

Mid-term Review 2003 from Iceland

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Iceland

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Introduction

Iceland's total area is approximately 103,000 sq. km, of which only about 23% is arable land. As of 1. December 2002 the population of Iceland was 288,471 with a population density of c. 2.8 inhabitants per sq. km. Icelandic is the native tongue of Iceland. It belongs, along with Norwegian and Faeroes, to the West Scandinavian branch of the North Germanic family of languages. There are no minority languages in Iceland.

Iceland is a representative democracy with an elected president. The current constitution came into effect on 17 June 1944, when Iceland achieved its independence from Denmark. The Icelandic system of government is based on the principle of the tripartite division of power. According to the Constitution of Iceland "Althingi" and the president jointly exercise legislative power in the country. In 2002 Iceland was divided into 105 municipalities. The municipal councils are elected by universal suffrage with four years interval, in municipalities with over 300 inhabitants by proportional representation, in others by simple majority. There is great disparity in population; the population of the largest municipality, the capital Reykjavík, had 112,490 inhabitants on 1 December 2002, while some of the smaller rural districts had population of under 50.

Economic Indicators

A free-market economy may now be said to predominate in Iceland, marking a change from earlier times when government intervention was frequent. The fishing industry accounts for approximately one-seventh of the GNP and employs about 9% of the work force. At the same time, however, about three-quarters of all exports in recent years have been fish products. Apart from fish, Iceland's most significant resource is its vast natural energy potential, both as regards waterpower and geothermal power. In the year 2000 the GDP was 30,597 USD per capita. Rate of inflation in 2002 was 4,5%. The average rate of unemployment in 2002 was 3,2%.

1. Building up Structures and Institutional Frameworks: Policies, Legal provisions, Delivery system and Innovations

No comprehensive legislation is in force on adult education in Iceland. The Act on Upper Secondary Education (Lög um framhaldsskóla) passed in 1996, covers several aspects of adult education, including adult education programmes in evening classes and lifelong learning centres. The Act on Vocational Training in Business and Industry of 1992 covers studies or courses followed by participants in order to increase their skills and knowledge for the jobs in which they work or intend to work. An Act on Labour Market Measures of 1997 provides for the right of the unemployed to study in connection with a job-seeking plan compiled by regional employment centres in consultation with the job seeker.

In 1998 the Icelandic government presented a five-year plan on how to increase and improve lifelong learning in the Icelandic community. It surfaces in this policy formulation

that it is the responsibility of several parties to promote lifelong learning in the community, including the government, parties of the labour market, institutions, companies and the individuals themselves. A resolution of the government states that adult training and lifelong learning shall come under the Ministry of Education Science and Culture. The government responsibility in lifelong learning is primarily entailed in ensuring good basic education for all. This applies not least to education and training in information technology.

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

In Iceland adults generally do not have legal right to leaves of absence for the purpose of studying at compulsory, upper secondary or university level. There are, however, a few exceptions to this. Primary and secondary school teachers have, for example, the legal right to paid leaves of up to one year to attend in-service training or further education once in their career. Educational leaves may also be available to employees and civil servants according to various wage contracts.

Public institutions at the upper secondary and higher education levels including lifelong learning centres mainly offer adult education. Municipality schools, private schools, companies or organisations may also provide for adult education.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture *menntamálaráðuneytið* is in charge of virtually all education that takes place within the public sector education system including adult education. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture prepares education bills, issues regulations and sees to it that laws and regulations are complied with. No regulations are in force to cover the operation of educational courses offered by the private sector, except where a specific agreement has been made between the body offering the courses and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

The Ministry of Social Affairs *félagamálaráðuneytið* has responsibilities concerning vocational education and training in business and industry.

In early 2003 the government made an agreement with the Federation of Icelandic Industries and the Icelandic Confederation of Labours on the establishment of the Education and Training Service Centre *Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins*. This is a three-year programme supported annually by the government. The main goal is to increase educational opportunities among people on the labour market, support educational providers to define the target groups' need for education and assist in developing methods to assess informal competence.

EDUCATE – Iceland Mennt, established in 1998, is a co-operation forum between the educational sector, the social partners, local authorities and others interested in education and training. The main focus of the work of the institute is to gather and disseminate information on education and training and to act as a venue for discussion between the educational and employment sectors as well as policy makers.

In relation to the government's five-year plan on lifelong learning a special committee has been appointed.

2. Increasing Investment in Adult Learning

Funds for adult education programmes and distance learning in upper secondary schools are determined by the Parliament in the annual state budget. The state pays two thirds of the cost of tuition, students pay one third which in some cases may be covered partly or wholly by their unions. Running costs are paid by the state.

The running costs of operating lifelong learning centres are provided for by allocations in the annual state budget. Course participants are responsible for tuition fees. However, unions, companies, institutions or organisations often pay the fees for people participating on their behalf. The same applies for participants at courses run by the Institute of Continuing Education of the University of Iceland Endurmenntunarstofnun Háskóla Íslands. Fees may also be financed by the state, as is, for example, the case for courses in Icelandic for immigrants.

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

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

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

Public expenditure on education as percentage of GDP has increased as defined the following table:

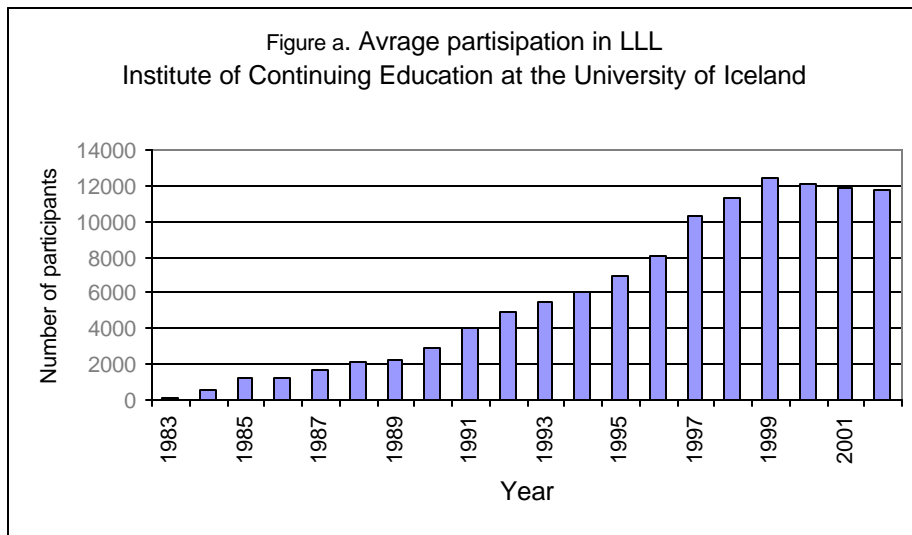
Public expenditure on education as percentage of GDP	1990	1995	2000
Primary education	2.37%	2.43%	3.26%
Upper secondary level	1.15%	1.31%	1.30%
Tertiary education	0.62%	0.66%	0.80%
Other educational affairs	0.74%	0.49%	0.58%
thereof students' loans	0.60%	0.32%	0.29%
Public educational services	4.89%	4.89%	5.94%

3. Increasing Participation

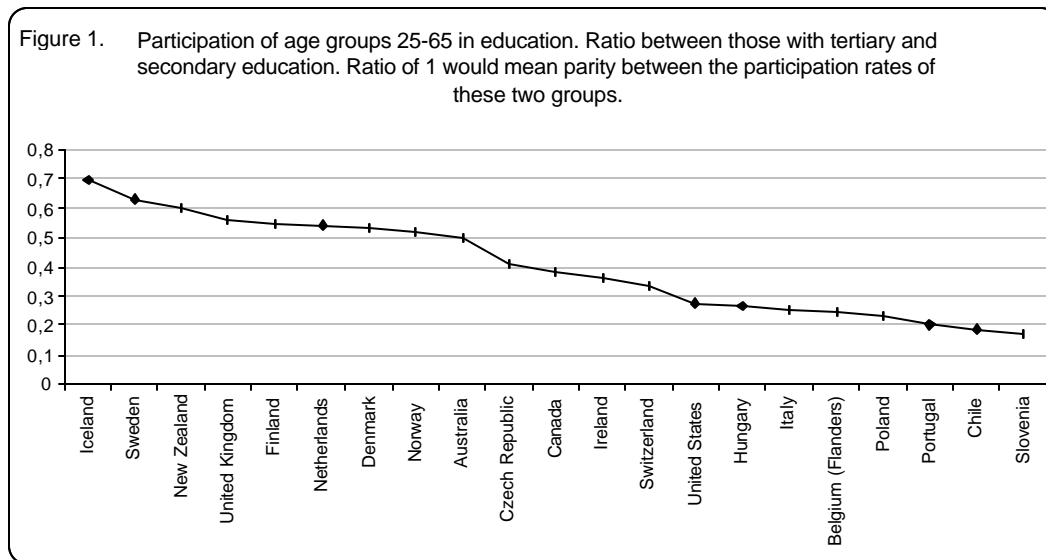
Most higher education institutions offer distance learning. Lifelong learning centres coordinate distance learning offerings from the different higher education institutions. An increasing number of adults make use of the possibilities offered by these centres of higher education studies.

Participation in adult education at the Lifelong learning centres that are located in the more dense areas in Iceland has increased considerably during the last 3 years and grown from 3,0% adults participation in the year 2000 to approximately 5,5% in 2002.

The Institute of Continuing Education at the University of Iceland is offering increased number of programmes for adults in several areas. These courses are open to all, but for some of them a certain level of basic education in the field is required. The courses are organised in such a way that participants are able to attend the courses parallel to being employed. Participation has been as follows:



It was shown in a recent survey¹, that participation of Icelandic adults in various forms of adult education is relatively high. It is in fact similar to what is found in the other Nordic countries, which as a group show relatively very high rates of participation. An interesting feature of the Icelandic data is the relatively sizable proportion involved in education for leisure. But the most noteworthy feature of the data was the equity in participation among a variety of social groups. The Icelandic data showed least disparity among the countries compared, between different age groups and groups with different educational background as shown in Figure 1. The figure shows the ratio between the participation rates of the different educational groups in each country.



4. Research Studies in the field of Adult Learning

¹ Jónasson, J. T., & Tuijnman, A. (2001b). The Nordic model of adult education: Issues for discussion.

Educators training and Research studies in the field of adult learning are mainly carried out by the following three universities in Iceland.

- The University of Iceland, www.hi.is
- Iceland University of Education, www.khi.is

The Iceland University of Education operates research programmes and houses various institutions that provide services for students, teachers and professionals in the field of education and social pedagogy.

- The University of Akureyri Iceland, www.unak.is

More information available at their websites.

5. Adult Educators/Facilitators' Status and Training

In the initial teacher training programme at the University of Iceland Háskóli Íslands training in the teaching of mature students is included.

At upper secondary schools, those who teach in the adult education programmes are subject to the same rules as all upper secondary school teachers. See 4.4.

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

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

Not all teachers of adults at the compulsory school level are fully qualified as some of them are employed by municipal evening schools, which do not necessarily demand any formal qualifications.

6. Empowering Adult Learners

According to the legislation on upper secondary education, schools at that level are allowed to offer special programmes, including evening classes, for mature students (18 years or over) who are unable to avail themselves of regular instruction at the upper secondary schools but wish to complete studies comparable to the programmes offered by them. The law also permits anyone who has turned 18 to take individual courses during regular school hours. The evening programmes offered are comparable to those of the day school, but the students get half the number of lessons.

In those upper secondary schools, which offer adult education, programmes through evening school there is a unit-credit system. Many of the upper secondary comprehensive schools offer vocational training programmes, which are also offered as a part of adult education if there is sufficient demand.

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

Nine lifelong learning centres have been established, with one in each of the main regions of the country as well as one in the capital. The lifelong learning centres took over the role of the itinerary school, which was to provide educational opportunities to where the participants actually live. The centres have increasingly been providing for distance education at the upper secondary and higher education level.

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

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

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

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues curriculum guidelines for upper secondary schools, which also apply to adult education.

There are no admission requirements for adults to attend courses at the compulsory school level. In order to enrol in an adult education programme at the upper secondary level the student is generally expected to be 18 years of age or older. So far, no particular academic preparation has been required. Schools are allowed to evaluate previous studies and give credits that count towards the completion of studies.

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

Those adult students who complete their education at the higher education level receive a certificate, which confirms that they have completed their education. In some cases the certificate gives them the right to work in a certain field of employment, as is the case for people with the teachers' certificate. The certificate delivered to adult students is equivalent to the one delivered to students attending normal higher education institutions.

By the initiative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture methods are being developed to assess informal learning.

7. Examples of Best Practice and Innovations

Second Chance Schools for Women / Women's Educational Workshop.

This is a school where women have great influence in the organization of the workshop and daily routines. Emphasis is on open and honest communication. In the workshop women learn to form their individual opinion, express themselves and listen to others. They are also trained in tolerance

and self-respect. The whole program is adapted to the women's needs and the women are encouraged to tackle things they haven't done before.

Day program is from 9 to 15 during a period of 16 weeks. All women are welcome but unemployed women have priority and no special requirements are for educational background. A study shows that 60-70% of women who have attended the Women's Educational Workshop have joined the working force within six months and 20-30% of them have continued to study. The school takes part in a Grundvig 2, learning partnership program named Second Chance for Women.

Leonardo da Vinci project: Learning Community. See more: <http://www.learncom.eu.org>

Raising the Levels of Nordic Adult Education². A survey made in the Nordic Countries to identify the Nordic model for education, in particular adult learning, with regard to content and organisation, and to describe development trends in an international perspective. Further a description is required of good solutions for the work carried out by the Nordic countries in the field of adult education, with a special focus on three sectors:

- The role of universities and institutions of higher education in relation to the competences required for working life.
- The workplace as a learning environment.
- The role of adult education in relation to the competences required for working life.

8. Future Actions and Concrete Targets for 2009

Adult education is becoming integral part of the Icelandic educational enterprise and some it even a part of our educational system. Two universities, the University of Iceland and the Iceland University of Education, have initiated programmes specifically aimed at adult educators and these programmes promise to be quite popular. Continuing and adult education programmes seem to be flourishing and all the educational institutions, both at the secondary and tertiary level seem to be keen to take part in and sustain the up-swing that has been experienced during the last decade.

It is expected that the lifelong learning centres will continue to prosper, and more of their courses and seminars will be aimed at the higher education level. New methods for validation of non-formal, informal and formal competence are being formed and will be taken into use within the very near future.

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² TemaNord 2000:569. Nordisk Ministerråd, København 2000

