

= Education in Iceland =

The system of education in Iceland is divided in four levels : playschool , compulsory , upper secondary and higher , and is similar to that of other Nordic countries . Education is mandatory for children aged 6 ? 16 . Most institutions are funded by the state ; there are very few private schools in the country . Iceland is a country with gymnasia .

= = Background = =

The first national education law was the 1907 education law , and the first national curriculum was published in 1926 . Although the curriculum was periodically revised , the overall education system was not significantly modernized until the Compulsory Education Act of 1974 , which mandated special education services for all students with disabilities .

According to the Ministry of Education , Science and Culture :

The Ministry of Education , Science and Culture has the jurisdiction of educational responsibility . Traditionally , education in Iceland has been run in the public sector ; there is a small , although growing , number of private education institutions in the country . Over the years , the educational system has been decentralised , and responsibility for primary and lower secondary schools lies with the local authorities . The state runs upper secondary schools and higher education institutions .

The Ministry issues the National Curriculum Guidelines . The National Centre for Educational Materials publishes educational materials for education institutions , and issues them free of charge . The Educational Testing Institute is the country ? s sole examination board ; responsible for issuing and grading national assessments .

There are 192 institutions catering for compulsory education , 42 schools for upper secondary education and 9 higher education institutions .

= = History = =

The oldest gymnasiums in the country are Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík and Menntaskólinn á Akureyri . Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík traces its origin to 1056 , when a school was established in Skálholt . The school was moved to Reykjavík in 1786 , but poor housing conditions forced it to move again in 1805 to Bessastaðir near Reykjavík . In 1846 the school was moved to its current location , and a new building was erected for it in Reykjavík .

The University of Iceland was the first higher education institution in the country , and was established on 17 June 1911 , uniting three former Icelandic schools : Prestaskólinn , Læknaskólinn and Lagaskólinn , which taught theology , medicine and law , respectively . The university originally had only faculties for these three fields , in addition to a faculty of humanities . The first rector of the university was Björn M. Ólsen , a professor in the faculty of humanities .

= = Levels = =

The Icelandic education system comprises four levels : playschool , compulsory , upper secondary and higher .

= = = Playschool = = =

Playschool or leikskóli , is non @-@ compulsory education for those under the age of six , and is the first step in the education system . The current legislation concerning playschools was passed in 2007 . The Ministry of Education , Science and Culture is responsible for the policies and methods that playschools must use , and they issue the National Curriculum Guidelines . They are also responsible for ensuring that the curriculum is suitable so as to make the transition into compulsory education as easy as possible . However , the Ministry does not implement the regulations and guidelines ; instead this is the responsibility of the local authority , who fund and administer

playschools . In addition , the local authority employs representatives who supervise the playschools ? operation .

Parents must pay for their children to attend playschools . Around 30 % of the costs of running the institutions are covered by these fees . Private playschools ? fees can be around 10 ? 20 % higher than those of public institutions . Almost all private schools receive some municipal funding .

The buildings are often purpose @-@ built on a site where around 30 @-@ 40m2 of playing space is available for each child in the playground . Around 6 m2 per child is allocated indoors . The institutions are intended to be mixed sex . Playschools are intended for children under the age of six ; the youngest children to attend are at least two years old . Children of single parents and students are given priority , and in some cases children with a handicap are also given priority . In the majority of cases , the children are divided into age groups , but in some smaller communities these may be grouped together .

Children attend playschool for a minimum of four and a maximum of nine hours per day .

= = = Compulsory = = =

Compulsory education or grunnskóli (lit . ? basic school ?) , is the period of education which is compulsory for all . The legislation concerning compulsory education was passed in 2007 , and in 1996 municipalities took over the running of compulsory education . It comprises primary and lower secondary education , which often takes place at the same institution . The law states that education is mandatory for children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 16 . The school year lasts nine months , and begins between August 21 and September 1 , ending between May 31 and June 10 . The minimum number of school days is 170 , but after a new teachers ? wage contract , this will increase to 180 . Lessons take place five days a week .

Responsibility lies with parents for making sure that their children attend and register at school . The law states that it is the responsibility of the municipality to give instruction and fund institutions (this includes teaching , substitute teaching , administration and specialist services) , and provide special education if required . There are no entry requirements for pupils , and the acceptance rate is 100 % at six years of age .

Pupils have the right to attend a school in the area in which they live . The state requires that the school integrates handicapped pupils into mainstream education .

The state is responsible for assessing institutions to make sure that they are operating within the law and the National Curriculum Guidelines . They also produce educational materials , and implement educational law and regulations .

Compulsory education is divided into ten years . Schools which have all ten years , year one to seven , and years eight to ten are common . Those schools which teach from years eight to ten often have a wider catchment area . The size of institutions is widely varied . In the Reykjavík urban area , schools can be up to 1200 pupils in size . In rural areas , schools can have fewer than 10 pupils , and around 50 % of schools have fewer than 100 pupils . All compulsory education institutions are mixed sex . Many counselling services are available , including help with studies and specific subjects ; psychological counselling is also available .

Each school must follow the National Curriculum Guidelines , but exceptions are made for schools with special characteristics . The school is required to create a school working plan and an annual calendar , organise teaching and pupil assessment and to provide extracurricular activities . The number of lessons for each year is as follows :

Nowadays , the National Curriculum Guidelines have provisions for those learning Icelandic whose mother tongue is a foreign language and deaf and hearing @-@ impaired pupils . Pupils are expected to keep up with the pace of teaching ; however those students who are struggling receive remedial teaching without being moved from most of their classes . An emphasis is made on providing a variety of teaching methods .

= = = = Assessment = = = =

In Iceland , assessment and evaluation of pupils is conducted internally , and is not standardised between different institutions . Pupils are given regular reports to year their progress ; however the way in which this is done varies between schools . For example , a numerical year could be given , or an oral and written assessment may be given .

Their principal purpose is to help ease the transition into upper secondary education and help the pupil to choose a course of study . Pupils are awarded a certificate with their marks at the end of the compulsory schooling period .

In addition to pupil assessment , the law requires that schools implement some form of self @-@ evaluation on the quality of their services and to make sure that institutions are operating inside the law and within guidelines . Schools are assessed externally every five years by the Ministry of Education , Science and Culture .

= = = = Teachers = = = =

Similar to primary education in other countries , from years one to seven , the same teacher teaches the pupils all of their subjects . From year eight upwards , pupils receive teaching from a number of different teachers (this marks the boundary between primary education and lower secondary education) . Groups may be mixed around year by year .

Primary school teachers are general teachers who have received their training at either the University of Iceland or the University of Akureyri . The typical course lasts three years . Lower secondary teachers may also be trained at the University of Iceland . A BA or BS degree is required in this situation . The courses are designed to be both academic and practical . Municipalities are responsible for the employment of teachers . Optional in @-@ service teacher training courses are offered on an annual basis .

= = = Upper secondary = = =

Upper secondary education or framhaldsskóli (lit . ? continued school ?) , follows lower secondary education . These schools are also known as gymnasia in English . It is not compulsory , but everyone who has had their compulsory education has the right to upper secondary education . The typical course length is four years , for students aged between 16 and 20 . The length of the course can vary , especially in vocational courses . This stage of education is governed by the Upper Secondary School Act of 2007 . Like all other schools in Iceland , upper secondary schools are mixed sex .

Students do not have to pay tuition fees , but they must pay an enrolment fee and are expected to buy their own textbooks . Students who enrol in vocational courses pay a portion of the costs of the materials that they use .

All students have the right to enter upper secondary education when they turn sixteen . Around 97 % of students leaving lower secondary education enter into upper secondary education ; however there is a notable drop @-@ out rate . There are specific entry requirements for different courses , but as all students have the right to this sort of education , a general program of study is available for those students who may fail to meet requirements . Some schools enjoy more prestige and popularity than others , especially in Reykjavík , and those may need to turn away hundreds of students every year .

The school year lasts for nine months , and is divided into two terms : autumn and spring . Students attend around 32 ? 40 lessons a week , each lasting 40 ? 80 minutes . This can vary drastically between institutions .

There are around forty gymnasia in the country ; sizes vary as much as the primary schools . The largest gymnasia have over 3 @, @ 000 students ? the smallest , less than fifty . The gymnasia can be divided thus :

grammar schools ? offering four @-@ year @-@ long programmes of study , ending with matriculation exams ;

industrial @-@ vocational schools ? theoretical and practical courses in various trades ;

comprehensive schools ? offering a mixture of courses , has qualities of both a grammar school and an industrial @-@ vocational institution , in addition to specialised vocational programmes ; specialised vocational schools ? programmes of study for specific trades and careers .

The law requires that there are academic , vocational , artistic and general programmes of study , all of which lead to higher education . Any gymnasium can therefore offer the matriculation examination , called the Stúdentspróf , providing it complies with Ministry of Education regulations .

The gymnasia have forms which operate on a unit @-@ credit system , that is to say a term is divided into course units , each of which is worth a certain number of credits . Students are consequently able to regulate the speed of their education based on their personal circumstances . This system is used in most upper secondary institutions in Iceland .

Many institutions also offer evening classes targeted at adults , some of which are on @-@ a @-@ par with their daytime courses . Distance learning is also offered at most schools .

Counselling services are also offered , like those of the compulsory education institutions .

=== Assessment ===

Examinations are taken at the end of every term as opposed to at the end of the year . Final years are often based on continuous assessments and assignments ; however some courses do have final exams . There were no nationally co @-@ ordinated exams in upper secondary education until school year 2003 ? 4 , when certain subjects were introduced . Institutions are also required to self @-@ assess , like compulsory education institutions they are assessed externally every five years .

=== Teachers ===

Upper secondary teachers are required to have completed four years at university , of which at least two years must have been devoted to a major subject , and at least one to teaching methodology and skills . Vocational teachers must be qualified in their particular discipline , or must be a master craftsman in their trade , and have at least two years of experience .

In @-@ service training courses are also offered . Teachers are paid by the state but hired by the individual school .

=== Higher education ===

The final level is higher education , or háskóli (lit . ? high school ?) . There are eight such institutions in the country , most of which are run by the state . The first institution , the University of Iceland , opened in 1911 , and is still the principal higher education institution in the country . In recent years , however , more universities have opened across the country , widening the range of choices available . Legislation concerning higher education institutions was passed in 1997 , which includes a definition of the term háskóli (to include universities which do not carry out research) . There is also separate legislation in place for each public institution , defining their role in research and general organisation . Private and public universities both receive funding from the state .

The administration of each university is divided into the Senate , the rector , faculty meetings , faculty councils and deans (however , some universities are not divided into faculties) . The Senate ultimately makes decisions on the running and organisation of the institution , and formulates policy . The state will formulate a contract with the university , defining the institution ? s objectives and the amount of funding that the state will give to the institution .

Despite the growing number of higher education institutions in the country , many students decide to pursue their university education abroad (around 16 % , mostly in postgraduate studies) .

The academic year lasts from September to May , and is divided into two terms : autumn and spring .

=== Admission ===

Most undergraduates will have to pass some form of matriculation exam to get into university ; however those with sufficient work experience may be admitted in some cases . Vocational and technical courses have looser requirements , only stating that the applicant have some sort of experience in their chosen field of study . Institutions are free to set their own admission criteria . Registration for potential students takes place from May to June each year ; however the application deadline for foreign students is earlier : March 15 .

= = = = Student finance = = = =

In state @-@ run institutions , students only need pay registration fees ; there are no tuition fees . Private institutions , however , charge fees . All students are eligible to some financial support from the Icelandic Student Loan Fund ; the exact amount depends on their financial and personal situation . The student must begin to repay this money two years after completing their study programme . In addition to Icelandic students , students from the European Union or EEA @-@ EFTA member states are also eligible to apply for loans , if they have been working in their trade in the country for at least one year .

Annually there are a limited number of scholarships available for foreign students to study the Icelandic language and literature at the University of Iceland , offered by the Ministry of Education , Science and Culture .

Grants are available for post @-@ graduates in research universities , which are awarded on the basis of joint submission from student and professor , and approval from the respective faculty .

= = Special education = =

Before the Compulsory Education Act of 1974 , only selected groups of students with disabilities , such as deaf and blind students , received any formal special education , although students with mild disabilities had been accommodated at rural schools since 1907 . With the changes in the law , a special school was opened in Reykjavik for students with mental retardation , and similar programs followed . Students with physical disabilities were mainstreamed into regular classrooms . The Iceland University of Education developed programs to train teachers and other specialists to provide appropriate services .

Reflecting Icelandic cultural values of tolerance , equity , and celebrating differences rather than individualism , current government policy emphasizes inclusion , or " one school for all " , although segregated classrooms and schools are still permitted and supported .

The Education Law on Upper Secondary Education of 1992 entitles students to attend schools and university , and to receive appropriate supports for doing so , but does not exempt them from the normal entrance requirements , such as demonstrating a given level of reading or mathematics achievement . Consequently , after reaching the end of compulsory school age , it is difficult for students with significant cognitive impairments to find further education .