

Iceland – country report

Nordic-Baltic meeting, May 2016 in Helsinki, Finland

About Leikn, The Association of Adult Education, Iceland

Leikn is an umbrella association with 18 member organizations that run more than 50 offices all around Iceland. All members in Leikn offer educational pathways and training courses in various forms for their adult students. Leikn is a non-profit organization, as all its members, and acts on a voluntary basis. The main tasks of Leikn is to disseminate information on new knowledge in the field of AE, both to the members and the general public. Leikn also facilitates cooperation and participation in projects, on national and international level and tries to influence policies and cooperate with stakeholders in AE. Leikn sends out a digital presentation discussing interesting topics, trends and initiatives, monthly and publishes web-based newsletter to continuously raise awareness of new developments in AE.



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National policies in Adult Education in Iceland

Act on Adult Education

The Act on Adult Education was issued in 2010. The legislation aims to support adults who have not finished upper- secondary education and enable access, participation and equality in education. Funding is ensured to LLL centers and accredited learning bodies to offer three kinds of measurable educational services meant the target group: 1) Educational programs/training courses aimed at upskilling competences (mostly work-based or basic skills), 2) recognition of prior learning projects and 3) career guidance individual services. Purpose of the law was to fill in a gap in the legal framework, secure funding, quality, transparency and coherence by taking the first steps towards the fifth column of the educational system. A revision on the implementation so far, was carried out 2014 and following, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, is contracting the Educational Training Service Centre to supervise the funding structure and professional assistance or evaluation. The new contract for the next 5 years has not been introduced yet. Leikn favors this legislations but has criticized the too narrow definition of the target group, being only “low- skilled” and the difficulties in analyzing the educational status of each individual attending course or asking for guidance. Leikn means that the 5th pillar of Education should involve all adults.

White paper (Hvít bókin)

In June 2014 the Ministry of education published White paper - the Reform of Education. The White paper is intended to focus on which pillars of the Icelandic educational need to be strengthened and which methods are best suited to provide students with the education that legislation and the national curriculum requires. The law of Adult education is the fifth pillar of the educational system and in the White paper there is very little discussion of adult education and informal learning.



The White paper discusses the current status of the Icelandic educational system and on the basis of that analysis, presents draft of priorities and actions. Maximum weight is placed on the main objective to improve literacy performance, restructuring of study time and the reform of vocational education in the formal school system.

Interest groups from workers and employers associations, and Leikn, criticized harshly that no consideration was given to adult education / non-formal learning, particularly with regard to assessments into the formal school system. This criticism resulted in the ministry putting together a consulting group to remedy the lack of both involvement and consultation with the representatives of workers and employers.

Following the White-book adult students older than 25 were not allowed to attend academic courses leading to the matriculation test, in upper secondary schools, anymore. They were however allowed to join vocational and technical education within the formal school system. All academic studies for 25+ were moved to the LLL center, CVT entities or special schools, which in most cases charge fees. These fees can be repaid back from the CVT funds owned by the social partners, according to rights stipulated in labor- market negotiations. These age restriction are now being discussed and criticized in Iceland, since it is estimated that many adult students, did quit their studies.

The Icelandic National Qualification Framework (ISQF)

The Icelandic National Qualification Framework (ISQF) has been developed and designed within the formal educational system since 2008 and it will be formally launched at the end of 2015. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for managing the reference process and linking it to the EQF. As it stand now the ISQF contains 7 levels, one level less than the EQF.



All relevant stakeholders within the formal educational system have been approached e.g. teachers, headmasters and professional associations and most curriculums have been levelled. The ongoing activities now, involve discussion and setting up a cooperation forum with other stakeholders, outside the formal educational system.

ISQF level	Examples of Qualifications	EQF level
7	Doctorate degree	8
6	Master and Candidatus degree	7
5	Bachelor degree	6
4	Diploma at higher education level	5
3	Matriculation examination	4
2	Upper secondary school leaving certificate, other final examinations	3
1	Upper secondary school leaving certificate, other final examinations, compulsory school final examination	1 & 2

Leikn-The Association of Adult Education, and most stakeholders on labor market, e.g. the social partners (trade unions and employers), LLL- and educational training centers along with educational funds, have opposed to this approach and stressed the necessity for pre- entry level, so the ISQF involves career developmental opportunities for all workers and citizens. This is now being negotiated on along with questions regarding the ideology and implementation of the framework in Iceland. The main question so far not fully answered nor fully discussed, according to Leikn and other stakeholders in Adult education, are (to mention a few):

- Unified or separate framework for formal and informal education?
- Definition of qualification and educational measures (diplomas/certification in informal learning),
- The use of Standardized Recognition of prior learning methods within the system to enhance transferability,
- How to develop qualification that are fit for their purposes and are able to meet rapid changes in education and working life?
- How to market the ISQF and build up trust?
- Do learning outcomes map out and evaluate all educational experiences?

According to Leikn, who has been an active partner in the dialog between the Ministry and informal/non-formal learning sector, many fundamental questions need to be discussed in more depth and more interest shown in really adapting the view of the informal learning sector into the ISQF. This work is still an ongoing process in 2016 but more consensus has been reached.

Recognition of prior learning

In Iceland a national strategy for the validation of non-formal and informal learning has progressed rapidly in the last decade due to both governmental support and effective labor market agreement in favor for Lifelong Learning. Various governmental initiatives have taken place to support and strengthen adult education and to tackle a high dropout rate from the upper secondary schools.

Since the financial crash in 2008, many collaborative pilots/projects have been developed and tried out e.g. to fight increased unemployment and inactivity. Recognition of prior learning/qualifications (RPL) has been one of those methods that have proven to be successful. The method of RPL is regarded as an innovative way to meet educational needs, changes in the work place and upgrading of skills and competences. The process is now being regulated to increase participation and access of adults so they can have their competences documented and evaluated. Everyone is supposed to benefit from the RPL process; individuals, companies and organization and the wider environment. Most RPL projects are connected to the formal educational system where competences of each individual are mapped against vocational curriculums. Only few projects have worked on valuating non-formal competences against job profiles. Either way the process of RPL is marked by thorough quality standards and measures in order to maintain transparency, clarity and trust of the RPL tool. In Iceland the infrastructure of methods and instruments has been formed and many projects have been carried out in the sector of traded skills, with the main purpose to facilitate educational pathways and progression for “unskilled” craftsmen.



All RPL projects in Iceland are carried out in groups and at the moment most curriculums on the lower levels of the NFQ are being transformed to measurable standards. Fewer projects are being worked on where individual competences are being evaluated against job-profiles in cooperation with companies and institutions. The RPL process has been described in regulation, when working with low-skilled participants.

New Directorate on Education

The Directorate of Education was established on October 1st 2015, following the adoption of Act no. 91/2015. The Directorate is an administrative institution in the field of education and its main objective is to improve quality and support progress in education in accordance with law and government policies, best evidence and international standards. The Directorate of Education has taken over responsibilities from the former Education Testing Institute and The National Centre for Educational Materials. The Directorate has also assumed responsibility for certain administrative tasks from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and for new projects such as the implementation of the National agreement on literacy. The agency has also taken over or is

responsible for accreditation of adult educational providers, accreditation of curriculum for adults learners and coherent implementation of RPL.

The role of the social partners and the CVT funds.

All trade unions have for a long time offered their members various services, including educational and vocational training and leisure opportunities. Members have always been encouraged to apply for grants to update their skills and companies/institutions to subsidize cost in CVT. It can be said that the social partners move the CVT higher on the agenda ending in the Act of Adult Education where the main target group is people with no/little formal educational background. The social partners fund various educational training centers for employees with higher educational background e.g. the industries, public sector and specific professions.

By applying pressure through the collective labor-market bargaining they managed to significantly strengthen previously existing training funds and invent new methods of collaborative forums for different stakeholders in CVT. Today, all employees and employers (including the public sector) contribute a small percentage of the salary to a training fund – that is usually tied to a particular union or association of unions. These funds either directly fund training activities or reimburse employees. The main responsibility of this funding though lies with the employer who pays fee which amounts 0.3-1% of the wages of each individual worker to mutual funds which are used for different CVT activities, i.e. the running of sectoral training funds or specialized educational and training centers. The next step in the early 2000s was that both public and private labor union associations established training development centers for their constituents in collaboration with their respective bargaining partner. The activities of these centres have proven very successful.



Fighting unemployment with education

Iceland has managed to tackle the unemployment rate, which did rise dramatically, after the financial crisis. Today the unemployment rate is appr.2,6% but higher among specific groups like young people and newly graduates from universities. Three governmental initiatives have taken place the last 5 years where a collaborative forum of all stakeholders was formed, where the labor market and the formal and informal school system worked closely together and where an intensive guidance and support structure was set up to assist marginalized groups. These projects were all hosted and managed by the Directorate of Labor:

- 1) The first effort program which started in 2010 was called „Active youth“ (Ungt fólk til athafna). It included increased counselling for young people and responsible active participation of the unemployed in those measures along with active job searching. The aim was to ensure all young people aged 16 to 29, who had been job-seekers for three months or longer, received active labour market measures.



- 2) In autumn of 2011 a new program titled „Learning is a road to employment “(Nám er vinnandi vegur), was implemented. The aim was to react to increasing long-term unemployment by encouraging job-seekers to seek further education by making it possible for them to receive unemployment benefits while studying. Special emphasis was on vocational, technical and creative education.
- 3) The third effort program was called “The Road to Employment” (Vinnandi vegur) was a collaboration between the government, local municipalities and the labour market. The project was set in action in the beginning of 2012. Those seeking employment would be given a chance to participate in the labour market and employers were given the chance to hire new employees and create new jobs by being compensated from the Unemployment Fund for each employee hired through the project. The goal was to create 1.500 new jobs.



Increase attractiveness of the VET-system

Combined initiatives are currently being taken to make vocational education and especially the trade and craftsman studies, more attractive to younger people, as a career choice. The Nordic countries seems to lead the way and the discussions on future developments are taking place. Leikn observes the dialog and its main concerns are adults in transition and their access to vocational studies, as hobby or change of career. Large generations are getting older and changes in career are inevitable.

Projects and ideas

Validation of general competences/Basic Skills

The participants are validated in the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) in steps 1-2-3. This project is run by Simey in Akureyri (the North of Iceland) according to the RPL methodology.

The general competences were mapped as:

- IT and computer skills
- Communication skills
- Essential skills; reading, writing, numeracy
- Communication and cooperation skills
- General safety
- Management and planning
- Continuous learning and personal growth
- Multicultural thinking and equality
- Information Processing
- Environment and sustainability



The gain for the individual: To be able to focus on his strengths in communication and cooperation built on his past experience in working life or in personal life. Enhancing possibilities on the job market and in continuous learning. Making individual strengths visible for the person, job market and learning/ training institutions. Contact: www.simey.is

Pilot projects for increased education in Western part of Iceland

Símenntunarmiðstöðin á Vesturlandi (The Lifelong Learning Center of Western region of Iceland) signed a contract with the University of Bifröst regarding a project which the Ministry of Education launched in 2014.

The main goals of the project were 4 and aiming at the whole region (Norðvesturkjördæmi):

- To promote consultation for companies regarding education at work
- To increase cooperation of the economy and educators of occupational learning
- To increase the numbers of individuals who complete vocational training
- To improve the Icelandic knowledge of immigrants

Validation of real competence was introduced to people in the region and the emphasis was on a fishing industry, butchery, industrial mechanics, marine engineering, skippers, kindergarten assistants, social assistants and learning support assistants. 117 individuals have completed validation and over 3000 'units' have been validated.

90 individuals have started vocational studies in secondary schools, 28 individuals were registered to secondary schools (former dropouts). Similar project was launched in one quarter in Reykjavik, Breidholt, based on the same ideology and that did reach out to immigrants, young unemployed people and people in career transition. That project was called Education Now (Menntun núna).



Various methods were tried in Icelandic teaching. Foreign employees of one company participated in a distance learning course, a women's organization took care of teaching Icelandic in one area and one course was taught with a helping hand of a translator. 120 people attended two conferences about the multicultural society and Icelandic teaching. The project was completed on the 1st of March 2015 and the results are still being discussed and learned from. Reports in Icelandic can be found on www.simenntun.is and www.frae.is.

Web-page on occupations and education: (Next steps)

Education and Training Service Centre for the Employment Sector plc. (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins - FA) and Centre for Lifelong Guidance Expertise (Sérfræðisetur í ævinlangri náms- og starfsráðgjöf SÆNS) collaborated on the development of a new website in cooperation with various stakeholders i.e. Occupational councils, professional associations and educational partners.

The website is a part of an IPA funded project managed by the Lifelong learning center in 2012-2014 under the name: The development of competence assessment in order to increase the employability of adults with little formal education.



Various advisory partners participated on the project; The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, The Ministry of Finance and Economic affairs, The Ministry of Welfare, The Icelandic Confederation of Labor, The Confederation of Icelandic Employers, The Federation of State and Municipal Employees, The Association of Local Authorities in Iceland, The Association of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Centers, The Association of Upper Secondary Schools, and Statistic Iceland.

The main objective of the website is to give individuals information and advice on the Icelandic Labor market, Educational opportunities and skills assessments/validations of real competence. At this point the website contains around 220 job descriptions, 100 course descriptions, and information on skills assessments/validations of real competence and education-and career counselling. A great demand has been for this kind of information website to enable individuals to make educational and career choices. Further development of the website is important but at this point funding is unclear.

Evaluation of the adult education system in Iceland

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture requested, in June 2013, that Capacent-Iceland would make a comprehensive assessment of the adult education system in Iceland. The evaluation, which focused on roles, division of labor and cooperation between The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC), Education and Training Fund, educational partners, other stakeholders and the Ministry. The main goal of the assessment was to assess the development of the adult education system, the efficiency and utilization of funds and to check what results it has produced over the past five years and to examine the relationship between stakeholders and decision-makers. Special emphasis was placed on assessing the impact and effectiveness of the system.

Shift-Work and Public Health

All actors on the labor market, public and private, have agreed to design training for staff working on shifts and planners organizing shift work. The main aim of this practical 30 hours training course is to prevent employees, working on shifts, from (possible) negative consequences of long term shift work. Many researches show statistical significance between various health and lifestyles factors and working on shifts. The course trains employees to select shifts according to personal safety and health issues and offer training to follow regulations and labour market agreements. Employers and HRM specialist also receive training in administrating and correcting shift systems. All stakeholders on the labor-market were involved when designing the curriculum and agreed on one centralized web-based educational management system to support the project. The courses will be offered nationwide through the learning system of Starfsmennt.

Goals: To maintain and support healthy life and successful career in working on shifts.

Target group: Shift work personnel, employers and administrators of shift work systems, social partners.

Learning outcomes: To know about possible negative consequences of working on shifts, when labour market agreements are not followed. To set up and practice prevention measures. To be familiar with health issues, the importance of sleep, physical exercise and supportive working conditions.

Website / Contact information: www.smennt.is



Icelandic for immigrants mothers

This project is run in the North of Iceland by Simey-Lifelong learning Centre and aimed at young mothers who do not have Icelandic as their mother tongue. The mothers attend a course in Icelandic along with their babies, who participate in the course and play in the classroom. The staff assist both the mothers in learning and practising the language and the kids, who play in the educational workshop facilities. A welcoming atmosphere is stressed and informal communication between the mothers, teachers and staff.

Goals: By welcoming other family members into the classroom the barriers of being faraway from ones family or not having a child care support, is removed and educational activities of young mothers are enhanced.

Target group: Young immigrant mothers (or parents).

Learning outcome: To learn more Icelandic and practise the spoken language. To facilitate participation in adult education by welcoming kids in the classroom. To remove barriers to enhance employability through participation in adult education.

Website: www.simey.is



GOAL: Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners - GOAL