

## **Iceland– Country report, Nordic Baltic meeting 2014**

New laws in adult education took effect on the 1.oct 2010. Purpose of the law was to fill in a gap in the legal framework within the Icelandic law system. The purpose was to strengthen the formal foundation of the continuing education in Iceland and make it the fifth column of the educational system.

### **EQF/NQF**

The Ministry is responsible for creating a qualification framework for lifelong learning in Iceland and has now developed a comprehensive NQF covering all levels and types of qualifications. The work started in 2007 and few working groups have been formed. The national curriculum guide for upper secondary school was renewed and validated in terms of setting up learning competence level. The Icelandic educational system was ranked in the reference frame from level 1 -7. It goes hand in hand with general reform of the educational system in Iceland covering all levels of education. The main elements of this framework are now gradually being put in place, especially level 1 – 4. Level 5 – 7 needs more examination. New laws were established for adult education in year 2010 and law for upper secondary school is constantly under review. It shows that all education should be based on the NQF and has already been done accordingly. Lower levels (1-4) have mostly been discussed in Iceland – but only the seven levels will be referenced to the EQF. The curriculum for upper secondary schools (from 2011) provides that the outcomes of all types of learning should be linked to the ability levels. This is the only implementation that has started. For adult education and those who have little education The Education and Training Service Centre has been working on several curriculums which have been approved by the Ministry. All informal learning is based on the first step. All the curriculums that are written today by the Service centre are based on learning outcomes. Education and Culture Ministry sets quality standards for the preparation and development of curricula for continuing education and certifies individual curriculum based on them.

Level 1 and 2 (EQF) was consolidated. That was because in Iceland we do not have formal studies regarding EQF level 1. We have been struggling to locate informal and non-formal learning on the levels. It has been difficult to decide on what level the continuing education should be on the reference frame and we need much more discussions about that. The first step is on the verge of primary and secondary schools and includes general education. Learning in the first level may also include general preparation for work on the labor market that does not require a lot of specialization and are made under the direction or supervision of others.

Qualifications at a level two are characterized by two relatively short specializations, aiming in particular to professional preparation for further study or work.

Qualifications at the third level qualifications are characterized by even higher standards of knowledge, skills and abilities related to specialization and professionalism. There is a selective preparation for university, legitimate jobs, internships and specialized art.

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The fourth step involves learning that takes place either within or on behalf of the college or university. Qualifications at the fourth level are characterized either by increased specialization and/or extension of specialization in relation to the management, direction, development and innovation.

NQF for university considers level 5 – 7 – it has not yet been established enough.

### **Basic Skills: Mapping and development of future skills**

In Iceland a systematic mapping of basic skills to increase employability and staff development has been lacking for quite a while. Of course key-competences have been described for the educational system but not for the labor market, unless the mapping is connected to transparency of salary schemes and performance management within specific sectors/pilots. There has been consensus on the most important basic skills, i.e. reading, writing, mathematics, communication, team-work abilities and information management. It is agreed on that more skills needs to be identified to meet current changes in the workplace and for future skills development of the workforce. In order to do so various actors have combined efforts to work e.g. within The IPA- project (Creation of a recognition system of non-formal and informal learning on upper secondary level) and searched for best practices and databanks abroad. The public sector has mapped out these competences and other work-based competences in order to make the salary schemes less gender biased and more transparent. The LLL sector is prepared to participate in this competence development in cooperation with authorities, institutions and companies by using the NQF and RPL methods to train various target groups, e.g. unemployed people, staff members and managers.

### **Validation**

Validation of real competences has developed very fast in the last 10 years. Between the years 2007 till 2013 the total number of participants was about 2000 in 30 different occupational professions. In certified trades, recognize knowledge and skills acquired on the job, competence standards, and link the validated competencies to the NQF/EQF. This has been practiced for sound technicians and also for bank clerks. The objective for competence standards within the job market is to analyze what the sector is in need for in regards to knowledge and skills of the specific job categories and each participant is validated towards those competence standards.

Validation for paraprofessionals in schools and kindergarten has the objective to validate against the curriculum from the ministry of education, validation for office/ computer staff has the objective to validate against a curriculum within the secondary school system, the validation for staff working within shops and service has the objective to validate against a curriculum from the Education and training service. In the recent years the validation process has been established as one of the most efficient strategies to provide a new opportunity for adults to regain their approach for further education and complete vocational training or secondary education. Other opportunities can be found within training programs for universities. Recognition of competences builds confidence and motivation to learn, especially if the employees can continue their competence development based on **recognition of prior learning** process. In this context it can be of great value to link RPL of

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workplace learning to National Qualification Frameworks (NQF's). People in the labor market acquire knowledge and skills in many fields by various means, such as through professional experience, vocational training, leisure education, school study, social activities and family life. We need to focus on methods for people with little formal education who have build up their competences in specific jobs on the labor market. The focus should also be on how to develop appropriate standards/learning outcomes based on workplace competences and how to link those to National Qualification Frameworks (NQF's). NQF implementation requires time for stakeholders to develop an understanding of the key concepts and to promote cultural change. Stakeholder involvement is important at all stages to ensure ownership.

### **IPA- Project on Creation of a Recognition System of Non-formal and Informal learning on Upper secondary level**

In 2012 the Education and training service in Iceland was granted in connection with IPA, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) which offers assistance to countries engaged in the accession process to the European Union (EU), to speed up development of validation, career guidance for adults, and to develop employability of adults with little formal education. This project is in its beginning phase and will finish 2015. The project is a part of Instrumental Pre-Accession program which is connected to the member application of Iceland to enter the EU, but the negotiation phase started in 2010. The ECTS leads this project. Many sectors and skills are addressed and the results are expected to have very positive impact on validation processes within the formal school system and on the labor market. A total of 52 validation projects will take place in 3years time in various sectors; 40 against existing curricula on Upper Secondary School level, 6 against specific job criteria, and 6 based on criteria of basic skills. The methodology has been in development since 2004 and now already covering about 30 curricula and 3 specific jobs. This project is now on hold since Iceland has put the negotiations on hold.

### **Career counseling in the work place**

All the lifelong learning centers in Iceland are offering career counseling in the work place and have been doing so since 2006. The counseling is originated from an LdV project: Workplace Guidance and was promoted by Starfsafl – educational fund. It was a pilot project in Iceland from 2003-2005 and the result led to funding of the services in 2006.

Main goal for workplace guidance for adults on the labor market (Workplace guidance) is an aid in reaching out to as many as possible in the identified target group, where they are located, with information about

- Education
- Funds
- Guidance towards an active participation in lifelong learning and competence development.

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For success it is important to base the guidance on a trusting relationship and an equal ground. Counselors should provide guidance on various types of education and settings, not only linked to their own setting. They should also obtain information on the needs of the target group and develop appropriate educational opportunities/solutions. The workplace guidance has been a challenging task and important to cooperate with various stakeholders. Counselors have been marketing the services in companies and they had to use a more informal ways of approaching the user of the service. It is important to show interest in the person and base the guidance on a trusting relationship on an equal ground. They've also had the task to sell the idea of lifelong learning to employees and how the company could gain from a visit from a career counselor.

Counselors keep track of data which are to be sent to the Education and training service centre and they also have a meeting three times a year for sharing and developing. Career counseling in the workplace has been developing rapidly and has made Iceland a leader at the international level regarding career counseling services in the employment market. In 2013 there were 11.100 interviews given by counselor all around Iceland but the numbers of interviews have been growing steadily since 2006.