



THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN ICELAND

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
1998



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BACKGROUND

Iceland is a republic with a parliamentary democracy.

Iceland is an island in the North Atlantic Ocean, on the borders of the temperate and the Arctic zones, with its extreme northern point touching the Arctic Circle. Its nearest neighbour to the west is Greenland, at a distance of 278 km. Some 420 km to the southeast lie the Faroe Islands.

Iceland's total area is approximately 103,000 km² of which only 23% is arable land.

As of the 1st of December 1997, the population of Iceland was 272,064 with a population density of ca. 2.5 inhabitants per km². Icelandic is the national language.

Iceland is a republic with a parliamentary democracy. The President is elected by popular vote

for a four-year term. Executive power lies with the cabinet formed by the political parties. The government must have the direct or indirect support of the majority of the Icelandic parliament, which has 63 members. Parliamentary elections are held at intervals of four years or less.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the official state church.

Local government is exercised by 162 municipalities.

In 1996, the principal employment sectors were: agriculture, 4.5% of work force; fishing and fishing industry, 10.9%; industry other than fishing, 11.1%; construction, 6.5%; commerce and repair services, 13.7%; hotel and

A fundamental principle of Icelandic education is that everyone should have equal opportunities to acquire an education.

restaurant, 3.1%; transport and communications, 7.1%; banking and insurance, 3.2%; public administration, 4.2%; real estate and business services, 6.2%; education, 6.7%; health services and social work, 14.7%; others, 8.1%.

As of the 1st of November 1997, 3.8% of the work force was unemployed.

Basic principles

A fundamental principle of Icelandic education is that everyone should have equal opportunities to acquire an education, irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, religion, possible handicap, and cultural or social background. According to the law of 1974 on the educational system, everyone is entitled to free compulsory upper secondary and higher education. Education in Iceland has tradi-

tionally been organised within the public sector, and there are very few private institutions in the school system. Almost all private schools receive public funding.

At the pre-school level, teaching and education are carried out with clear goals in mind, under the guidance of specially trained personnel.

The main purpose of compulsory schooling (ages six to sixteen years) is to prepare pupils for life and work in a continuously developing, democratic society. The organisation of the school as well as its work shall, therefore, be guided by tolerance, Christian values and democratic co-operation.

At the upper secondary level, which normally includes the sixteen- to twenty-year age group,





The Icelandic parliament is legally and politically responsible for the educational system.

anyone who has completed compulsory education or has turned eighteen has the right to enter a course of studies. An effort must be made to give pupils a choice of subjects and forms of instruction in accordance with their needs and wishes. The primary aims of upper secondary education are to prepare pupils for life and work in a democratic society by offering them suitable opportunities to learn and develop individually, and prepare them for employment through specialised studies leading to professional qualifications or further study.

Universities are charged with the task of carrying out research and offering higher education programmes in different subjects as stipulated by the legislation governing each institution.

The main purpose of adult education is to encourage equality

of opportunity among adults without regard to location, age, gender, occupation or previous education.

Distribution of responsibility

Icelandic parliament is legally and politically responsible for the educational system. It determines its basic objectives and administrative framework. All education comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, with the exception of a few specialised schools.

The educational system has, to a large extent, been decentralised both with regard to responsibilities and decision-making. This reflects a general trend in Icelandic society. Local municipalities are responsible for the operation of pre-schools and primary and lower secondary schools. On the other hand, the state runs the upper secondary schools and schools at the higher education level.

Central administration

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is directed by a Secretary General, who acts on the instructions of the Minister.

The Ministry is divided into three offices:

- Office of the Minister and Secretary General, which includes four departments: Administra-

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues the National Curriculum Guidelines for compulsory and upper secondary education

tion, Financial Affairs, International Relations and Legal Affairs.

- Office of Education and Research
- Office of Cultural Affairs.

Each of these departments and offices is under the control of a Director General.

The Ministry determines the educational programme for pre-school education at the national level by issuing an educational programme which the pre-schools are to follow.

The Ministry issues the National Curriculum Guidelines for compulsory and upper secondary education. These National Curriculum Guidelines are intended both to provide the detailed objectives necessary to implement the law and offer direction as to how they should be carried out in practice.

The National Centre for Educational Materials (under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture) develops and publishes educational materials for compulsory schools and distributes them to pupils free of charge.

The Institute for Educational Research is an independent institution funded by the state through the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Its main function is to carry out research in the field of education, both at the compulsory and upper secondary levels. The Institute is responsible for organising, setting and grading the nationally co-ordinated examinations.

By law, each higher education institution is directly responsible to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.





Local municipalities are responsible for the full operation of pre-schools, primary and lower secondary schools.

Local administration Local municipalities are responsible for the full operation of pre-schools, and primary and lower secondary schools. Apart from being represented in the school boards of upper secondary schools, local municipalities have no administrative responsibilities at the upper secondary level, or at the higher education level.

Pre-school education is controlled by the pre-school board which supervises pre-school educational affairs in the municipality concerned. The larger municipalities have pre-school representatives who are employees of the municipalities in question. The pre-school representative works in co-operation with the pre-school and its director, giving advice, monitoring the operation of the pre-schools within that municipality and promoting

co-operation between the individual pre-schools.

A school board is responsible for compulsory educational affairs for each municipality. It is to ensure that all children of school age in the area receive the instruction prescribed by law. Local municipalities are responsible for the full operation of schools at the compulsory level (primary and lower secondary education), including the construction, operation and maintenance of facilities in accordance with the law of 1995 concerning compulsory education.

There is no local administration at the upper secondary and higher education level.

Evaluation and supervision

According to legislation and regulations on pre-school education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for carrying out a comprehensive evaluation of pre-schools, i.e. their general educational performance with regard to the national objectives and the schools' educational plans.

Legislation adopted in 1995 on compulsory education and in 1996 on upper secondary education stipulates that all compulsory and upper secondary schools



The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture shall investigate the self-evaluation methods used by compulsory and upper secondary schools at a five-year interval.

are to adopt methods of evaluating school activities, including instruction and administrative practices, internal communication and external relations. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is to investigate the self-evaluation methods used by the schools at five-year intervals.

The Ministry is responsible for carrying out evaluation of compulsory schools and their activities to ensure that schooling complies with provisions of the law on compulsory education and the National Curriculum Guidelines.

According to recent legislation and regulations concerning individual higher education institutions, evaluation of university programmes must be conducted on a regular basis. In recent years, the Ministry has taken steps to initiate such regular evaluation.

Financing

Local municipalities pay for the construction and the operation of pre-schools and primary and lower secondary schools. Parents pay fees for their children to attend pre-schools. Compulsory education (primary and lower secondary), including textbooks and materials, is completely free of charge but in upper secondary and higher education only tuition is free. The state pays for all educational materials at the compulsory level.

The operating costs of upper secondary education are funded by the state. Construction costs and initial capital investment for equipment are divided between the state and the municipalities, which pay 60% and 40% respectively.

University level institutions receive annual budget allocations which they themselves administer.





PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Pre-school is the first school level in Iceland.

General description

The present legislation concerning pre-schools was passed in 1994. The first article of the law defines pre-schools as the first level of the educational system. According to the law, pre-schools are to provide education for children who have not reached the age at which compulsory education begins.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture lays down the framework and policy for pre-school education, including its educational role, and sets the general policy regarding the methods used. The Ministry is to issue an educational programme that specifies the aims that pre-schools are to follow and describes the basic means and attitudes that apply in the education

of young children. The Ministry is also to see to it that the education provided in pre-schools blends in smoothly with the education that children receive in the first years of compulsory education.

Local municipalities have the responsibility of implementing the law on pre-school education. According to the law, the construction and operation of pre-schools are to be funded and administered by local municipalities, which are to establish and operate pre-schools for children and manage the schools in accordance with the law. They are, furthermore, expected to employ pre-school representatives who advise on matters that pertain to such schools and supervise their operation.

Most pre-schools are established and run by the municipalities.

All parents pay fees for their children to attend pre-school. Parental contributions cover roughly 30% of the operating costs of publicly run pre-schools. The fees in privately run pre-schools are around 15-20% higher than in the public ones.

Pre-schools are most often in buildings that are specifically designed and constructed for their operation, and they are situated where there is enough room to have a spacious playground, approximately 30 to 40 square metres of space for each child. Indoors, 7 square metres of space are required for each child. Pre-schools are intended for both boys and girls, and with only one exception, pre-schools in Iceland are co-educational.

Most pre-schools are established and run by the municipalities.

Other parties may also operate a pre-school in consultation with the municipality. Almost all private pre-schools receive financial support from the municipality.

Pre-schools are for all children who have not reached the age at which compulsory school begins, i. e. the 1st of September of the year in which the child turns six. However, very few pre-schools accept children less than one year old, and the youngest children are usually two years of age. In local municipalities where there may be insufficient room to accommodate all applicants, the children of single parents and students are often given priority.

Handicapped children have the same right as other children to attend pre-schools, and in many cases are given a priority status





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in regard to admission. The programme for handicapped children is the same as for other children, but adapted to their abilities.

The children are usually divided into separate groups according to age. It is not uncommon, however, especially in smaller communities that children in different age brackets are kept together in a group.

Curriculum

The law concerning pre-schools defines their main aim in education as follows:

- to provide children with safe conditions in which to play and a healthy environment in which to grow up;
- to give children the opportunity of participating in games and activities and to enjoy the more varied educational opportunities

provided in groups under the direction of pre-school teachers;

- to place emphasis on encouraging, in co-operation with parents, the all-round development of the children in accordance with the individual nature and needs of each child and to strive to offer them the emotional and physical support needed to enjoy their childhood;
- to encourage tolerance and open-mindedness in the children and to provide them with equal opportunities to develop;
- to support their Christian ethical development and lay the foundations for children to become independent, conscious, active and responsible participants in a democratic society which is constantly and rapidly changing;
- to foster the children's creative and expressive abilities in order to strengthen their self-image, feelings of security and ability to solve problems in a non-aggressive manner.

As the law concerning pre-schools stipulates, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues an educational programme which they are to follow. This programme is to include a definition of the educational and pedagogical role of

The nucleus of the educational work in pre-schools is the play.

pre-schools and a policy of how that role is to be carried out. The current pre-school educational programme is based on a child-centred ideology, where emphasis is placed on childhood as a separate stage of development with special qualities which must be borne in mind; the individual development and needs of each child must be the focal point. The nucleus of educational work in pre-schools is play, which is considered the best way for the child to learn and mature.

Children attend pre-schools from 4 hours to a maximum of 9 hours a day.

Pre-school education is intended to bridge the gap between caring for children and educating them, supporting their all-round development and thus preparing them for primary school and life itself.

The educational programme for pre-schools is issued in lieu of a curriculum.

The programme deals with the following educational areas:

- Caring and daily routine
- Play and playing conditions
- Speech and speech stimulation
- Visual creativity and expression
- Music, sound and movement
- Nature
- Society

There are no clear demarcation lines between these areas as in the case of traditional school subjects and each pre-school determines how much time is spent on each area and how they are integrated.

Special Teaching

Pre-school-age children who need special assistance or training because of a handicap or





Special assistance or training is provided in pre-schools for handicapped children and children with emotional or social difficulties.

emotional or social difficulties are provided with such training. Aimed at increasing the child's competence, this training and is undertaken within the pre-school they attend, according to certain rules and under the supervision of a pre-school teacher, a social pedagogue or other specialists. All children who get special assistance or training are given regular check-ups to monitor their health and development.

Assessment

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

Heads of pre-schools see to it that the educational work that

takes place in their school is evaluated on a regular basis. The present law concerning pre-schools gives the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture the duty of carrying out a comprehensive assessment of their general educational performance.

Teachers

Pre-school teachers are required to complete a three-year course of studies at the Icelandic College for Pre-school Teachers or at the University of Akureyri. Most of the students who enter this college have completed matriculation examinations. The programme is divided into two-thirds academic subjects and one-third practical training in a pre-school under the supervision of a qualified pre-school teacher.

It has become quite common for qualified pre-school personnel to supplement their education after having worked for a minimum of three years in a pre-school. In-service training for pre-school teachers is not required by law.

Pre-school education is to be given by staff who has professional training in working with children at this level. It is not until the 1994 law on pre-school education that the title pre-school teacher is used officially, but it has not the status of a professional title.





COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Primary and lower secondary education form part of the same school level.

General description

In 1995, new legislation concerning compulsory schools was passed. In comparison with previous legislation, the greatest change is that as of the 1st of August, 1996, local municipalities took over the operation of schools at the compulsory level.

The law concerning compulsory education stipulates mandatory education for children and adolescents between the ages of six and sixteen. The law determines the length of the academic year and the minimum number of lessons to be given each week and defines which subjects are obligatory. The school year lasts for nine months, normally beginning on the 1st of September and ending on the 31st of May. The number of school days is

170 and classes are held five days a week. School hours vary.

The law makes it the duty of parents to see to it that their children register for and attend school. The law also specifies the duty of the state and local municipalities to see to it that instruction, as decreed by law, be given.

There is no division between primary and lower secondary education. They form part of the same school level and usually take place in the same school. There are no entrance requirements at this school level, and all children are accepted at the age of six years. The enrolment rate is 100%.

Local municipalities operate

The local municipalities operate compulsory schools for children and adolescents between the ages of six and sixteen.

compulsory schools for children and adolescents between the ages of six and sixteen. They pay for instruction, general teaching, substitute teaching, administration and specialists' services as well as the establishment and running of schools at the compulsory level, and the provision of special education, including the teaching of children in hospitals and the operation of a school attached to the state psychiatric ward for children. Special schools follow the same programmes as ordinary compulsory schools. The law concerning schools at the compulsory level stipulates that all children are to receive suitable instruction, taking into account the nature of the pupil and his or her needs and promoting the development, health and education of each individual. Pupils have the right to attend school in the area where they live. Fur-

thermore, the school is to systematically integrate handicapped pupils into mainstream education.

The state monitors the implementation of educational law and regulations and is responsible for the publication of educational materials. Furthermore, the state is responsible for assessing individual schools and the educational work that is carried out in them to ensure that all such activities are in compliance with existing law and the National Curriculum Guidelines.

Local education offices provide schools with various specialist services, such as general pedagogical counselling, counselling in respect to particular subjects, educational counselling for students and school psychology services. Where such services are not offered by the local mu-





Almost one-half of all compulsory schools have fewer than one hundred pupils.

nicipalities themselves, the local authority in question is under an obligation to negotiate with other local municipalities or with institutions, such as teacher training institutions or other parties which provide similar services.

Compulsory school is divided into ten grades. Three types of schools are the most common: schools that have all ten grades, schools that have grades one to seven and schools that have grades eight to ten. Schools that have grades eight to ten are often merger schools, i.e. they take in pupils from more than one school in the catchment area that has grades one to seven.

The size of schools varies tremendously. The largest schools are in the capital and its suburbs and have about 700-800

pupils. In rural areas, outside Reykjavík and its suburbs, there are many small schools, some with fewer than 10 pupils.

Almost one-half of all compulsory schools have fewer than 100 pupils. All compulsory schools are co-educational, i.e., pupils of both sexes attend.

Smaller rural schools generally have only a single teaching shift, with all pupils attending at the same time, but many of the larger schools in urban areas are unable to accommodate all their pupils at the same time due to shortage of space. Classes are then staggered, with one portion of the pupils attending school during the earlier part of the day and the remaining portion during the latter part of the day. Some municipalities provide out-of-hours provision for the children. The children then remain at school after regular teaching is over, to study, play, and pursue their hobbies.

Home-room or advisory teachers, who are required for each class by law, are intended in particular to offer pupils advice on their studies and their study choice. Special school counselors are relatively rare and are found primarily in the larger schools.

The National Curriculum Guidelines apply to all grades and subjects in compulsory school.

Curriculum

The main aims of compulsory education, as stated in the law of 1995, are the following:

* to prepare pupils for life and work in a continually developing democratic society. The organisation of the school and the work that takes place there is thus to be guided by tolerance, Christian values and democratic co-operation.

* to aim at conducting its operation in the fullest possible accordance with the nature and needs of its pupils and to encourage the development, health and education of each individual.

* to give pupils an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills and to cultivate work habits that promote a continuous interest in seeking education and self-development. School work is therefore to lay the foundation for independent thinking and to train pupils' ability to co-operate with others.

On basis of the law, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues regulations and National Curriculum Guidelines. These provide the details of how the law is to be implemented and define more clearly the educational role of compulsory schools and the main objectives of instruction in individual subjects in accordance with that role.

The National Curriculum Guidelines are a further development of the law and have the legal status of a ministry regulation. They interpret the law and further specify what is to be co-ordinated in all Icelandic compulsory schools. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Guidelines set the parameters for each school and its staff in respect to organisation, execution and evaluation of education within that school. The National Curriculum Guidelines apply to all grades and subjects in compulsory school.

In addition to the National Curriculum Guidelines, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues guidelines on the proportion of total teaching time to be devoted to individual subjects for each year. The number of hours of instruction varies according to the age of the pupils.

According to the law on compulsory education, the staff of each school is obliged to write a school working guide which is to be based on the National Curriculum Guidelines, but gives each school an opportunity to take into account its circumstances and special characteristics. The school working guide is to be an administrative plan for each school.



calendar, the organisation of teaching, the aims and content of the education offered, pupil assessment procedures, assessment of the work that goes on in the school, extra-curricular activities and other aspects of the operation of the school.

According to the law concerning compulsory education, the number of lessons per week will be increased so that, by the academic year 2001-2002, the number of lessons per week will be 30 in grades 1 to 4, 35 in grades 5 to 7 and 37 in grades 8 to 10.

In the academic year of 2000 - 2001 the number of lessons per week in compulsory school will be 30 in grades 1 to 4, 35 in grades 5 to 7 and 37 in grades 8 to 10.

It is to account for the school year and to include an annual

During the academic year of 1997-98 the number of lessons for each grade was as follows:

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lessons per week	28	28	28	28	32	33	35	36	36	36

At the conclusion of ten years of compulsory education, the pupils' scheduled school time will have been divided among the various subjects in approximately the following manner:

Icelandic	18%
Mathematics	15%
Arts, crafts and home economics	20%
Modern languages	9%
Natural sciences	6%
Social studies	7%
Religious studies	3%
Physical education	10%
Electives and misc. extra studies	12%



The law on compulsory education provides for special instruction in Icelandic for children whose mother tongue is not Icelandic.

Icelandic, mathematics, arts and crafts, home economics, music, social studies, natural sciences and physical education are subjects which all pupils study from grade 1 through to grade 9. Danish is studied from grade 6 (eleven-year-olds) and English from grade 7. In the 10th grade (the final year of compulsory education), all pupils study Icelandic, mathematics, English, Danish and physical education, while other subjects and electives vary.

Pupils are generally expected to cover the same subject material at roughly the same speed. Individuals having difficulty are provided with remedial teaching, primarily in Icelandic and mathematics, but remain with their class for most of their lessons. Teachers choose teaching methods suited to their pupils, their instructional aims and the conditions under which they teach. In general, an attempt is made to provide as much variety as possible.

Instruction based on the school's immediate environment generally takes place in the form of field trips which are most often linked to studies in traditional subjects. Studies of pollution in a nearby lake or river or studies of soil erosion and actions to alleviate the problem are examples of projects related to natural

and social sciences.

In recent years, the number of immigrants has increased in Iceland. Most come from Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and from Asian countries. In the law on compulsory education, there are provisions for the rights of immigrant children, i.e., all children whose mother tongue is not Icelandic, to receive special instruction to help them learn Icelandic. According to a regulation in 1996 concerning the instruction in Icelandic for pupils whose mother tongue is not Icelandic, such pupils shall, as far as can be arranged and with the agreement of the local municipality in question, receive instruction in their mother tongue.

Special teaching

Compulsory school pupils experiencing academic or social difficulties are offered a considerable amount of remedial instruction, after the pupil's academic difficulties have been diagnosed. This instruction can take place in two different ways: either the remedial teacher works with the form teacher in the classroom, where he or she assists the pupil, or the pupil is taken out of the classroom and tutored by the remedial teacher on an individual basis or in a small group. A number of schools also have special departments for pupils with severe learning disabilities.



Nationally co-ordinated examinations in Icelandic and mathematics in grades 4 and 7 were set for the first time in 1996.

Assessment

Examinations and other forms of assessment, usually written, are carried out by individual teachers and schools. Assessment is therefore not standardised between different schools and teachers. The way in which the reports on pupils' progress are written varies greatly: the assessment could be in the form of a numerical or letter grade, or an oral or written commentary. Reports are given at regular intervals throughout the school year and at the end of each year.

At the end of the tenth and final year of compulsory education, all pupils sit the nationally co-ordinated examinations in Icelandic, mathematics, English and Danish. These examinations are composed, marked and organised by The Institute of Educational Research. Marks ranging from one to ten are given, based

on referenced criteria (10 being the highest). The purpose of these examinations is primarily to indicate the pupil's standing at the completion of his compulsory education and to assist her/him in choosing a course of upper-secondary study. At the end of compulsory schooling, all pupils receive a certificate stating their marks on both the nationally co-ordinated examinations and all other courses completed in their final year at school.

The law concerning compulsory education stipulates that nationally co-ordinated examinations in core subjects be instituted in the 4th and 7th grades. Nationally co-ordinated examinations for grades 4 and 7 were set for the first time in the autumn of 1996. The subjects examined were Icelandic and mathematics.

The Ministry is to produce survey examinations and standardised proficiency examinations for the schools, in order to measure the academic standing of students. The law also stipulates that each school is to introduce methods which will enable it to evaluate its own educational work. This evaluation must include, among other things, teaching and administration, communication within the school and relationships with external parties. Every five years

To qualify as a compulsory school teacher a three year course at a teacher training college is required as a minimum.

the school's methods of assessment are to be evaluated by an outside party.

The Ministry is also responsible for carrying out the evaluation of schools and school activities to ensure that schooling complies with the provisions of the law on compulsory education.

Teachers

At primary level (grades 1-7), the same teacher instructs a class in most subjects. At lower secondary level (grades 8-10), teachers generally teach one or more subjects to a number of different classes. Teachers may or may not continue with the same group from one year to another. To qualify as a compulsory

school teacher, a three-year course at a teacher training college is required.

Teachers are employed by the municipalities and work either full-time or part-time.

Participation in in-service training or continuing education is not compulsory, but collective bargaining agreements provide for teachers to attend training courses. Each year, teacher training institutions offer a variety of courses, both during the school year and in the summer.





UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Anyone who has completed compulsory education has the right to enter a course of studies in an upper secondary school.

General description

Upper secondary education is governed by law from 1996. Certain provisions of the law, however, will take effect in stages, with the full legislation completely implemented by the beginning of the school year 2000-2001. The law primarily defines the framework for education at that level, its aims, the role and responsibility of the state and local municipalities, as well as other parties involved in providing education at this level. More detailed provisions regarding the implementation of upper secondary education are to be found in regulations which the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues on the basis of the law in effect. In addition, the Ministry issues National Curriculum Guidelines which,

among other things, describe the objectives and contents of individual programmes of study.

Upper secondary education is not compulsory, but anyone who has completed compulsory education has the right to enter a course of studies in an upper secondary school. All schools at that level, like other schools in Iceland, are co-educational. Education at upper secondary level is free of charge but pupils pay an enrolment fee and must purchase their textbooks. Pupils in vocational training pay a part of the cost of materials they use.

Pupils may enter upper secondary schools at the end of compulsory schooling in the year they turn sixteen. In recent years, 87-89% of the pupils who

The main types of upper secondary schools are: grammar schools, industrial vocational schools, comprehensive schools and specialized vocational schools.

completed compulsory education have entered upper secondary education directly thereafter; the dropout rate during upper secondary schooling is, however, considerable.

The law concerning upper secondary education allows for varied admission requirements to different programmes of study at the upper secondary level according to what demands are made by the programme of study in question. However, all pupils have the right to education at this level. Those students who fail to meet minimum requirements at the end of compulsory school may take remedial courses in core subjects in an upper secondary school or go into a special department.

The school year, which lasts for nine months, is divided into autumn and spring terms. Pupils

generally attend 32 to 40 lessons per week, with each lesson lasting 40 minutes.

There are around 40 upper secondary schools, of varying size. The largest schools have around 1,500 pupils and the smallest fewer than 50.

The main types of upper secondary schools are as follows:

- Grammar schools that offer four-year academic programmes of study which conclude with matriculation examinations.
- Industrial-vocational schools, which offer theoretical and practical programmes of study in skilled and some non-skilled trades.
- Comprehensive schools that provide academic programmes comparable to those of the grammar schools and vocational





The unit-credit system is the most common form of upper secondary education.

programmes similar to those offered by the industrial-vocational schools, as well as other specialised vocational training programmes.

- Specialised vocational schools which offer programmes of study in preparation for specialised employment.

Generally speaking, courses of study at the upper secondary level can be divided into academically and vocationally oriented courses. However, this division is by no means without exceptions, as these two fields often overlap.

The law concerning upper secondary education stipulates that there should be four types of programmes of study: vocational programmes, fine arts programmes, academic programmes leading to matriculation and a

short general programme. According to the law, all programmes of study are to lead to further education either directly or through defined additional studies.

Upper secondary schools either have traditional classes or forms where all the pupils of a class follow a particular programme of study, or they operate according to a unit-credit system. In a unit-credit system the educational content of each subject is divided into a number of defined course units which last for one semester. Pupils in a given course form a group for that course unit and they are given a certain number of credits for each course unit they complete. The unit-credit system allows pupils to regulate the speed at which they complete their education, i.e. to accelerate their studies or take more time because of personal circumstances. The unit-credit system is now the most common form of upper secondary education, both in general academic studies and in vocational training.

Upper secondary schools generally offer educational counselling which, among other things, includes assistance in choosing a programme of study, in organising studies and making a study plan and assistance with study-related problems. Ed-

Some upper secondary schools have evening classes with programmes comparable to those of the day school.

educational counselling also often involves helping pupils with their personal problems.

Some upper secondary schools have evening classes with programmes comparable to those of the day school. These classes are intended in particular for adults who are not in a position to attend school in the daytime because of their jobs or work in the home.

Curriculum

The law defines the objectives of upper secondary education as follows:

- to encourage the overall development of pupils in order to prepare them as well as possible for active participation in a democratic society.
- to prepare pupils for employment and further study.
- to strive to develop responsibility, broad-mindedness, initiative, self-confidence and tolerance in its pupils, train them in disciplined and independent work practices and critical thought, instruct them in appreciation of cultural values and encourage them to seek knowledge continuously.

The National Curriculum Guidelines issued by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture is the main guide on school operations. Here, the objectives of

upper secondary school are further developed, the objectives of individual programmes of study and subjects are defined and the conclusion of study prescribed. The National Curriculum Guidelines prescribe the structure of individual programmes of study, coherence of study programmes and the normal length of study for each programme. The guidelines determine the minimum number of instructional periods in individual subjects and their general content.

The National Curriculum Guidelines are to make provision for assessment. They stipulate what requirements pupils must fulfil to be considered to have completed individual courses in a study programme satisfactorily and the minimum pass requirements for specific final examinations.

On the basis of the National Curriculum Guidelines, upper secondary schools are to write their own school working guides. School working guides are required, among other things, to specify what areas individual schools have chosen to emphasise, define the education they offer, their teaching methods and administration.

General Academic Education

General academic education is



Many forms of vocational training give the pupils legal certification for certain types of employment.

primarily organised as a four-year course leading to a matriculation examination. Subjects to be studied are divided into three groups: general subjects that all pupils are required to take, specialised subjects according to the aims of a particular programme of study and electives. About two-thirds of the course leading to matriculation has been of a general nature and common to all programmes.

According to legislation on upper secondary education, there are to be three academic programmes of study leading to matriculation: foreign languages, natural sciences and social sciences. However, there are possibilities for specialisation within each programme of study. Furthermore there is a shorter general programme of study for pupils who are undecided as to what to do after compulsory ed-

ucation or need further preparation for academic or vocational studies.

Vocational Education

Vocational education takes place in comprehensive schools, industrial-vocational schools and specialised vocational schools. The length of the courses they offer varies but the most prevalent are four-year courses. Many forms of vocational training give the pupils legal certification for certain types of employment. This applies to studies in the skilled trades, and also, for example, in the training of nurses' aides and in the course that qualifies sea-captains.

Within vocational education, pupils can choose between training for a skilled trade or vocational training in other areas, for example in the field of agriculture, in the travel industry, fisheries, the food production industry, or health and commerce.

Training for a skilled trade takes three to four years. It is comprised of a vocational programme of study at an upper secondary school and a study contract with a master craftsman or an industrial firm.

The pupil has the choice of one of the following avenues:

- an apprenticeship agreement with a master craftsman

The journeyman's examination provides the apprentice with qualifications to pursue the trade concerned.

- a one-year programme of basic academic and practical studies at an industrial-vocational school or a comprehensive school, followed by an apprenticeship agreement with a master craftsman.

- an initial one-year programme of basic academic and practical studies, followed by a one-year programme of specialised academic and practical studies at an industrial-vocational school or a comprehensive school, and finally an apprenticeship agreement with a master craftsman or an industrial firm.

Both industrial-vocational schools and comprehensive schools offer education with programmes or models of the same length and structure according to a common curriculum. On completion of studies, the apprentice takes the journeyman's examination, that

provides the qualifications required to pursue the trade concerned. During the training period, apprentices receive payment from the employer according to wage agreements.

An apprentice who has completed the journeyman's examination can become a master craftsman after a certain period of work experience and advanced studies at a vocational school. A master craftsman has the right to supervise work in his field.

The law on upper secondary education stipulates that pupils in vocational programmes are to be given the possibility of doing additional studies in preparation for study at the higher education level.

The law of 1996 concerning upper secondary education stipulates that a vocational council





Icelandic upper secondary schools generally have examinations at the end of every semester.

with representatives from employers and employees, in the vocations in question, in addition to one representative from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is to define the needs of the vocations in question in respect to knowledge and ability of the employees and to define the aims of that particular course of study. Vocational councils are also to make suggestions concerning the structure of vocational education and curriculum guidelines for special subjects that pertain to the vocation in question.

Special Teaching

According to the law on upper secondary education, handicapped pupils are to be provided with instruction and training according to their needs and to be given special support in their studies. Where possible, they are to be integrated into main-

stream education and do, for the most part, attend a regular class and follow the same subjects as other students, but with special assistance.

The law concerning upper-secondary schools contains provisions in respect to special teaching in Icelandic for those students whose first language is not Icelandic. It also provides for special instruction in Icelandic for Icelandic students who have lived abroad for long periods of time and for deaf students.

Assessment

Icelandic upper secondary schools generally have examinations at the end of every semester regardless of the type of school. Assignments completed during the semester often count towards the final mark. Certain courses have no final examination at the end of the semester and the grade is based on continuous assessment and on the assignments set.

For the skilled trades, there are journeyman's examinations which are the responsibility of the trade in question. According to the law, vocational councils make proposals concerning assessment in vocational training, including the journeyman's examination.



According to a recent law on upper secondary education, there are to be nationally co-ordinated final examinations in certain subjects.

Apart from the journeyman's examination, nationally co-ordinated examinations in upper secondary education have not been practised. Examinations have been the responsibility of each school. According to the law of 1996 on upper-secondary education, there are to be nationally co-ordinated final examinations in certain subjects. This provision will not come into effect completely until the school year 2000-2001.

The law on upper secondary education stipulates that upper secondary schools are to evaluate their educational work. This evaluation includes, among other things, teaching, administration and communication within the school. Each school's methods of self-evaluation are to be assessed externally every five years.

Teachers

Legislation stipulates that upper secondary teachers of academic

subjects shall have completed at least four full years of university education. At least two of these should be in a major subject and one year should be devoted to the study of education and instructional methodology. A comparable programme of study completed at a university abroad is also accepted as fulfilling this requirement. Teachers of vocational subjects or other technical subjects at a vocational school must be qualified in the field in which they teach or be a master craftsman in the trade in question and have, in addition, a minimum of two years experience working in the trade. They also are required to have completed a one-year programme of study in education and instructional methodology.

Teachers are paid by the state although they are hired by individual schools to teach the subject(s) in which they have specialised. In-service training courses are held annually.





HIGHER EDUCATION

New legislation on higher education institutions establishes the general framework for the activities of these institutions.

General description

The modern Icelandic system of higher education dates back to the foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911. The University of Iceland remains the principal institution of higher learning in Iceland, but over the last three decades new institutions of higher education have emerged with a more specialized focus, creating greater diversity on the higher education level.

New legislation on higher education institutions enacted in December 1997 establishes the general framework for the activities of these institutions. Under the new Act, the Icelandic term „háskóli“ is used to refer both to traditional universities and institutions which do not have re-

search responsibilities. According to the law the Minister of Education, Science and Culture determines whether and to what extent institutions shall engage in research. State higher education institutions will receive separate appropriations from the state budget, but the Minister may contract with state and private institutions to undertake specific projects and provide specific services. The lines of administrative authority are laid out in the law and external influence on institutions of higher education is ensured by reserving two seats on their governing councils for outside members. According to the legislation the Minister of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for establishing rules on quality evaluation and recognition of all



Icelandic students have a long tradition of travelling abroad for their higher education.

degrees offered. The role of each higher education institution is further defined in separate legislation on their activities.

Icelandic students have a long tradition of travelling abroad for their higher education. In recent years twenty percent of Icelandic students in higher education have been studying abroad at any given time, most of them in post-graduate studies.

Types of higher education institutions
Presently there are ten institutions of higher education in the country. Six offer university degrees, while others, mainly art colleges, offer diplomas. Most of the institutions of higher education are run by the state, but two are run by private parties with state support. Institutions of higher education differ in the extent to which they engage in

research and in the number of programmes of study they offer. Most colleges do not have research obligations and specialize in a single field of study, technical, vocational or the arts.

The University of Iceland is comprised of nine faculties with research and teaching responsibilities. The faculties are: arts, economics and business administration, engineering, law, medicine, natural sciences, odontology, social sciences and theology. Most faculties are further divided into departments. Most of the faculties offer post-graduate studies.

The University of Akureyri has four departments: Health-sciences, management study, fishery studies and teacher education.





In general, the admission to institutions at the higher education level requires students to have passed the matriculation examination.

The University College of Education is responsible for education of teachers at the pre-school and compulsory school levels as well as physical education and social pedagogy. It also offers a Master of Education (MEd) programme with specialization in curriculum studies, special education, educational administration and educational theory and provides continuing education for teachers. As of 1 January 1998 three colleges were merged with the University College of Education: a college for pre-school teachers, a college of physical education and a college of social pedagogy. The new University College of Education is divided into three departments: undergraduate studies, post-graduate studies and continuing education.

The Icelandic College of Engineering and Technology offers programmes in management,

civil and electrical engineering technology, laboratory and radiology technology.

The Co-operative College at Bifröst and the Hvanneyri College of Agriculture offer programmes in management and agricultural science respectively.

The following colleges offer diploma courses only:

The Icelandic College of Drama, the Icelandic College of Music and the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts in drama, music, fine and applied arts and design, and the Commercial College of Iceland, School of Computer Science.

Admission

In general, the admission to institutions at the higher education level requires students to have passed the matriculation examination or its equivalent. In some cases applicants with substantial work experience who have not completed their matriculation examination may be admitted. For the vocational and technical courses in colleges, practical experience in an appropriate field of study is usually required. All the institutions except the University of Iceland can restrict their intake of students. The art colleges hold entrance examinations.

As stated above, the University of Iceland, which admits two

In the Faculty of Medicine, Departments of Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Physiotherapy and in the Faculty of Odontology of the University of Iceland, a system of numerus clausus is in effect.

thirds of higher education students in Iceland, does not have general restrictions on admission for those who have passed the matriculation examination. However, in the Faculty of Medicine, Departments of Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Physiotherapy, and in the Faculty of Odontology a system of numerus clausus is in effect and the number of students who are allowed to continue following a competitive examination at the end of the first semester is limited. Also, for the Department of Pharmacy and the Faculty of Science, students are required to have matriculated from a mathematics, physics, or natural sciences branch of study of an upper secondary school in order to qualify for admission.

The legislation on higher education institutions of 1997 includes new provisions that allow all in-

stitutions to set their own admission criteria. Admission to higher education programmes may also be granted to students who have completed studies abroad which ensure sufficient preparation for university studies and are equivalent to the Icelandic matriculation examination. Institutions of higher education may also grant admission to students who have completed other studies in Iceland, which the faculties in question regard as sufficient preparation for studies at the institution.

Registration of first year students usually takes place from late May until mid June. The application deadline for foreign students, other than students from the Nordic countries, is 15 April of the year in which they wish to commence their studies. The University of Iceland and some other institutions also admit new





There are no tuition fees at state-run institutions of higher education.

students for the spring semester, with applications accepted during the first week of January.

Fees/student finance

There are no tuition fees at state-run Icelandic institutions of higher education, only registration fees. Privately run colleges charge tuition fees.

Icelandic students attending institutions of higher education are eligible for student loans from the Icelandic Student Loan Fund. The total loan received per annum depends upon the income of the student (and his/her spouse, as appropriate). Repayments commence two years after completion or discontinuation of studies.

In accordance with provisions of the EEA agreement governing the treatment of migrant workers from the European Union and

the EEA-EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein), individuals who have worked in Iceland at their trade or profession for at least one year are entitled to apply for a loan. Students from the Nordic countries who are permanent residents in Iceland and are registered at an Icelandic institution of higher education, are also eligible for student loans if they are not supported financially by their own country. The governing board of the Student Loan Fund may grant loans to other foreign students if reciprocity agreements have been concluded between their countries and Iceland.

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

Grants are available for post-graduate, research-oriented studies at universities in Iceland. The grants are awarded on the basis of a research proposal submitted jointly by a student and professor. The research proposal must also be approved by the respective university department.

In most institutions of higher education the academic year lasts from September to May.

Academic Year

In most institutions of higher education the academic year lasts from September to May and is divided into two semesters, autumn and spring. The autumn semester starts at the beginning of September and lasts until late December. The spring semester lasts from the beginning of January until the end of May.

Courses / Qualifications

Diploma Courses

A diploma or certificate is awarded after 2-3 years of post-secondary study in drama, fine and applied arts and design, music, computer studies, management and civil and electrical engineering.

First University Degrees

A BA degree is awarded to students who have completed 3 to 4 years of study in a degree

course in the fields of humanities, theology or social sciences and who have satisfactorily completed the required final thesis or research project.

A BS degree is awarded to students who have completed 3 to 4 years of study on a degree course in the fields of economics, business administration, natural sciences, health subjects, fishery studies, agricultural science and engineering.

A BEd degree is awarded to students who have completed 3 years of study in a degree course for pre-school teachers, compulsory school teachers and in social pedagogy. The BEd degree represents professional teacher certification at the respective school level.

BPhilIsl degree (Baccalaureatus Philologiae Islandicae) is award-





The Candidatus degree is an academic/professional degree in the fields of theology, medicine, pharmacy, law, business administration, engineering and dentistry.

ed after completion of the programme in Icelandic for foreign students offered at the University of Iceland. This degree is on the same level as the BA degree.

The Candidatus degree is offered only at the University of Iceland and qualifies the holder for a special office or profession. It is an academic/professional degree in the fields of theology, medicine, pharmacy, law, business administration, engineering and dentistry.

Postgraduate Degrees

The University of Iceland offers one-year programs of study (after the bachelor degree) leading to postgraduate certificates in education, social work, journalism and mass communication.

The MS degree is awarded after two years of post-graduate study in the faculties of medicine, eco-

nomics and business administration, engineering and natural sciences at the University of Iceland and the successful completion of a major thesis research project. The MA degree is awarded after two years of post-graduate study in the humanities and the social sciences at the University of Iceland and the successful completion of a major thesis research project. The MEd degree is awarded after two years of post-graduate study at the University College of Education and the successful completion of a major thesis research project.

There are two types of doctoral programmes and they are only offered at the University of Iceland. One is a program of study in Icelandic literature, Icelandic language and Icelandic history leading to a dr. phil. degree awarded by the Faculty of Arts. The admission prerequisite for this program is a first class MA degree from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Iceland. Students who have completed a first class MA degree from another faculty at the University of Iceland or from another university recognized by the Faculty of Arts may apply for admission to the doctoral programme. In such a case the student must pass a special entrance examination before being accepted.



University degrees are only awarded after students have written a final thesis or completed a research project.

The other doctoral programme is not an instructional or predefined course of studies but is based on independent research by a candidate. As a general rule this doctorate degree can only be awarded to individuals who have completed a professional degree (candidatus), a master's degree or the equivalent.

Assessment

Student assessment is usually based on written or oral examinations and individual assignments. University degrees are only awarded after students have written a final thesis or completed a research project.



Table 1.

Central and local government educational expenditure as proportion of GDP

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Public educational expenditure	4,88	5,09	5,20	5,04	4,88	4,89	5,34
Central government expenditure ¹⁾	3,72	3,78	3,71	3,57	3,39	3,34	3,05
Local government expenditure	1,16	1,31	1,49	1,48	1,49	1,54	2,29

¹⁾ Transfers between central and local governments are counted where the actual spending takes place.

Source: National Economic Institute

Table 2.

Number of schools at compulsory, upper secondary and higher education level and student proportion by school size 1997/98

Size of schools	Compulsory		Upper secondary		Higher	
	Number of schools	% of all students	Number of schools	% of all students	Number of schools	% of all students
Less than 50	57	3	7	1	2	1
51-100	33	6	4	2	2	2
101-200	29	10	4	4	1	2
201-400	38	27	4	8	1	3
401-600	31	37	6	18	2	8
601-800	10	17	4	17	0	0
801-1000	0	0	5	26	0	0
More than 1000	0	0	3	24	2	84
Total	198	100	37	100	10	100

Table 3.

Number of students in higher education by year and ISCED level 1994-1996

Year	ISCED 5	ISCED 6	ISCED 7	Total
1994	1269	5982	135	7386
1995	1267	6025	191	7483
1996	1248	6388	238	7874

Source: Statistics Iceland

Table 4.

Number of school administrators and teachers by sex and school level 1996

	Number of individuals			% of total	
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Compulsory school level	2714	975	3689	73,6	26,4
Principal	64	156	220	29,1	70,9
Assist. principal	61	50	111	55,0	45,0
Teacher	2589	769	3358	77,1	22,9
Upper secondary level	574	740	1314	43,7	56,3
Principal	8	33	41	19,5	80,5
Assist. principal	4	22	26	15,4	84,6
Teacher	562	685	1247	45,1	54,9
Universities ¹⁾	133	369	502	26,5	73,5
Vice-chancellor	-	4	4		100
Professor	13	140	153	8,5	91,5
Associate professor	34	122	156	21,8	78,2
Lecturer	69	84	153	45,1	54,9
Part-time instructor	17	19	36	47,2	52,8

Note:

¹⁾ The University of Iceland, University of Akureyri, University College of Education and Icelandic College of Engineering and Technology.

Source: State Salary Office

Table 5.

Number of school hours per week at compulsory level by age of pupils

Age	1990-91	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99*	1999-2000*
6	¹⁾	25	26	27	28	29	30
7	22	25	27	27	28	29	30
8	22	25	27	27	28	29	30
9	26	26	27	27	28	29	30
10	29	28	30	30	32	34	35
11	32	30	32	32	33	34	35
12	34	32	34	34	35	35	35
13	35	34	35	35	36	37	37
14	35	34	35	35	36	37	37
15	31-35	34	35	35	36	37	37

¹⁾ Education for 6-year-olds not compulsory.

* Increase in the number of school hours as determined by law.

Table 6.

Number of hours per year by student age 1996/97

Age	6 yrs	10 yrs	13-15 yrs	16-19 yrs
Number of hours	612	680	793	677

Table 7.

Proportion of children in pre-schools by age 1992 and 1996

Year	2 yrs. old	3yrs. old	4 yrs. old	5 yrs. old
1992	42	75	79	74
1996	60	84	87	86

Source: Statistics Iceland 1996

Table 8.

Enrolment rates of cohorts aged 16-19 years, 1978-1996

Age	1978	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996
16	67	65	71	75	77	80	83	85	89	89
17	54	56	61	65	66	68	70	74	77	76
18	49	48	54	56	58	58	63	64	65	67
19	42	47	50	53	55	55	59	61	64	63

Source: Statistics Iceland 1996

Table 9.

Proportional distribution of students at upper secondary level by line of study 1980-1996

	1980			1990			1996		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
General programmes	12	12	12	14	14	13	21	21	20
Languages	7	3	12	9	4	15	10	5	15
Fine and applied arts	2	2	3	4	2	5	3	2	5
Teacher training	9	4	15	6	3	10	4	4	5
Social science	4	4	5	8	5	12	13	8	18
Commerce, economics	15	13	18	14	14	15	7	8	7
Natural sciences	14	16	11	15	16	14	17	17	17
Crafts and technical trades	25	44	3	21	36	4	17	30	4
Agriculture and food trades	4	4	4	6	6	6	5	6	5
Health-related programmes	8	0	17	3	0	5	2	0	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Statistics Iceland

Table 10.

Proportion of girls per 100 boys in general upper secondary and vocational programmes of study 1980-1996

	1980	1990	1992	1994	1996
General education	125	129	127	126	127
Vocational education	43	35	34	35	38

Table 11.

Proportional distribution of students at the higher education level¹⁾ by line of study, 1980-1996.

	1980			1990			1996		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Languages	23	18	29	20	16	24	18	15	20
Fine and applied arts ²⁾	3	2	3
Teacher training, education	13	5	22	16	9	21	18	7	25
Social sciences, jurisprudence	12	13	12	16	16	16	15	16	15
Economics, bus. administr.	14	19	7	15	21	10	10	15	7
Natural sciences, mathematics	9	11	6	8	13	5	10	16	5
Engineering	9	14	1	7	14	1	9	16	3
Agriculture, food sciences	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	1
Medicine, nursing, etc.	19	18	21	16	9	21	16	10	21
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes:

¹⁾ Non-university institutions first appear at higher education level in 1995. They were previously included at upper secondary level.

²⁾ Art education is not included in higher education until 1995.

Source: Statistics Iceland 1992 and 1996

Table 12. Unemployment rate in November 1996 by education level and sex.

	Men	Women	Total
	%	%	%
Compulsory (ISCED 1-2)	9	5,4	6,7
Upper secondary and short post-secondary (ISCED 3-5)	2,3	3,5	2,7
Higher education (ISCED 6-7)	0,6	1,6	1,1
Total	3,4	4,1	3,9

Source: Statistics Iceland

Table 13. Number of students passing matriculation examination 1974/75 to 1995/96 as percentage of 20-years olds

Year	Men	Women	Total
1979-80	21,8	28,6	25,1
1989-90	34,4	55,4	44,7
1991-92	35,9	53,3	44,9
1993-94	42,8	60,4	51,4
1994-95	39,1	59,0	49,0
1995-96	40,8	59,5	49,9

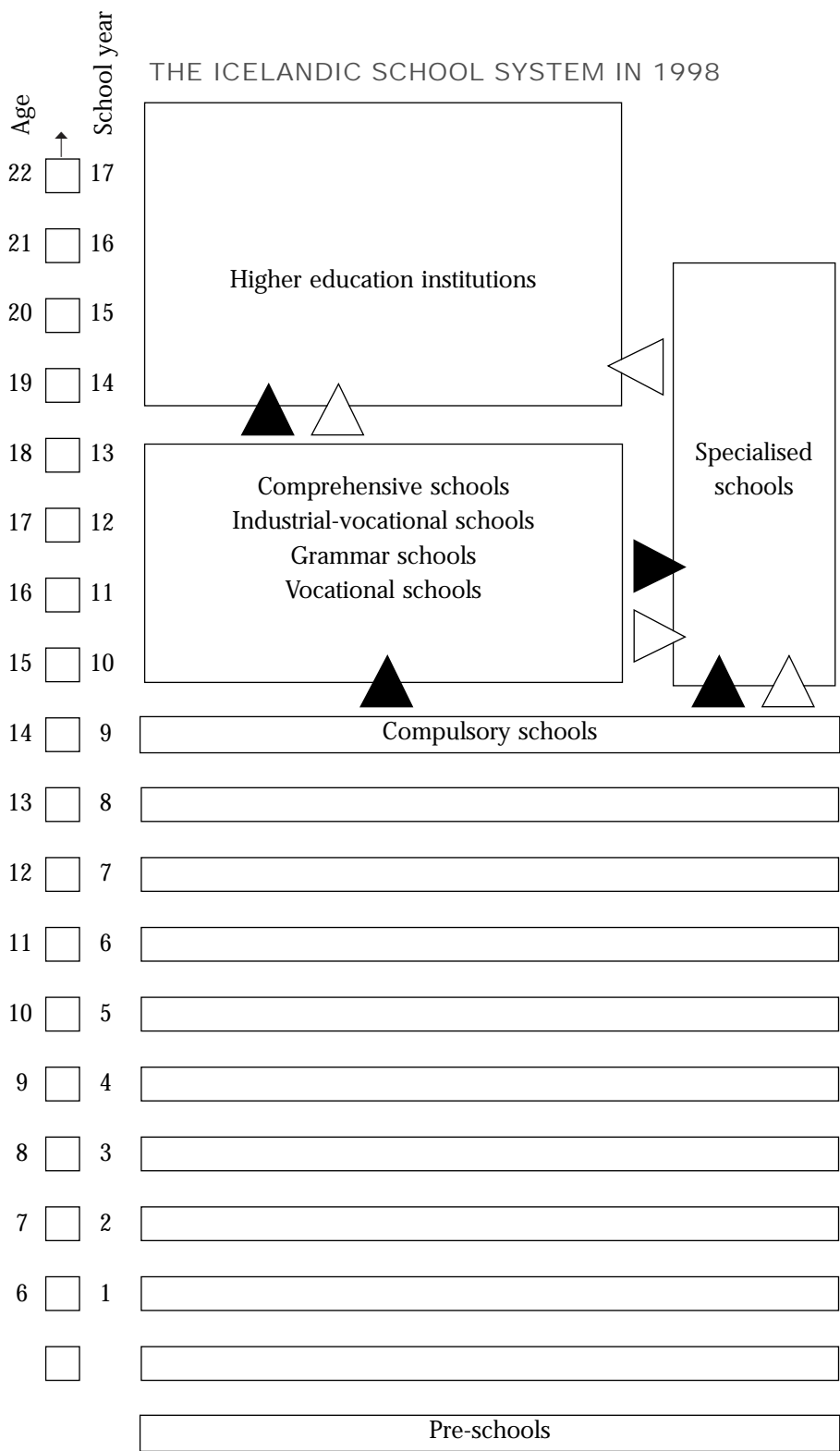
Source: Statistics Iceland

Table 14. Enrolment rates in education of age cohorts 20-29 years, 1996

Age	Men	Women	Total
	%	%	%
20	45	43	44
21	41	39	40
22	41	39	40
23	36	37	36
24	32	34	33
25	25	28	27
26	22	21	21
27	15	16	16
28	13	11	12
29	11	11	11

Source: Statistics Iceland





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