2007) in those who complete graduation in vocational education. At the same time those who graduated from academic curricula increased by 8%. Those who took a final exam in a trade increased by about 66% and those who completed a competence test increased by 82%. The latter group includes students in design, tourism, art studies and in music. After art studies were included in the curriculum for upper secondary schools in 1999 there was an increase in applications, particularly for those subjects that have classified themselves as creative. This increased in applications can be interpreted as a need for new options other than academic learning paths. One could argue that many of those who chose art studies would have chosen vocational education if there had been a sufficiently varied offer of possibilities that also included the possibility of continuing education.

During a period of changes, it is important to have flexibility in all aspects of our society and in particular in vocational education. The new upper secondary school legislation opens the door for changes in vocational education and this opportunity should be used in a balanced and innovative manner. In the opinion of the working group there is a lack of vocational education curricula, such as in retail and commerce.

4. Ways towards improvement

1. Payment for vocational education

Learning in school and at the workplace shall be integrated such that the students learning programme become homogeneous. It is proposed that companies be assessed for their suitability to provide teaching at the workplace. The criteria for the assessment will include availability of facilities for teaching, competence of staff to organise and provide teaching and their willingness to collaborate with the student's school in organising the teaching at the workplace. Assessment of companies for teaching will be the joint concern of parties to the labour market and the school for each subject. Companies that receive a positive assessment will be paid for providing teaching at the workplace. To this end, a fund will be set up for such payments or companies will be remunerated in another manner, e.g. by tax concessions.

2. Cooperation between schools

Cooperation between and within school levels is important. The new upper secondary schools legislation provides explicitly for such cooperation, but it has to be assured in practice. A basis must be created that facilitates communications, encourages schools to take the initiative and that ensures that curricular development reflects cooperation.

3. Visibility of jobs

Companies need to open their doors for students, parents and guardians and school employees, and should perceive this as being in their interest to do so. Schools can also increase understanding of jobs and can arouse students' interest in various ways. This will happen in three ways:

- a) by presenting better the operations and nature of companies to children and young people through increased cooperation;
- b) by companies playing a bigger role in training students and by taking more responsibility for this task;
- c) by applying a greater variety of methods in school work when solving problems. Hand work and visual processing are important in this context.

4. Cooperation between vocational education institutions

Schools and the employment sector need a formal forum for open and candid debate about collaboration, development of school work and about vocational education, with the interests of students in the forefront.

5. Cross discipline learning

The working group proposes that the opportunities presented by the new upper secondary schools legislation should be used to integrate subjects. In this way we get “multi-discipline” people who have completed a curriculum that is not rigidly bound to those fixed curricula for subjects that we know today. The student then graduates with a non-formal certificate that is equivalent e.g. to graduation from upper secondary school or a journeyman's certificate.

5. Reactions and discussions at the conference

Expert reactions

Halla Bogadóttir, goldsmith

Halla started by talking about her involvement in trade education, both from the point of view of a student and then later as a participant in curriculum development for the goldsmiths trade. She discussed the problems faced by vocational education as seen from her trade. Journeymen have not applied to learn to be masters and so there are few masters to take on apprentices. In her opinion money has also hindered access for students to learning at the workplace and the proposals of the working group for payments to companies are a positive step. Supervision of learning is difficult because there are so many family connections in the trade.

So when working on the curriculum for goldsmiths, first published in 2002, the emphasis was on increasing the number of students and on increasing the schools' role as there were so few opportunities outside the schools. There are still too few starting. It is difficult to choose between applicants and many are waiting or drop out. The average age of those studying to become goldsmiths is 30, many of whom have studied a significant amount in other subjects. Now new admission rules are being prepared where one possibility being considered is to move the curriculum to university level.

Halla concludes that practical teaching at the compulsory school stage needs to be doubled and that this is a fundamental issue if vocational education is to be strengthened. Another issue is that the teaching of student teachers who plan to teach vocational subjects needs to be improved. Work has to be done to bring about a change in attitude as there is still a strong tendency for parents to direct their children to academic learning.

Summary of discussion at the conference

In the new legislation on upper secondary schools emphasis is placed on “one upper secondary school” yet despite that the discussions at the conference aimed more at the traditional division at upper secondary school level into vocational and academic. This is interesting in the light of the fact that the statistics that were presented showed that young people increasingly aim to complete upper secondary school graduation from vocational curricula. Young people seem to think that variety and a broad base are most important in ensuring both their competitiveness on the labour market and opportunities for continuing their education.

Main challenges

Out of the discussion came the view that the main problems of the vocational education system were student indifference and dropout and that funds were lacking for the purchase of teaching aids and material. Vocational training and learning at the workplace were not well enough organised. A shortage of educated teachers and

availability of lifelong learning for teachers was not the least of the problems. Following on from this a question was directed to the Education Department of the University of Iceland. How does the Education Department intend to serve the needs of those who teach practical subjects in compulsory school or in an upper secondary school. It was stated that there had been no response to these needs but that people were aware of them and were working on changes that have to be made because of the lengthening of teacher education.

There seemed to be consensus among conference guests that compulsory schools should teach children to work with "hand and mind". There is a demand for increased teaching of practical subjects in compulsory school and for integration of practical and academic teaching where possible. A special effort needs to be made to correct the negative attitudes to vocational education by giving it parity with academic education in children's learning and to make better use of the opportunities inherent in practical learning.

The importance of the larger society was addressed. Attention needs to be paid to the kind of messages young people are getting from the labour market. The importance of qualification and competence in the labour market affect academic interest. If the labour market does not require a specific vocational education then the students see little reason to get the qualification.

Cooperation between schools and the employment sector

A significant element in the discussion on vocational education was how to organise the sharing of tasks between the schools and the employment sector. Conference guests agreed that more attention needed to be paid to formal cooperation between these two parties and to better organisation and understanding of learning at the work place by both parties.

Participants felt that schools generally did a good job in teaching work procedures and techniques. The criticism was rather that students came from schools without the skills to solve problems and develop new solutions. This element can be better taught in training at the work place. In companies, on the other hand, it is often difficult to train for all work procedures and techniques that the curriculum requires the student to know. This is not least attributable to increased specialisation in companies in manufacturing, services, retail and other sectors. One has to keep in mind not to generalise. The above criticism of the schools seems not to have applied to the art schools as the emphasis there is to develop a student's skills through tasks. There is every reason to see if these working methods could be transferred to the vocational schools.

The competence to solve problems – design solutions – is one of the individual's most valuable attributes, the attribute that most employers are looking for and that they refer to when criticising schools for providing students that are "not good enough". One could assume that here is the reason why the employment sector distrusts short curricula that teach simple, specialised technology and techniques. The roots of criticism from the employment sector are the same when it is stated that young tradesmen and others that have studied in the vocational education system lack professional understanding, pride and ambition for their trade.

There was some contradiction in the discussion about who should be responsible for learning at the work place and in general about what the roles should be of those involved in vocational education. Up to now the discussion has been characterised by emphasis on specific instances and examples, concepts are uncertain, definition of responsibility is unclear and there does not seem to be full consensus on who is first and foremost the "customer" of the vocational education system. When these contradictions are examined it becomes patently obvious how delicate a task it is to aim at creating one model that suits all the differing trades and professions on offer in vocational education. The system is varied, trades vary and require a variety of facilities, equipment and teachers. The organisation needs to be in line with the nature of each trade. The schools and the employment sector must work together on defining requirements for more variety and must fulfil those that are deemed realistic. Without an overarching view, proposals for solutions will not be formed. The danger is that if an overarching view is not achieved then proposals will be like patchwork, that at best repair the worst defects of the system.

Main sources of the working groups

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2. *Web, Education & Training 2010*
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/objectives_en.html#language
3. *Education and Training 2010 The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the context of Europe*
http://bella.stjr.is/utgafur/menntun_i_motun.pdf
4. *2007 National Report – Iceland. The Ministry of Education report to the Commission on the status in Iceland regarding the development of Lifelong Learning Strategy*
5. *The Ministry of Education grant application to the Commission “Establishment and implementation of National Lifelong Learning Strategies – Education and Training 2010”*
6. *Commission Staff working document: Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training – Indicators and Benchmarks 2007. See:*
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/progress06/report_en.pdf
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13. *The shift to learning outcomes. Conceptual, political and practical developments in Europe. Report from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) from 2008.*
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Concept definitions

Formal education	Skills that are learned in a formal school system and recognised with graduation or exam qualifications awarded by formal school authorities (The Education and Training Service Centre, n.d).
Non formal education	Skills that the individual has acquired through daily activities related to his work, family or leisure pursuits. Skills that the individual has but having neither a certificate nor other confirmation that he has acquired such skills (The Education and Training Service Centre, n.d).
Nonformal education	Skills acquired outside the school system, e.g. at a lifelong learning centre, adult education centre or through courses at work. These skills are often confirmed with a certificate or recognition of participation (The Education and Training Service Centre, n.d).
Continuing education	Any education designed to meet the needs of individuals with short formal education, and that is not organised on the basis of legislation governing upper secondary schools or universities.
Learning outcomes	Definition of skills, knowledge and competence that the individual has gained at the end of his course of learning. In curriculum development learning outcomes shall be set for the curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture e.d.).
Competence	Means an overview and ability to use knowledge and skills.
- Skills	Both mental and practical. It implies the ability to apply methods and work processes.
- Knowledge	A collection of facts, laws, theories and techniques. It is both academic and practical.
National Qualification Framework	The qualifications framework embraces all learning at upper secondary school and university levels. Four competence levels are defined in the framework. Each step implies given competence that the student shall have gained at the end of his studies. Outcomes of the competence have been specified independent of input. One should assume that it will take students varying lengths of time to gain the competence in question (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture e.d.).
Real skills	The total skills that an individual has acquired in various ways such as through work experience, vocational education, leisure study, school education, social involvement and family life (The Education and Training Service Centre, n.d).

Evaluation of Real Skills	Confirmation and evaluation of an individual's real skills, without regard to how or where the skills were acquired. The aim is that the individual receive recognition of the real skills he commands at any given time, such that he does not need to study material he already knows or such that he can gain promotion at work (The Education and Training Service Centre, n.d).
Vocational education / learning	All learning designed to prepare the individual for a specific job in the labour market, whether it provides formal accreditation or not and where it can be either practical or academic (Gestur Guðmundsson, 1993).
Vocational training / learning at the work place	The part of specified vocational education that takes place At the work place.

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Appendix I. Conference Agenda

Policy-making for LIFELONG LEARNING

The Development of Education Policy in Iceland in the context of Europe

Conference held at the headquarters of RE, Bæjarháls 1
Thursday 26 February 2009 9-17

Agenda

At

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 9-9:15 | Registration |
| 9:15-9:25 | Katrín Jakobsdóttir Minister of Education opens the conference |
| 9:25-9:45 | <i>Education Policy in Iceland in the context of Europe</i> Arnór Guðmundsson, Director at the Ministry of Education. |
| 9:45-10:15 | <i>Softness in matters of education. Deliberations on “open cooperation” and on soft and hard management techniques in the domain of the European Union</i> Ágúst H. Ingþórsson, director of the University of Iceland Research Liaison Office |
| 10:15-11:00 | Key skills and learning outcomes in curriculum development Björg Pétursdóttir, Ministry of Education |
| 11:00-11:15 | Coffee break |
| 11:15-13:00 | Short presentation of the main conclusions of the working groups that have been working during the last months

<i>Group A – qualifications framework for LIFELONG LEARNING - NQF</i>
Summary: Ólafur Grétar Kristjánsson, Ministry of Education
Expert reactions: Ólafur Jónsson, Iðunn

<i>Group B – Dropout</i>
Summary: Sigurður Sigursveinsson Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
Expert reactions: Ingibjörg Elsa Guðmundsdóttir Education and Training Service Centre

<i>Group C – Strengthening of continuing education</i>
Summary: Stefán Stefánsson, Ministry of Education
Expert reactions: Sigríður Anna Guðjónsdóttir Federation of Trade & Services |
| 13:00-13:30 | Lunch |
| 13:30-14:30 | Continuation of presentation of the main conclusions of the working groups that have been working during the last months |

Group D – Development of Teacher Education

Summary: Sigurjón Mýrdal, mm

Expert reactions: Gunnar Gíslason, Director of Education, Akureyri Town

Group E – Strengthening of vocational education

Summary: Þórir Ólafsson, Ministry of Education

Expert reactions: Halla Bogadóttir, goldsmith

14:30-16:00 *Five discussion groups during the coffee break with speakers.* Conference guests have the opportunity to ask the panel questions and contribute to the report.

16:00-17:00 Panel Discussions Participants:

Arnór Guðmundsson, Director at the Ministry of Education.

Dr. Jón Torfi Jónasson, professors, Director of the University of Iceland Department of Education

Ragnar Þorsteinsson, Director of Education, Reykjavík

Baldur Gíslason, Director of the Technical College of Iceland

Jón Steindór Valdimarsson, manager of the Confederation of Industries

Kristín Guðmundsdóttir, President of the Association of Nursing Assistants

The conference chair will be Ágúst H. Ingbórsson, director of the University of Iceland Research Liaison Office

17:00-18:00 Close of Conference Sólrún Jensdóttir, Ministry of Education

Light refreshments at close of conference

Appendix II: INTERIM REPORT Review Meetings

In order to prepare the work of the working groups, two review meetings were held where it was endeavoured to scrutinise social circumstances, technical change and attitudes of society and those issues that could affect education and culture in Iceland. At the review meetings all comments, assertions and ideas were recorded and later used as input for the work of the working groups.

One review group discussed lifelong learning from the point of view of the student as an individual and at the review emphasis was placed on getting proposals and ideas about how it would be possible to empower and support the student:

- to be more independent and to be a better student
- to become more skilled at defining his own independent paths and strategy in learning and work
- to be able to train his skills in tackling tasks

The other group discussed lifelong learning from the point of view of the social environment/ working environment of the student and the emphasis was on eliciting proposals and ideas regarding:

- the legal framework for learning in all areas
- regulations and work practices
- views in society in general

The reviews were conducted such that various individuals were contacted that were thought to have a good grasp of the subject under review. In choosing participants efforts were also made to make the selection broad in order to get as many opinions as possible. The participants were reminded that they were taking part as individuals and not as representatives of specific interest groups or of certain points of view. There was great interest in participating and about 20 people took part at each meeting which lasted for 3-4 hours. Before the meeting the participants received a comprehensive list of questions on the subject under review and were asked to consider them prior to the meeting, but without writing down answers. A kind of brainstorming was used at the meetings where participants write down their own ideas and comments on the subject. After the participants had written down their ideas there were discussions on assertions in order to elicit as many views as possible. Participants were also given the opportunity to read what others had written, comment on it or make additions.

At the review meetings there were more than 600 comments, assertions and ideas collected, that were then categorised. From the categorisation the salient issues were taken and the conclusions used as input for the work of the working groups.

Though initially there had been two views or approaches, the discussions were such that the conclusions of both groups were very consistent so that in the analysis the conclusions were merged and processed as a whole.

Analysis of the discussions at the reviews

The main purpose of the reviews was to shed light on the social and/or changes of opinion are occurring that relate to lifelong learning and to determine whether these changes call for alterations to the system.

At the same time ideas were sought on how to support positive change, in accordance with the opinions and will of the community, and on how to avoid changes that conflict with opinions and customs or that inhibit normal development of the society.

The meetings both went well and they returned more than 600 assertions regarding lifelong learning that give a picture of current views or those that are emerging in Icelandic society today.

A project employee categorised and analysed the results.

Synopsis from 600 assertions

General

- The issue is wide and has many facets, and there is every reason to tread carefully when making changes.
- Research is needed and it is important to gain consensus on aims and methods.

- Scrutinise and review what we evaluate and where we wish to place emphasis in the work of schools and also how we evaluate the work being done. (are there unrealistic emphases given current circumstances)
- An in-depth review must be conducted on what children need to know and learn.
- Teaching has a dual role: build up the student's knowledge and bring him to maturity In general the emphasis is shifting to developing the student. This change of emphasis could impinge negatively on a student's level of knowledge, particularly in the early years of school and the result could look bad in Pisa surveys.
- Scientific and professional work procedures need to be strengthened in all areas.

The teacher

- The teacher's task are changing. More emphasis on the instructor role, work management, encouragement and reward.
- The teacher is as always the most important party in the system, so the main emphasis needs to be on the teacher, his skills and his work.
- Teacher self assessment should be used and they need to be supported as school staff.
- Who has the role of instructing and encouraging teachers.
- The teacher is part of the team that ensures that all students achieve success commensurate with their ability.
- Teachers' knowledge and skills for teamwork need to be enhanced.
- The teacher is part of the student's working environment in addition to being the one who plays the largest role in designing this environment.

Schools, support system and communications with external parties

- The support system needs to be strengthened with management and running of the schools and schoolwork as a whole.
- Organisation and management in the school system as a whole needs to be strengthened.
- Guarantee that there is a good flow between school levels and school systems.
- The communications between schools and parents should be more targeted and more professional.
- In schools there should be cross-disciplinary cooperation to help those students that are different and collaboration with parents, family and specialised institutions should be more targeted.
- Families that need to encourage their children should be helped. parents also need to be encouraged.
- Preventative measures against dropout need to be in place.
- It must be assured that schools get exact and fair assessment such that they can make improvements, where and when needed, in order to improve results and also because of expected cooperation between schools.

The student and the student's self esteem

- Help the student build his self esteem.
- Teach and support students social skills.
- Research society's views and parents' role in self esteem.
- Teach students about their emotions and about their strengths and weaknesses.
- Teach about self esteem, about money matters, assessment of value, depression, study skills, relations between parents and children and other issues that are prerequisites for achieving results.
- Rights and obligations of parents and children.
- Encourage moderate peer competition, as in sports.
- Divide by ability, not everyone in the same department.
- Teach and train students to actively participate as students.
- Build up student self esteem and encourage being different and variety.
- Learn to know and tackle mental pain and disappointment.
- Learning is a change that costs sacrifice and effort.
- The student develops best by learning through work.

Innovation and entrepreneurship

- Increase the number of entrepreneurs through upbringing and teaching.
- Design a social environment that encourages learning and change.

- There should be increased emphasis on strengthening student initiative.
- Look at results not at titles or examinations.

Schools and school work

- There is a call for more management skills in the schools, particularly human resources management skills.
- More breadth of education is needed in school staff.
- The schools need more independence which in turn requires more monitoring of the schools and more management skills in the schools.
- School managers' management tools are too weak and need to be strengthened.
- The school should treat students as material, and all students should receive help to achieve the maturity and skills of which they are capable.
- A student's weaknesses should be identified at the outset and should be tackled until he can learn in the same manner as his peers.
- Emphases in preventative work.
- Active assessment and reward as a method to achieve better results.
- Assessment and reward should underpin work and work methods and it should be ensured that the student and the teacher do not simply take the easiest options.
- Preventative measures against dropout during the last phase of schooling need to be in place.
- Make a distinction between management by discipline and the desire to be successful.
- Introduce a skills portfolio where a record is kept of completed tasks, of learning and work career, endorsed by a teacher or supervisor.
- A good assessment system must be developed, that evaluates most aspects of learning and skills for all.
- Such a system should be able to bridge the gap between school and the employment sector.
- One cannot ignore the productivity philosophy and the demand for assessment and tests in all areas, but ways must also be found to confirm skills and ability by other means and with a broader assessment.

Vocational education (to learn through work and projects)

- where vocational education suits a student better than academic learning then it should be available on an equal footing with academic learning.
- vocational education will be taken up wider than in practical subjects such that students gain first hand experience of the work.
- More emphasis should be placed on increasing student skills in solving problems.
- It is thought that a student matures fastest by tackling real problems.
- School should not just be office work.
- More variety and change in students' education.

The employment sector and lifelong learning

- Human resources management is quickly making ground in companies with staff with a high level of knowledge, but others need more help in introducing these techniques.
- Staff interviews, where staff knowledge and skill building is discussed, have become established in those companies where staff have university education, while other companies still have along way to go and require support.
- Efforts need to be targeted more at arousing the interest of the disadvantaged in following an appropriate course of learning.
- One should avoid a separation between courses run by the employment sector and those in the school system.
- Emphasis on teaching and learning being separated from general work.?
- Separate learning and work.

General

The main point here is that we live in a very good community of happy and active citizens that are in general interested in learning. It can be dangerous to disturb the equilibrium but at the same time it is important not to stagnate.

It is also important to keep in mind that lifelong learning touches all facets of society which makes it a complex issue. We must retain what is good while at the same time meeting new demands and circumstances in an innovative manner. Iceland is one of those countries that is doing best and it can often be difficult to find good

role models to emulate, so we must develop our own methods and approach and must set our own objectives. It is particularly dangerous to pay too much attention to surveys and comparison with other cultures without taking all variables into consideration.

There is full intent in the community to increase considerably the quality and operations in learning and teaching in all areas. Nor is there a lack of knowledge on how to perform this task, but it is important to be absolutely aware of the fact that the task is both complex and wide-reaching and that tangible results will not appear until after some time has elapsed.

Opinion and changes in opinion

The principle of equality is held dear in Iceland and also that the individual should be allowed to decide for himself and choose what he considers best and gives him most fulfilment. and gives him most fulfilment. The emphasis in schools should be first and foremost to build the student's skills and maturity, with knowledge-building coming in second place. In the same manner it is also a broadly held view that the individual may differ from the majority and should not suffer as a result. This view is for example manifested in the demand that the education system should meet the special needs of individuals much more than it does at present such that all will receive equal opportunity to grow and mature. This demand has however not been analysed such that it is clear how much its fulfilment will cost and where the boundary lies between feasibility and fairness. In the review group the opinion was that if a student's family or employer needed assistance then it is the job of the school or of other community institutions to provide the help required for the individual in question to reach the maturity within his capabilities. The view in the review group was also that this service should be on the initiative of schools and/or other institutions where they should monitor, then offer assistance where necessary, without waiting for a request for assistance.

An analogous shift of opinion is taking place in the employment sector. There is increased emphasis on structured learning for staff and the salaries agreements of all trade unions guarantee employees equal access to learning. In general everyone's right to lifelong learning is recognised and funds are allocated for this provision but the professions vary greatly in the extent to which they participate in structured learning and companies also vary in the extent to which they help or enable their staff to learn. It is therefore important that the employment sector provide support services or assistance for those that need encouragement or direct help in organising their training or other skill-building.

In the review group it clearly emerged that the tasks of school and the workplace were in two categories, on the one hand to teach specific knowledge and skills and on the other hand to contribute to the individual's development. Participants in the group considered that increased maturity should be the main objective of the teaching. It also emerged that the student needs to continuously learn more and more and that the teacher needs continuously to handle a variety of demands and communications between the teacher and the students and their families become more and more time-consuming. It is fairly clear that individual teachers cannot provide all that is required but that this should be the joint task of the educational institution in cooperation with the institutions involved in assuring the welfare of citizens.

The new legislation governing compulsory education and upper secondary schools opens many possibilities while at the same time moving more responsibility to the schools. At the review doubts were expressed about whether the schools were generally competent in terms of management to take on the responsibility given to them by the new legislation, unless they received targeted support and advice.

You need a society to bring up an individual, and in the same way you could say that you need school institutions to lead an individual through his schooling.

The knowledge, experience and skills are available in the educational institutions. The opportunities to improve results even more lie in achieving and managing better the cooperation between all players in the task, including parents, students and employers.

The key is how we strengthen the management component in the system. How do we train our teachers to collaborate more effectively on how to define tasks and responsibility and to set objectives.

Tasks ahead, and a few proposals and questions from the review groups.

Questions that need to be answered

- How much weighting should we give the demand that all should work on improving themselves?
- How protective should we be?
- How deep is the cultural difference between the groups, on the one hand those who wish to learn and on the other those who see no reason to do so. Is it possible to identify the cultural difference?
- Is it possible to design a communication system that bridges this cultural difference?
- Is it necessary to strengthen the social environment by e.g. establishing a support system that supports and promotes changes towards a situation where a larger percentage wants to and can learn.
- The issues that particularly need to be discussed should be highlighted and be debated publicly such that the public's wishes and views in these matters are clear.
- In the debate, emphasis was placed on preventing a situation where individuals vanishes or are forgotten in the system. Done with a mixture of external and internal supervision.
- It is important that institutions work together in order to provide students and their families with the help they need.
- Build up the support system for staff that are not motivated to take advantage of the services that are available to them. One needs to work in a targeted manner with the individual and his immediate environment.
- An active system needs to be developed to monitor the implementation and quality of school work and it must be made possible to react, if and when satisfactory results are not being achieved.
- How do we measure results.
- New legislation provides for increased independence and thus responsibility for the schools, their managers and the school committees. This change will lead to managers needing to apply, in a targeted manner, company methodologies in the new companies that the schools are. In the same manner it will be necessary to ensure normal competition in operation and that it does not lead to schools competing to enrol students in curricula that give the best operational profit.
- It is predictable that in the competition it will be expensive to provide for students' special needs and it is not clear how it can be ensured that this will be done.
- Ensure that schools design and offer options for those who are not inclined to academic learning.
- A change of perception where the student has the knowledge or the learning programme.

Synopsis for each working group

The development of education levels

In general the qualifications awarded by schools weigh heavily and most people define themselves with reference to these qualifications even a long time after they were gained and where the individual has gained other skills and knowledge.

The main comments are that there is a great need for transparency and visibility in all areas regarding the knowledge and abilities of individuals, and at the same time there are reservations about making these matters too complicated.

It was often pointed out that an even more effective system was required to assist and encourage individuals to develop themselves and their talents.

Systems are becoming more and more complex such that one needs better directions in order to navigate the systems.

What changes need to be made and what should be preserved.

The main issue is:

This system demands significant development costs and there is also considerable cost in maintaining the system and assisting people to use the system. EU is adopting the system but there is great doubt about whether the EU will succeed in implementing the system.

This is an issue of trust. The system must be well-promoted for it to work and it has to prove itself in practice. There will be great pressure to record people's talents and capability, and great temptation to exaggerate the capabilities of individuals who will not meet expectations when demands are made on them. Employers must be able to trust the system under pressure and until this is ensured then the old methods will take precedence.

The system can on the other hand be an important tool to bridge the communications gap between the labour market and schools and to provide a systematic framework for these communications. And also as a tool for managers and staff who organise learning in companies.

Dropout from education

The emphasis is on developing the individual and in using as many devices as possible to this end. Doing this through tasks is considered most important.

Do not focus too much on Pisa statistics except when evaluating part of education that deals with the transfer of knowledge.

Examine more carefully the individual's support environment and develop it.

Use the system to find quickly those who are at risk and find ways to give them support and assistance.

Organise the monitoring system to monitor performance in each area.

Look at the school as a whole and not at individual teachers.

Increase collaboration with parties outside the system and with the health system as a whole.

Strengthen the schools' management systems and place more emphasis on them being learning companies.

More opportunities and more variety.

What changes need to be made and what should be preserved.

Salient points:

It came up repeatedly in this discussion that with many teachers, or rather in many schools at the compulsory level, it was common that students who were in some way different, were left to their own devices. In this way individuals complete their compulsory education such that they are unable to meet the demands of upper secondary schools and drop out for that reason. The question is what can be done to correct this? Stricter supervision of schools and teachers. Better internal monitoring in the schools. More time for the teachers. Joint effort and collaboration with outside parties.

There is another kind of dropout scenario where the student simply decides not to learn because something more attractive is on offer.

Are we too tolerant?

Strengthening continuing education

Collaboration between educational institutions and companies and more visibility of knowledge and of what is being done in companies. They should not work in isolation. More emphasis on the visibility of what is being done in companies; increased collaboration between schools and companies in organising learning in companies and making it more targeted. Find out if it possible to formalise in some manner the communications between companies and schools such that knowledge credits are recognised.

Student-oriented learning also applies in companies. Companies need to know or possibly better understand the methodology that they are actually applying such that it is used more effectively.

What about the support systems such as the career advisors' support system? Should a system be made to help companies develop more effective work within the companies.

The key issue here is recognition of what has been done and that recognition in part involves coordinating work in companies and schools such that qualifications and degrees in companies are equivalent to those awarded in schools.

Demand for more variety

What changes need to be made and what should be preserved.

Management knowledge in companies is generally on the increase and more emphasis is being placed on companies being knowledge companies. An increasing number of companies operate as academies such that individuals are made responsible for their own learning within the companies such as through employee interviews where the way in which the employee will develop himself is examined. In this respect, schools and companies are getting closer.

Examples of window gazing and how specialist are integrated into the whole and how the composite knowledge of the team is designed.

This development has particularly taken place in companies where the majority of employees have an academic education and now the trade unions and FA have started to push their members and companies to follow a similar path.

The question is what more can be done and how.

The next question is whether people should be left to their own devices. Should everyone be learning something, whether they want to or not.

Development of teacher education

It is clear that the teacher plays a key role in bringing the student to maturity and in ensuring that he gains the specified knowledge credits.

This dual role is both complex and delicate and demands many distinct knowledge units and experience that one cannot assume to be at the command of individual teachers. It should thus be seen as a joint task for many parties, i.e. the school as a whole, and in many instances the task cannot be completed without the support of various players in the healthcare system.

What about the education of school managers, or the education of professionals who are to impart specialised work education that must take place in the work place.

What about the role of teachers in monitoring the mental state of students?

Everything stands or falls by the teacher.

How is it possible to:

Make the teacher's job more effective by increasing his own knowledge and understanding of his subject or task. Clearer aims and clearer measurable demands.

Provide the teacher with a working environment that collaborates with him in handling difficult issues. An environment that is stimulating and encouraging.

Teach teachers to work more as part of a team.

Demand for more variety and more breadth.

What changes need to be made and what should be preserved.

Salient points:

Demands and variety are increasing so much that it is not realistic to expect the individual teacher to be able to fulfil these demands. Teaching students is become a collaborative effort of many parties. For these parties to succeed in working effectively together they need to operate in a management system that can coordinate their work and evaluate results.

Teachers need above all to be able to work in this manner.

Strengthening vocational education

The basic principle in student based learning is that the student learns through tasks such that the learning combines the assimilation of some knowledge with the student gaining the skills and confidence that enable him to take on new tasks and thus further enhance his learning. When trying to achieve two objectives simultaneously then the danger is that neither will be adequately reached, which could explain why Iceland performs below expectations in the Pisa surveys, but the question is whether this is an acceptable sacrifice. Such a decision needs to be taken deliberately and publicly.

The key issue here is to learn and develop through tasks. Interweave learning at the workplace with school learning.

Develop methods that suit those that need to use another approach in their work, an approach that is better suited to learning through tasks.

Find out how the management system can tackle these matters.

Harmonise the two cultures of traditional school learning and learning through work or tasks.

In summary, one has to develop a system or methods to harmonise the differing cultures of formal and non-formal learning. Regulations need to be written and consensus on collaboration between the technical upper secondary schools and companies must be reached.

Education and support needs to be developed and funding must be found to ensure that all who are learning enjoy parity of opportunity, regardless of whether they are in vocational or academic education.

Vocational education also needs to achieve better status and esteem. Ways must be found to enable the student to identify himself with his curriculum and to free himself from traditional categorisation.

In the labour market jobs are made more varied in order to meet the needs that education brings, so that the jobs will be more attractive.

Demand for more variety

What changes need to be made and what should be preserved.

There were many comments on the image of practical trades and of the poor demand for learning such trades.

There is on the other hand a great demand for subjects that demand corresponding qualities and skills. Are men and women looking for a position in life or for rewarding tasks. Could it be that part of the problem is that the cultural difference between companies and schools make cooperation between them difficult.

The quest for degrees is the result of a lack of realistic and accredited evaluation of individuals' skills and knowledge.

Appendix III. List of conference participants

Gunnar Gíslason	Akureyrarbær - skóladeild
Jónína Ágústsdóttir	Akurskóli
Karitas Kvaran	Alþjóðaskrifstofu háskólastigsins
Halldór Grönvold	Alþýðusambandi Íslands
Ólafur Sigurðsson	Borgarholtsskóli
Gunnar Einarsson	Bæjarstjóri Garðabæjar
Atli Lýðsson	Eflingu stéttarfélagi
Kristín Jónsdóttir	Endurmenntunarstofnun H.Í.
Bryndís Þráinsdóttir	Farskóla Norðurlands vestra
Jóhann Ingólfsson	Farskóli Norðurlands vestra
Heimir Jón Guðjónsson	Fjölbrautaskólanum í Breiðholti
Gísli Ragnarsson	Fjölbrautaskólanum við Ármúla
Leifur A. Ísaksson	Fjölbrautaskóli Suðurnesja
Guðmunda Smáradóttir	Framvegis - miðstöð um símenntun í Rvk
Ingibjörg Elsa Guðmundsdóttir	Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins
Sigrún Jóhannesdóttir	Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins
Halla Bogadóttir	Gullsmiður
Ari Ólafsson	Háskóli Íslands
Guðmundur Kristmundsson	Háskóli Íslands
Jón Torfi Jónasson	Háskóli Íslands
Guðrún Geirsdóttir	Háskóli Íslands
Allyson Macdonald	Háskóli Íslands
Ágúst Þór Árnason	Háskólinn á Akureyri
Þóra Sigurðardóttir	Hönnunar- og handverksskólinn
Gylfi Einarsson	Iðan fræðslusetur
Hildur Elín Vignir	Iðan fræðslusetur
Ólafur Jónsson	Iðan fræðslusetur
Þór Pálsson	Iðnskólanum í Hafnarfirði
Jóhannes Einarsson	Iðnskólanum í Hafnarfirði
Þór Pálsson	Iðnskólanum í Hafnarfirði
Ingibjörg Jónasdóttir	Kaupþingi banka
Björg Bjarnadóttir	Kennarasambandi Íslands
Elna Katrín Jónsdóttir	Kennarasambandi Íslands
Kristín Jónsdóttir	Kvöldskóli Kópavogs
Dóra Stefánsdóttir	Landskrifstofa Menntaáætlunar ESB
Guðrún Ebba Ólafsdóttir	Laugalækjarskóla
Guðjónína Sæmundsdóttir	Leikn
Björg Birgisdóttir	Listaháskóla Íslands
Ingibjörg Kristinsdóttir	Listaháskóla Íslands
Arnór Guðmundsson	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Björg Pétursdóttir	Menntamálaráðuneyti

Katrín Jakobsdóttir	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Ólafur Grétar Kristjánsson	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Sigurður Sigursveinsson	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Sigurjón Mýrdal	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Sólrún Jensdóttir	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Stefán Stefánsson	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Þórir Ólafsson	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Rósa Gunnarsdóttir	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Hildur Skarphéðinsdóttir	Menntamálaráðuneyti
Ragnar Þorsteinsson	Menntasvið Reykjavíkurborgar
Hulda Ólafsdóttir	Mímir símenntun
Ingibjörg Jóhannsdóttir	Myndlistaskólinn í Reykjavík
Júlíus Björnsson	Námsmatsstofnun
Aðalheiður Jónsdóttir	Rannís
Ágúst H. Ingþórsson	Rannsóknáþjónusta H.Í.
Ástríður Guðlaugsdóttir	Rannsóknáþjónusta H.Í.
Eyrún Rúnarsdóttir	Rannsóknáþjónusta H.Í.
Sigurður Guðmundsson	Rannsóknáþjónusta H.Í.
Guðfinna Harðardóttir	Samband íslenskra sveitarfélaga
Svandís Ingimundardóttir	Samband íslenskra sveitarfélaga
Sigurður Albert Ármannsson	Sambandi íslenskra bankamanna
Guðrún Eyjólfsdóttir	Samtök atvinnulífsins
Jónína Gissurardóttir	Samtök atvinnulífsins
Jón Steindór Valdimarsson	Samtök iðnaðarins
Sigríður Anna Guðjónsdóttir	Samtök verslunar og þjónustu
Kristín Guðmundsdóttir	Sjúkraliðafélag Íslands
Birna Ólafsdóttir,	Sjúkraliðafélag Íslands
Þóra Björk Jónsdóttir	Skólaskrifstofa Skagfirðinga
Kristín Hreinsdóttir	Skólaskrifstofa Suðurlands
Hulda Anna Arnljótsdóttir	Starfsmennt
Baldur Gíslason	Tækniskólinn
Jón B. Stefánsson	Tækniskólinn
Stefanía Magnúsdóttir	Verslunarmannafélagi Reykjavíkur
Vigdís Þyri Ásmundsdóttir	