

Vocational education and training in Iceland

Short description

Dóra Stefánsdóttir

Cedefop Reference series

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Cedefop introduction

Cedefop is pleased to make this short description of vocational education and training in Iceland available to a wide audience through the European Training Village (ETV).

Although in structure and size this document is not so very different from others published by Cedefop, it has its specific characteristics. Many of these are concerned with the nature of Iceland, a small very thinly populated country, on the margins of Europe, but with a high standard of living and a well-developed educational and training system. It remains difficult to discern whether the relatively prosperous nature of Icelandic society can in part be attributed to the education and training system.

What is clear is that the nature and size of the country means that many Icelanders will continue to have to go abroad to avail of specialised learning programmes, but also that the opportunities which the new information and communication technologies provide for distance and informal learning are of immense importance in the Icelandic context.

The report is also unusual in that it has been written by a Cedefop staff member, who is of course from Iceland, rather than by an author resident in the country. I congratulate Dóra Stefánsdóttir on her courage in preparing this text and join with her in encouraging readers both those in Iceland and outside it to send her any comments they may have on the usefulness of this publication and the clarity of the text and the information it contains. Remembering that we have deliberately kept the text short, have you found major gaps in the presentation? In that context, we would draw your attention to the existence in hard and electronic form of the earlier and longer description of VET in Iceland published by Cedefop in 2000 – see Annex 2 for full details.

Stavros Stavrou
Deputy Director

Thessaloniki
November 2002

Author's preface

Upper secondary education in Iceland has been under gradual reconstruction for some time. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, both general and vocational education have been streamlined, choices made clearer and the changing of paths without losing previously gained study credits, has been made easier. The differentiation between general education on the one hand and vocational education on the other has become less rigid and it has become possible to finish upper secondary school with both vocational and general qualifications. Access to university education has also become easier for people with vocational qualifications and the first polytechnic institute was established in the summer of 2002.

However, the people graduating with vocational qualifications have not grown in numbers during the last couple of decades and in many trades the number of graduates has fallen. Especially girls seem to choose general rather than vocational education, possibly because many subjects traditionally dominated by women have now been moved from secondary to tertiary level, making a general school leaving certificate (*studentspróf*) almost a prerequisite.

At the time of publication, several steps were being taken by the Ministry and social partners that might change the picture (see chapter 6). Furthermore the government's plans for growth outside the area surrounding the capital might have an effect. At present, people in the country-side more often go into vocational education than those living in and around the city. For obvious reasons (the small size of most villages and indeed of the population as a whole), their choices have however been limited. Distance education, specific "growth" areas and increased possibilities of studying "at home" for longer periods will undoubtedly increase their options.

I would like to express my thanks to colleagues at Cedefop, Anne-France Mossoux, Eleonora W. Schmid and Michael Adams, for their valuable contribution to this document. It has been great fun to work on and also quite educational. I also thank all the numerous people in Iceland who have helped me with material, commented on the content and ironed out misconceptions.

Thessaloniki, July 2002,

Dóra Stefánsdóttir

Table of contents

1.	Background information	9
1.1.	Political background and economy	9
1.2.	Iceland in figures:	10
1.3.	Demography and education	10
2.	The education system	11
2.1.	Pre-primary education	12
2.2.	Compulsory education	12
2.3.	Upper secondary education	12
2.3.1.	General versus vocational education	13
	Dropout rates	14
2.3.2.	Gender differences	15
2.4.	Tertiary education	15
2.5.	Continuing education	16
3.	Structure of vocational education and training	17
3.1.	Historical background	17
3.2.	Initial vocational education and training	18
3.2.1.	School-based education and training	19
3.2.2.	Work-based training	19
3.2.3.	Qualifications and requirements	20
3.2.3.1.	Health-care studies	20
3.2.3.2.	Police officer	20
3.2.3.3.	The transport sector	20
3.2.3.4.	The journeyman's certificate	21
3.2.3.5.	Master craftsman's qualifications	21
3.2.4.	Non certified trades	21
3.3.	Vocational/professional education and training at tertiary level	22
3.4.	Continuing vocational education and training	23
3.4.1.	Training for people without qualifications	24
3.4.2.	Training for qualified people	24
3.5.	Gender difference	24
3.6.	Authorities in vocational training	25
4.	Financing of education	27

4.1.	The state.....	27
4.2.	Municipalities	27
4.3.	Private households	27
4.4.	Social partners	28
4.5.	Icelandic Study Loan Fund	28
5.	Qualitative aspects	29
5.1.	Training of trainers	29
5.1.1.	Teachers.....	29
5.1.2.	On-the-job trainers.....	29
5.2.	Guidance and counselling.....	29
6.	Trends and perspectives	31
6.1.	Cooperation between the state and social partners	31
6.2.	Continuing training.....	31
6.3.	Migration to the capital area	32
6.4.	Shorter upper secondary education	32
6.5.	The ICT revolution	32
Annex 1: Bibliography.....		33
Annex 2: Main organisations in education and training.....		35
Ministries		35
Other organisations		36

1. Background information

1.1. Political background and economy

Iceland is a parliamentary republic, based on the constitution of 1944 (amended in 1991). The country is divided into eight parliamentary constituencies, which to a degree determine state funds to adult education (see 3.6.1). There are 172 municipalities (their number has been decreasing gradually because of mergers) in charge of pre-primary and compulsory education.

The economy is primarily based on fisheries. Fish products amounted to 67.4% of total exports in 1999 and 63.31% in 2000 measured in fob ⁽¹⁾ prices. As a percentage of total export these years whole, frozen fish amounted to 21.61% and 18.31% respectively. The service sector is presently the fastest growing one with tourism as one of its main elements. During the last five to six decades an increased weight has been put on the export of energy. Metal (aluminium and iron) is imported, purified by the use of hydroelectrical power and re-exported. This forms the bulk of industrial exports.

Figure 1: Map of Iceland and its parliamentary constituencies



Source: Landmælingar Íslands

⁽¹⁾ Free on board i.e. without cost of shipping

1.2. Iceland in figures:

Total area	103 000 km ²
Population (1.12.2000)	286 250
Population density	0.36 p./km ²
Population increase from 1999	1.21%
Net. immigration 2000	1 652
Growth of GNP 2000	5.0%
GNP/capita 2000	Ikr. 2.4 million (Eur 274 000)
Employment 16-74 (1.12.2002)	83.7%
Labour force age 16-74	160 900
Employed 16-74	155 400
in agriculture and fisheries	8.3%
in industry	23.0%
in services	68.7%
Unemployment (1 December 2002)	2.1%
Unemployed	3 700
of which: 16–24 years	1 400
males	1 500
females	2 200

Source: Statistics Iceland Nov. 2001

The population is unevenly distributed between the regions. Thus the density is highest in the southwest (Reykjavík and its surroundings), but lowest in the northwest. The divide between the area around Reykjavík and all the rest of the country has been growing since the 1940s.

1.3. Demography and education

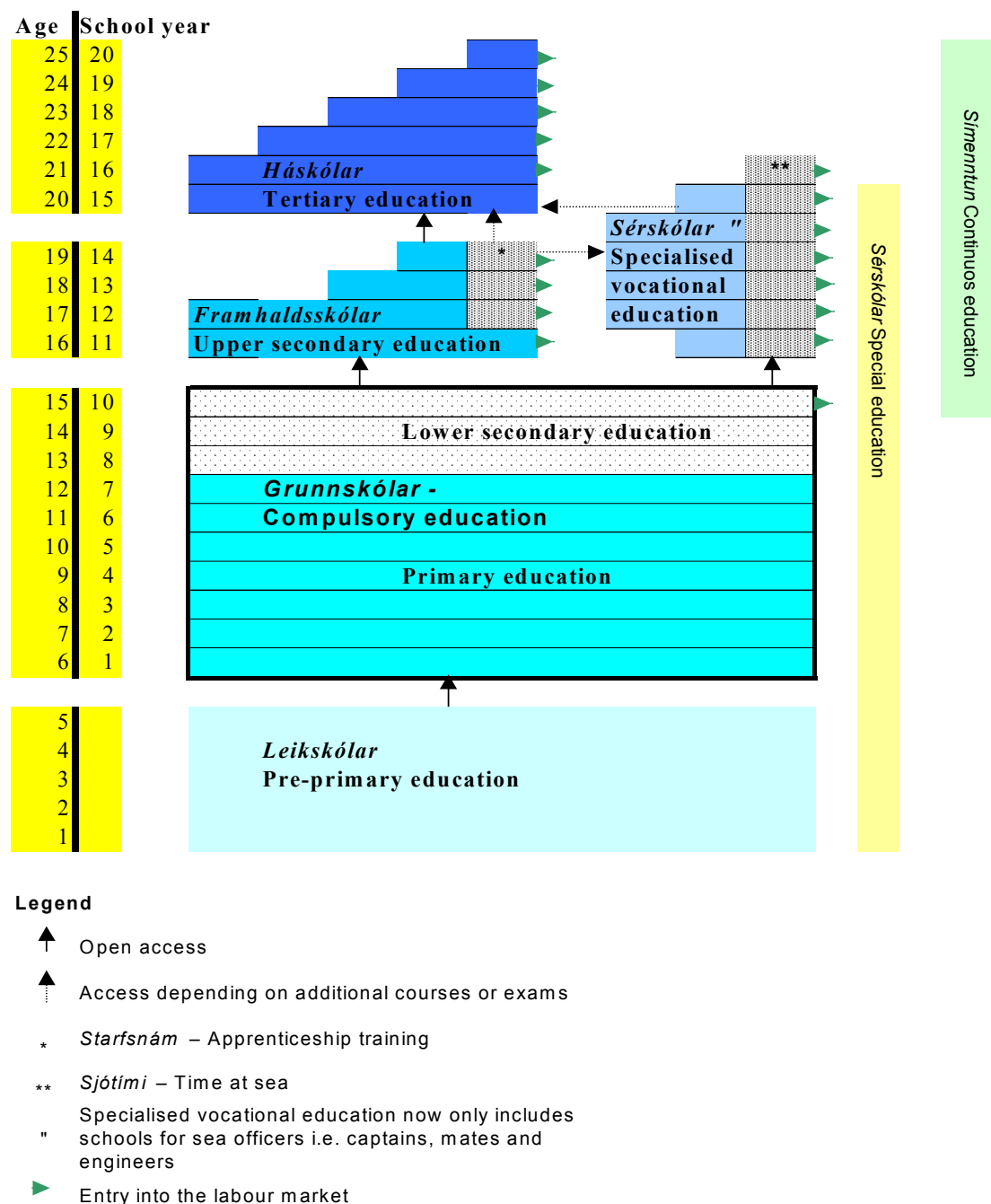
The small size of the population thinly distributed over the country has a detrimental effect on the supply of secondary and tertiary education. Especially in the extremely thinly populated countryside, courses on offer are limited and students often have to travel to Reykjavík or even abroad to study. Distance education is however gradually changing that picture.

The state is in charge of all upper secondary and most of tertiary education whereas each municipality is in charge of pre-school and compulsory education.

2. The education system

The Icelandic education system consists of five main blocks as can be seen in figure 2.

Figure 2: The Icelandic education system



Source: Author's graph based on information from the Ministry of Education

2.1. Pre-primary education

Leikskólar (pre-primary schools) are mainly in the hands of the municipalities and are available to children from 1 to 5. The education component has gradually been increased and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture formulates the basic policy for pre-schools according to the Pre-primary-school act of 1994. In 2000 around 91% of children between 3 and 5 went to *leikskólar* ⁽²⁾.

2.2. Compulsory education

School is compulsory for all children aged between 6 and 16. Special tuition for handicapped children is most commonly in regular schools but for those with very special needs there are specific schools. Seven years are classified as primary and three as lower secondary, although there is no fundamental distinction and pupils usually stay in the same school. Specific measures for non-native pupils have gradually been put in place, mainly by offering courses in Icelandic as a second language. A structural change in the education system took place in 1995 when the municipalities took over the running of *grunnskólar* (compulsory schools) from the state ⁽³⁾. This did not change the basic structure of the system, but the municipalities have gradually increased the service offered by the schools. The Ministry of Education is still responsible for the nationally coordinated curricula of core subjects and carries out central (not compulsory) examinations in 6 subjects (Icelandic, English, Danish, mathematics, natural sciences and social sciences) for all school leavers. In 2000 some 43 000 pupils attended *grunnskólar*.

2.3. Upper secondary education

In the academic year 2000-01 a little over 20 000 students attended 37 *framhaldsskólar* (upper secondary schools). Most of these students (17 879) were enlisted in day schools. Evening school students were usually adults who had left the school system and later resumed their studies ⁽⁴⁾. The shortest possible degree to accomplish takes 1 semester and the longest (and most common) 4 years. *Sérkennsla* (special education) is offered for handicapped students ⁽⁵⁾. Of 37 *framhaldsskólar*, 14 offered special tuition in 1999/2000 ⁽⁶⁾.

⁽²⁾ Source: Statistics Iceland 2001

⁽³⁾ Apart from six schools run by private organisations

⁽⁴⁾ There used to be a 25 year old age limit but this has been abolished so students are gradually becoming younger

⁽⁵⁾ This is mainly assisting them in finishing the degree on offer but in some cases special degrees are on offer for the mentally handicapped

⁽⁶⁾ Source Ministry of Education

2.3.1. General versus vocational education

Until the 1970s there were two main types of *framhaldsskólar* to choose from; *iðnskólar* (industrial vocational schools) and *menntaskólar* (grammar schools). Since then *ffölbrautarskólar* (comprehensive schools) have gradually been established. There, students can graduate either with general or vocational qualifications or a combination. These schools are now the most numerous in the country while there are few schools offering only vocational education. *Sérskólar* (specialized vocational schools) used to be many and offering a wide range of courses. Most of these studies are now at university level (see 3.5) and only two pathways are left, for mates/captains and ship engineers respectively.

An increasing proportion of upper secondary level tuition is being carried out through *ffarnám* (distance education) which has revolutionised the opportunities especially for people living in the countryside. In autumn 2001 1 051 students were enlisted in distance education versus 514 in 1999. In the diagram below, schools are listed according to the names of programmes. Note that figures for *iðnskólar* are included in *ffölbrautarskólar* (7).

Table 1: Number of students at upper secondary school-level 1998-2000, autumn

	1998	1999	2000
Total:	20 414	20 388	20 256
Day-school (mainly 16-20 year olds)	18 095	17 961	17 879
Evening school (mainly adults)	2 080	2 132	1 924
Distance learning (mainly adults)	239	295	453
<i>Fjölbrautaskólar</i> (Comprehensive schools)	13 514	13 512	13 593
<i>Menntaskólar</i> (Grammar schools)	5 207	5 199	5 038
<i>Sérskólar</i> (specialised vocational schools)	403	417	313
<i>Tónlistarskólar</i> (Secondary music schools)	50	73	80
Art schools	96	48	41
Students at secondary school level at (mainly) tertiary schools	146	189	234
Apprentices in training outside schools	998	950	957

Sources: Statistics Iceland

The percentage of vocational subjects in upper secondary education is low (only the last four categories in the following table) and about a third of all students are enrolled in these:

Table 2: Number of upper-secondary school students according to programme, 2000

	Total	Males	Females
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(7) Students may be counted more than once if they participate in more than one distance course

	Total	Males	Females
<i>Total</i>	20 256	9 909	10 347
<i>General programmes</i>	3 038	1 403	1 635
<i>Languages</i>	1,697	363	1 334
<i>Fine and applied arts</i>	972	208	764
<i>Pedagogical and physical programmes</i>	370	147	223
<i>Social science programmes</i>	3 246	1 168	2 078
<i>Natural science programmes</i>	3 939	2 013	1 926
<i>Commerce, economics</i>	1 959	956	1 003
<i>Crafts and technical trades</i>	3 517	3 212	305
<i>Agriculture, food and service trades</i>	1 068	415	653
<i>Health-related programmes</i>	450	24	426

Source: Statistics Iceland

Dropout rates

In 2001 around 90% of compulsory school leavers started upper secondary education. This percentage has increased gradually over the last decade. Between 20% and 25% seem to drop out during the first two years. Around one third seems to complete upper secondary education within the official time frame, be it 1 semester or 4 years, whereas some 65% seem to complete it before the age of 30 ⁽⁸⁾. There are some variations between years and when the demand for unskilled labour is great, dropout from upper secondary schools is usually high.

Although fewer students enrol in the rural areas than in and around Reykjavík, the dropout rates there are higher. While 93.7% of the capital area 16 year-olds enrol in upper secondary education and 70.6% graduate, only 86.1% of those in rural areas enrol and 63.1% graduate. Because of this, and the migration of educated people to Reykjavík, in some rural areas up to 65% of the population are workers without any post compulsory education ⁽⁹⁾.

The reasons for dropping out are varied. In a study carried out in 2001, among pupils born in 1975, 43% of drop outs said that they found school boring, 38% had found a good job, 36% said they had money problems and 35% had a difficult family situation ⁽¹⁰⁾. While the majority of boys who dropped out of school were able to find a good job and were happy with their choice, the majority of girls were not so happy with their dropping out and had not found satisfactory jobs. In a similar situation were immigrants, people with learning difficulties, people who did not know what they wanted in life and those who had experienced defeat within the school system.

⁽⁸⁾ Source *Nám og viðhorf ungs fólks í framhaldsskóla*

⁽⁹⁾ Source Ministry of Education 2001

⁽¹⁰⁾ Source *Ungt fólk og framhaldsskólinn, 2002*. Getting pregnant or having a baby was the most common reason for girls.

2.3.2. Gender differences

The study paths chosen by girls are usually more general and less technically oriented than those chosen by boys. One of the main reasons may be that many of the traditional ‘female’ subjects have been moved from secondary to tertiary level, hence taking a *studentspróf* (secondary school-leaving certificate) a necessary prerequisite. In 1999, some 55% of girls born in 1975 finished upper secondary school with qualifications necessary for tertiary studies and 7% with qualifications that gave direct access to jobs. The corresponding figures for boys were 27% and 15% respectively ⁽¹¹⁾.

2.4. Tertiary education

At tertiary level there are now eight institutions (five run by the state and three private) with *Háskóli Íslands* –HÍ- (the University of Iceland) being largest with 6 588 students in 1999 ⁽¹²⁾. Qualifications available vary from a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science (3-4 years of studies) to a Master’s (some 2 to 3 years on top of a BA or BS). HÍ offers PhD courses (time of studies can vary between 2 and 5 years on top of a master’s degree).

The number of students in distance education at tertiary institutions is growing rapidly and there were in total 1 101 enrolments in autumn 2001 versus 944 the previous year ⁽¹³⁾. Here it has to be noted that a much higher percentage of these students are enlisted only for a single course rather than for a degree than is the case in traditional education.

Many Icelanders take tertiary education abroad. In 2000 there were 1 706 ⁽¹⁴⁾. Those students are at both graduate and post-graduate levels, but there is a higher tendency for the latter ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Around 60% of university students are women. This is a great change from previous times and as late as 1985 participation was equal. Women aim for fields such as education, health care and social and literary science whereas men aim for various technical fields. It is interesting to note that women are now also the majority of students in law, medicine and theology ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Of 1 326 people who registered for the first time at the University of Iceland in 1993, 385 (almost 27%) had neither completed their studies in 2000, nor were they still enrolled ⁽¹⁷⁾. The rates between men and women are almost identical. Other surveys on dropout from tertiary education are not available and these figures must therefore be taken with reserve.

⁽¹¹⁾ Source *Nám og viðhorf ungs fólks í framhaldsskóla*

⁽¹²⁾ Source Ministry of Education

⁽¹³⁾ Source: Ministry of Education 2001

⁽¹⁴⁾ Source: Statistics Iceland

⁽¹⁵⁾ These are only students who take study loans. In all likelihood the number is higher

⁽¹⁶⁾ Source: *Hvað vilja konur?*

⁽¹⁷⁾ Source: Statistics Iceland

2.5. Continuing education

Símenntun (continuing education) has become extremely popular. This applies to courses both offered by the private sector and official institutions. In fact, continuing education is a field that is extremely difficult to summarise because of its diversification and because it keeps changing. Broadly it can be divided up into general adult education and training directly linked to specific tasks within the labour market (see 3.6).

A survey in 1998 showed that around half of those aged between 18 and 75 were participating in some sort of education outside the public education system, 34% in work related courses and 20% in leisure courses. Women participate in more leisure courses than men, whereas participation in work-related ones is similar between the sexes. However, low-paid women working in industry are the group that most rarely attends such courses (¹⁸).

Also within the public education system, continuing education has increased. It is possible both to add to qualifications (especially in the vocational training system) and to commence new studies, mainly in evening school or through distance education.

Participating in courses at tertiary level institutions has become very popular since *Endurmenntun Háskóla Íslands* (Continuing Education at the University of Iceland) started in 1983. In 2000 over 12 000 students enrolled there (¹⁹). Most of the courses are of short duration (from a couple of hours to a few weeks) and do not lead to a recognised degree, even though many of them offer some sort of a diploma. Other tertiary level institutions also offer similar studies but on a much smaller scale.

(¹⁸) Source: *Hvað vilja konur?*

(¹⁹) Source: University of Iceland

3. Structure of vocational education and training

3.1. Historical background

Before the last quarter of the nineteenth century the only possibility of vocational training was at first training abroad (mainly in Denmark) and later through an Icelandic apprenticeship system, where the apprentice depended on his/her master for food and lodging.

The first vocational (evening) school was established in 1869 and *Iðnskólinn í Reykjavík* (Reykjavik Technical School) was formally opened in 1904, run by the Association of master craftsmen in Reykjavík. All studies –were based on an apprenticeship system.

The first legislation was adopted in 1893, stipulating that formal tuition at a vocational school was the prerequisite for taking the journeyman's exam. Schools were gradually established all over Iceland and by World War II some 50-100 apprentices graduated each year.

The Vocational Education Act of 1949 established *Iðnfræðsluráð* (the Industrial Training Board), comprising representatives of master craftsmen and journeymen. Its role was to ensure that trainees received satisfactory workplace training.

With the Industrial Vocational Act of 1955 the state and municipalities took over the responsibility for vocational training even though craftsmen's associations still influenced the curricula. Education was offered during the day and 8 weeks of schooling a year became compulsory, in addition to workplace training.

In 1966 the option of a 1-2 year basic studies at school, including both the theoretical and the practical part, was introduced. However, it proved difficult for students to get the necessary apprenticeship contracts to complete their studies and in some cases the schools therefore started offering supplementary courses.

In the 1970s the comprehensive schools emerged (see 2.3.1). These were based on a modular system (each unit giving a credit) offering a core of general subjects to all students. Additionally each student would choose a path leading either to a general or vocational certificate. The latter requires on hands-on training, usually outside the school. It is also possible to graduate with both types of certificates. This type of school is particularly convenient for the smaller villages, where it has become common that former vocational and grammar schools merge. The biggest comprehensive schools are however in and around Reykjavik and in Akureyri.

In the 1970s national standard curricula for the theoretical part of the studies in various trades were developed. This has eased mobility and the access to further education.

The Upper Secondary School Act was adopted in 1988, covering both vocational and general education and training offered to people from 16 to 19. A new law was passed in 1996 and is the basis for the current education system. 14 vocational councils were formed, one for all the different trades in each sector, and a cooperation committee (*SAMSTARF*) to advise the Minister in the development of a VET-policy for the whole vocational sector. The social partners form the great majority of each council (6 people), with one person from the Ministry of Education. Their objectives are to review all study plans, to streamline training, suggest shorter and longer educational programmes and a more flexible system of vocational education. The overall committee has suggested that education and training be divided up into individual levels or cumulative steps each of which giving some qualifications.

Since the 1970s, some 15-20% of people have obtained vocational qualifications⁽²⁰⁾. The number of training opportunities has hardly increased and neither has the number of placements available for apprentices. Hence it is not surprising that the number of journeymen is falling and, with increased participation in upper secondary education as a whole, that the percentage of journeymen is falling even more rapidly compared with general education graduates⁽²¹⁾. It is interesting to note that outside the capital area, it is more common to complete vocational education than within the area⁽²²⁾.

3.2. Initial vocational education and training

All pupils who have finished compulsory education and have passed at least the minimum requirements in Icelandic and mathematics can start vocational education. It is furthermore possible for pupils over 18 who have not finished compulsory school to get exemption from this rule. Training can start either at school or at a workplace with which the student has a training contract. The most common rule is to start at school, then undertake workplace training and end with a demonstration test in the skills in question.

The system of initial vocational education and training can be divided up into two broad categories;

- (a) those that lead to a legally recognised, certified qualification;
 - certified trades (approximately 50 different trades of which 35 are active, i.e. there are usually some trainees in them)
 - training for the health service
 - training for officers of transportation vehicles in the air and at sea

⁽²⁰⁾ Here estimates tend to differ, according to the age of the survey groups because vocational graduates tend to be older than graduates from general studies. Some estimates go as far as saying that around 30% of people at the age of 35 have vocational qualifications of some sort.

⁽²¹⁾ Source: Óskarsdóttir 2000 p. 41

⁽²²⁾ Source: *Ungt fólk og framhaldsskólinn*

- training for police officers
- (b) those that do not lead to qualifications but generally give the bearer some increased benefits (see 3.4.6).

The length of time education and training is carried out in schools on the one hand and at workplaces on the other varies between trades.

Most vocational study paths have been losing pupils during the last years. A few have been keeping an even balance and fewer still have made slight gains. The percentage of those with vocational qualifications is considerably lower than in the other Nordic countries, not to speak of countries such as Austria and Germany.

Some students first enrol with in general studies and later change to vocational studies, utilising at least a part of their formerly acquired education. Those graduating with vocational qualifications thus tend to be older than those who graduate with general qualifications, e.g. 29 for journeymen versus of 21 for *stúdentspróf*⁽²³⁾.

Some non-formal vocational training takes place outside the official school system. One in five of 24 year olds born in 1975 said in a survey that they had undertaken such training. 75% of that group had no formal qualifications⁽²⁴⁾ from the public school system.

3.2.1. School-based education and training

School time is usually divided into a basic part (*grunnám*), which is common for several studies in similar sector (metal, construction, etc) and specialisation (*sérnám*) in a number of trades (see below). The duration of programmes can be between one semester (4 months) and 4 years.

3.2.2. Work-based training

Starfsþjálfun (practical training) or *samningsbundið iðnnám* (apprenticeship) is a regulated part of certified training. A training contract is usually signed between the trainee and an enterprise. The length of the training period varies from 4 – 36 months according to the structure of the VET-programme in question. During that time the trainee is supposed to carry out a broad range of tasks introducing him or her to all the most common subjects of the trade.

Employers have pointed out that for many companies it is difficult if not impossible to make apprenticeship agreements due to their small size and the limited scope of the work they carry out. They point out that in some branches of industry only a small proportion of companies is involved in apprenticeship training, even though they cannot be certain of how long the fully

⁽²³⁾ Source: Interview with officials from Ministry of Education

⁽²⁴⁾ Source: *Ungt fólk og framhaldsskólinn*.

trained person will work for them. Other companies do not provide training but nevertheless have access to fully trained personnel. Ideas of changes in the system were being discussed at the time of publication (see 6.1)

3.2.3. Qualifications and requirements

3.2.3.1. Health-care studies

The certified studies within the health-care system provide qualifications after 1-3 years of study. Thereof, work-based training within the health-care sector varies from 16 to 40 weeks. 325 people were enrolled at different levels in autumn 2000.

3.2.3.2. Police officer

The certificate of a police officer can be obtained after one year of a combination of theoretical and on-the-job training. 39 officers graduated in December 2001. Formally students are required to have completed at least of another upper secondary education but most students who are admitted in fact have completed 4 years and have a *stúdentspróf*. A little under 900 people attended such courses in 2001 ⁽²⁵⁾. Short courses are available after the completion of the one year course and offer specialisation in various fields

3.2.3.3. The transport sector

In the transport sector the most common studies are within the field of ship navigation and engineering. The structure of training has been developed in Iceland and does not comply with the international qualification system. For mates/captains the prerequisite of training is a 6 months time at sea. Each module of school-based training (both theoretical and on simulators) plus additional sea time gives navigation certificates for different ships types or sizes. For the engineers the principal is similar, each module of school plus workshop training gives qualification for a certain size of engine. In both cases, the number of students has been falling rapidly and in autumn 2000 there were 266 people training for engineering but only 46 for navigation.

In the field of aviation, training is solely undertaken by private schools. There are no entry requirements but students have to be at least 17 years old when commencing training. To become a commercial pilot two years of theoretical studies are needed plus time in the air, altogether some 4 to 5 years. The study for aircraft engineers takes similar time and cannot be completed in Iceland. Information on the number of students is not available.

⁽²⁵⁾ Source: The Icelandic Police School

3.2.3.4. *The journeyman's certificate*

The most common certificate to be obtained in the vocational training system is *sveinsbréf* (the journeyman's certificate). This usually takes four years and is a combination of studies at school and on-the-job training. During the work-place training the apprentices receive a gradually increasing proportion of the salaries of a fully qualified journeyman. Each certified trade has its own *sveinsprófs* (journeyman's exam) committee, comprised of employers and employees in the trade and representatives from Ministry of Education. The journeyman's certificate gives the right to work in the certified trade in question. It does not give automatic rights to further studies but journeymen can upon additional studies and /or examinations enter the tertiary education system. The length of further studies depends on the length of the previous education and on whether a student chooses to continue studying in a similar field or a new one ⁽²⁶⁾.

The annual number of journeymen's examinations has decreased over the last three decades, from around 820 in 1980 to 539 in 2000. However, in 1996 there was a slight rise (to 752) because two new trades were certified. In 1998 the number rose again (this time to 790) due a clause in the Upper Secondary School Act of 1996, which stipulated that workers, with at least 10 years in a specific trade, were no longer allowed to apply for a journeyman's certificate. An adaptation time of two years was given, thus forcing a relatively large group to apply within that timeframe.

3.2.3.5. *Master craftsman's qualifications*

With a journeyman's qualification and one year's work experience, it is possible to continue studying an additional year to obtain a certificate as a master craftsman of a certified trade (*meistarabréf*). That gives the right to train apprentices, operate a business or manage an industrial cooperation. Only a fraction of journeymen obtain master craftsmen's qualifications (115 in 1999/2000) ⁽²⁷⁾.

3.2.4. **Non certified trades**

A wide variety of studies in non-certified trades do not lead to qualifications. Even so, students are often able to obtain higher level jobs than those not trained at all, though this depends on economic fluctuations. Most of these programmes take place only at educational institutions and may vary from place to place, as certificates of completion are issued by the schools rather than centrally. The most usual entry requirements are a compulsory school-leaving certificate.

They most popular fields are:

⁽²⁶⁾ Students who have some vocational education but have not taken the journeyman's exam can also get their study units accredited.

⁽²⁷⁾ Source: Statistical Iceland

- massage. Takes three years and is a theoretical and practical programme. 51 were enrolled in autumn 2000;
- draughtsmanship. A three-year programme preparing students to work in draughting firms. 87 pupils were enrolled in 2000;
- agriculture and horticulture. Theoretical and practical studies in both livestock- and vegetable farming, lasting one to three years. 93 pupils were enrolled in autumn 2000;
- computer studies. Lasting three years aimed at preparing students for work in the computer industry. 552 were enrolled in autumn 2000;
- commercial studies. Generally takes two years. 932 were enrolled in autumn 2000;
- travel services. Offers two paths: one year of specialised studies or two years of theoretical and practical studies. Because the courses are at both upper secondary and tertiary level and classified in different categories in overall statistics, reliable information on attendance is not available. However, it is known that this is a rapidly growing field;
- various other courses for specific trades such as dental assistance, social services and fish processing. Very few people enrol in each of these;
- several specialised trade unions and other organisations in industry run their own training institutes (on a regular or non-regular basis), offering different courses related to the occupation in question. Employers usually contribute to the operation of these schools in accordance with specific sectoral agreements (from 0.2-1% of the salaries of fully trained people). Some of these schools have been certified by the Ministry of Education as private schools at upper secondary level;
- a few larger companies offer courses to the employees and some official institutions (e.g. the fire departments, the post and the customs and excise) run their own schools.

3.3. Vocational/professional education and training at tertiary level

At tertiary level the division between general and vocational/professional training becomes very unclear. Thus it is possible for students from comprehensive or grammar schools to enter tertiary level vocational education and for graduates of vocational institutions to enter university. In most cases some additional studies need to be undertaken to gain entry, but the general rule is that access is relatively easy.

It further complicates the picture that the University of Iceland has gradually taken over studies which used to be vocational at upper secondary level. One example is nursing, which is now one of the most popular subjects at the university but was until the 1970s taught at a specialised vocational upper secondary school. The division between technical programmes taught at HÍ and at *Tækniskóli Íslands*, the traditional school for tertiary vocational training, is also not clear. In the spring of 2002 this school was permitted by parliament to be run as a

university and is now called *Tækniháskóli Íslands* (The Icelandic College of Engineering and Technology). However, all statistics concerning students at the school are still classified as secondary school statistics.

Hence, it is difficult if not impossible to assess the number of students in tertiary vocational education or with tertiary vocational qualifications.

3.4. Continuing vocational education and training

Training for people with or without qualifications is varied. Most usual are short and compact courses, at the workplace or in a training institution close by. Until a few years ago, course-attendance gave an automatic salary increase but this has been changing and individual salary increases are in most cases a matter for negotiations.

Workplace continuous learning in Iceland seems to be among the lowest in Europe. Around 35% claimed in a survey in 1998 to have received induction training when they started their present work, but only half of those deemed the training sufficient⁽²⁸⁾. Another survey in 1996 showed that only 18% of women and 19% of men were involved in any workplace training that year. To this must be added that 60% of men and 45% of women were trying to learn how to improve their working capacity in their leisure time by reading books or taking computer courses.

The main reason for the low training figure is that most Icelandic companies are very small and do not have the resources to train. This can be seen from the fact that the bigger the company is, the more likely it is to offer training to its employees⁽²⁹⁾.

The general rule seems to be that the more education people already have, the more likely they are to receive further training connected to their job. Thus 72% of courses on offer were for specialists, 52% for middle management, 50% for people at technical level, 50% for office workers, 47% for managers but only 24% for general employees⁽³⁰⁾.

Eight *símenntunarmiðstöðvar* (centres for continuing training) have been opened outside the capital area⁽³¹⁾, offering a variety of training programmes, most of them vocational. The centres are run in close cooperation between municipalities, representatives of the labour market and the upper secondary schools in each region. Each centre also plans courses in all the villages in its region and offers distance education at upper secondary and tertiary level plus various leisure courses and specific job-training courses. Courses are subsidised by the government but participants do pay a low fee.

⁽²⁸⁾ Source: *Hvað vilja konur?*

⁽²⁹⁾ Source Ministry of Education 1998. More recent figures are not obtainable

⁽³⁰⁾ Ibid

⁽³¹⁾ One in each constituency apart from the north-east where there are two

3.4.1. Training for people without qualifications

Alþýðusamband Íslands –ASÍ- (The Icelandic Federation of Labour) ⁽³²⁾ has its own training organisation, called *Menningar- og fræslusamband alþýðu - Mfa*. It offers various courses, often in cooperation with other schools. The courses are mainly aimed at unskilled workers, and often more at improving their general knowledge e.g. in languages and computer literacy, rather than giving them more vocational qualifications. Until now only a fraction of workers have attended these courses.

In 2001 some of the large labour unions established specific training funds for all their members, into which the employers also pay a contribution. The results are likely to fundamentally change the whole spectrum of workers' training in Iceland.

The biggest municipalities run *Námsflokkar* (Adult Education Centres) offering various evening or weekend courses in both general subjects, such as languages and computer skills, and specialised courses. In some cases distance education (through correspondence) is on offer.

3.4.2. Training for qualified people

At some vocational schools it is also possible to participate in theoretical and practical courses on new trends in various trades. As a rule, these courses are offered by the trade unions, for their members, in cooperation with the school. The courses vary in duration but are usually short and finish with a diploma. Even though such diploma do not give formal rights, they can be important if the bearers wish to change their place of work.

Several of the biggest trades also operate their own training centres, funded by employers and employees and in many cases with government subsidies. Courses of various lengths are on offer, usually giving diplomas in (often very) specialised fields. Participation has been good but no overall statistics was available at the time of writing. The master craftsmen's qualification (see 3.2.2.5) could also be considered to belong to this category.

3.5. Gender difference

At all levels of vocational training the participation of men is far greater than of women. In many cases the ratio is 67% to 33%. Participation however varies greatly according to the trade in question. Thus, females tend to be more numerous than males in health-care studies, travel services and other service industry programmes. But when it comes to industrial and technical trades the ratio is almost 10 men to every woman. One small difference has to be taken into account, however. The older the students become, the bigger the percentage of

⁽³²⁾ In ASÍ there are 103 trade unions with the total of more than 78 000 employees.

women as it is not uncommon for them to re-start their studies after a period of work or child bearing. Men tend to take far more journeymen's exams than women (433 versus 104 in 1999/2000) and master craftsmen's exams (91 versus 24 in the same period).

Men are also more involved in workplace training than women. Furthermore, men are more likely than women to have their employer paying for the training, while women pay more themselves (in 82% of cases they paid tuition fees, while 65% of men did in 1993)⁽³³⁾.

3.6. Authorities in vocational training

Even though the Ministry of Education bears almost all the responsibility for vocational as well as for other education there are several other ministries involved. The Ministry of Social Affairs, through its *Starfsmenntaráð* (Vocational Education Council) is formally responsible for continuing vocational training (law 19/1992). However most of the public education programmes are under the responsibility of and funded by the Ministry of Education. The certification of health-care personnel is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, the training of law enforcement officers of the Ministry of Justice and of agricultural students the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Transportation is involved in the training of pilots and of sea officers and the Ministry of Industry in defining certified trades.

⁽³³⁾ Source Ministry of Education 1998. Again a more recent survey has not been undertaken so this may have changed

4. Financing of education

Figures on expenditure on general versus vocational education are not obtainable as all education statistics are under the same heading.

4.1. The state

The state is still the largest contributor to expenditure on education in Iceland. Overall state expenditure more than doubled, from 17 billion Ikr (Eur 209 million) in 1990 to 39 billion in 2000 (Eur 467 million). This was 4.79% and 5.94% of GDP respectively ⁽³⁴⁾.

From 1996 to 2001 a sum of 2 235 billion Ikr (around Eur 25.6 million) was contributed by the state to municipalities to enable them to offer a single shift system ⁽³⁵⁾. The state still pays for all education materials.

The operation of upper secondary and tertiary education is financed almost solely by the state. Municipalities however pay 40% of the construction of upper secondary schools, while the construction of buildings at the University of Iceland is partly financed by the University Lottery.

4.2. Municipalities

Municipalities finance pre-primary and compulsory education. Their education expenditure rose from 6 088 million Ikr (Eur 70 million) in 1996 to 13 825 million (Eur 157 million) in 1999. The increase has gradually become bigger than the increase in income from higher taxation (a difference of 625 million (Eur 7.1 million) in 1999) ⁽³⁶⁾. This is due e.g. to more tuition, a salary rise for teachers, meals at schools, new equipment and the inclusion of extra curricula activities.

Municipalities furthermore partially finance teaching in music and, in some cases, dance.

4.3. Private households

Even though the bulk of education in Iceland is almost free of charge, individual households' contributions have been rising rapidly. Thus some 2.5 billion Ikr (Eur 28 million) were spent

⁽³⁴⁾ Source National Economic Institute

⁽³⁵⁾ It used to be common to teach one shift in the morning and another in the afternoon

⁽³⁶⁾ Source KPMG 2000

on education and training in 1990 and the double, some 5 billion (Eur 58 million), 11 years later (³⁷). Included in this are registration fees in upper secondary and tertiary schools, school-books for upper secondary and tertiary schools and various costs in continuing learning. Parents also pay a varying amount for their children's music and dance lessons offered both inside the school system and by private schools. There is no set rule among the different communities on how big a percentage of these costs parents pay, it depends entirely on each community's budget. Outside this figure are the contributions to pre-primary schools. No definite figure is available but it has been estimated that parents pay on the whole about 1/3 of the running costs of those schools.

4.4. Social partners

Reliable figures about employer's expenditure on education and training are not obtainable. One estimate indicates that companies with more than 10 employees pay about IKR 800 million (Eur 9 million) annually for on-the-job courses. Other estimates indicate that 0.27% of companies' turnover was invested in lifelong learning (³⁸). According to a survey in 2000, *Samtök iðnaðarins* (the Federation of Industries) estimated that apprenticeship training costs at least 264 million IKR (Euro 3 million) annually (³⁹)

Many trade unions operate common funds into which both employers and employees pay a contribution. The latter can apply for grants from these funds and are allocated these according to previously agreed rules. Increased pressure has gradually been put on training funds and the issue has been pushed in wage negotiations with employers.

The role of various interest organisations in education is difficult if not impossible to assess. They offer numerous courses where, in most cases, participants pay all the costs. In a few cases the courses are subsidised by the organisation in question.

4.5. Icelandic Study Loan Fund

Lánasjóður íslenskra námsmanna – LÍN - (Icelandic Study Loan Fund) lends money at low interest rates to all tertiary level students and secondary school vocational students for their living costs. It is financed by repayment, government subsidies and bank loans. Repayments have increased more slowly than new loans because of devaluation of the Icelandic króna and in 1999-2001 the fund had to borrow around 3 000 million Ikr (Eur 34 million) annually (⁴⁰).

(³⁷) Source National Economic Institute

(³⁸) Source: Ministry of Education 1998

(³⁹) Source: *Fjárhagsleg ábyrgð á vinnustaðakennslu*

(⁴⁰) Source: LÍN

5. Qualitative aspects

5.1. Training of trainers

5.1.1. Teachers

There is no legal distinction between vocational and other teachers. Formally a teacher is supposed to have received teacher's training or to have passed a one year's pedagogy course at a university, after at least a bachelor's degree. Due to a shortage of qualified teachers it is however not uncommon for teachers to be exempted from this rule, especially outside the capital area. The general rule is that teachers' education and training is constantly improving.

Vocational subjects are generally taught by people who have both a thorough training in the respective field and have taken the pedagogy course. Again, exemptions from the latter rule can be granted.

There is probably no other profession than teachers' where as much emphasis has been put on retraining. Until the salary agreement of 2001, there was a direct correlation between the training courses a teacher would undertake and the salary he or she received. The correlation was decreased but there is still a strong link. Furthermore, various retraining scholarships and grants can be obtained. The teachers' union has both planned courses for teachers, often in cooperation with the education authorities, and disseminated information about courses run by others. Most schools also urge their teachers to undertake training during the relatively long summer holidays.

5.1.2. On-the-job trainers

To be allowed to train apprentices on-the-job a master craftsmen's qualification in the respective trade is a prerequisite so that the apprentices will acquire a broad knowledge of the field in question. Each certified trade has its own controlling body with the role of overseeing the apprentices get sufficient training. There is however no formal rule stipulating that on-the-job trainers get continuous training themselves.

5.2. Guidance and counselling

Almost all upper secondary and tertiary schools offer systematic guidance and counselling on different study paths, elective subjects and courses and future job-prospects. The most common form is to employ a counsellor who has a university degree in the field of counselling.

Lower secondary schools offer counselling for graduates in regard to the possibilities of further education. Depending largely on the size of the schools, the counsellors will be partly or purely employed as such.

On the web-site mennt.is, electronic guidance and counselling for all education after compulsory school is on offer. On the web-site of the Ministry of Education the booklet “*Nám að loknum grunnskóla*” (Studies after primary school) can also be found. It is updated annually.

6. Trends and perspectives

6.1. Cooperation between the state and social partners

The cooperation between the education system on one hand and the social partners on the other has often been weak. The school system has been criticised for its “product” (educated people) not being what the market needs. Since 1998, the Ministry of Education has cooperated with the social partner with the view of increasing the latter’s responsibility for vocational training. Within the vocational councils (see 3.1. above) work is also in progress. This is likely to have many implications such as:

- increased emphasis on curricula planning and organisation according to the detailed description of and demands for specific jobs;
- vocational education will be divided into different steps or modules and it will be explicit what each step entitles the trainees to do, both in terms of further studies and work;
- increased common basic education for occupations in a similar field, followed by specialisation;
- the role of on-the-job training will be increased. Social partners will define the objectives and content of the training and a joint working group between them and the Ministry will work out further guidelines for financing, planning and surveillance;
- a method of valuing and recognising informal learning will be developed as part of secondary school education. Guidelines will be made on the assessment of courses and work and leisure experience.

Furthermore, in 1998 *Mennt* (Educate Iceland) was established. It is a forum for cooperation between the education sector, social partners, municipalities and others interested in education and training.

6.2. Continuing training

Great emphasis has been put on continuing education during the last few years. The Ministry of Education introduced a five-year plan in 1998 to strengthen lifelong learning, according to which it is the joint responsibility of the government and social partners to ensure everybody’s rights and obligations to education throughout life ⁽⁴¹⁾. Several initiatives have already been taken to ensure these objectives. Increased emphasis by labour unions on the right to paid educational leave and/or subsidised courses could also change the scene considerably. Several measures are already in place or being planned.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Source Ministry of Education, 1998

6.3. Migration to the capital area

The trend of people moving from the countryside towards the capital area, apparent all through the 20th century, is an important factor in education. People, especially those who want university qualifications, move, sometimes when they are still in secondary school. Many steps have been taken to try to reverse the situation. Thus the availability of (at least) basic upper secondary education, distance learning and courses at the continuing education centres have increased the offer of studies outside the capital area by a great deal. In the spring of 2002 the *Alþingi* (Parliament) passed a plan on the development of the country-side with a strong emphasis on education, especially vocational education. Distance learning will be further developed with the aim of making it possible for people to stay at home for a longer time.

6.4. Shorter upper secondary education

The Ministry of Education is preparing to shorten upper secondary studies for the general *studentspróf* from four to three years. How exactly this will be done is not known and neither is it clear what will happen to vocational education in comprehensive and/or vocational schools.

6.5. The ICT revolution

Information and communication technology plays an increasing role in the Icelandic education system. The Ministry of Education has clearly stated its desire that all students and teachers in upper secondary schools have their own lap-top computers and that each school be equipped with its own short-wave communication net. The communication net and computers for the teachers are financed by the state but each student buys or rents his or her computer. Students and teachers are able to interact anywhere within the school area with the help of their computers. At the same time, teachers have been trained in computer assisted teaching. Within the next decade it is expected that the “lap-top-isation” be completed. A similar trend is visible in some of the tertiary schools. Also in primary schools, computers have been put to increased use and even in pre-primary schools they are introduced as one of the tools.

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Annex 2: Main organisations in education and training

Ministries

Menntamálaráðuneytið (the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture)

Sölvhólsgötu 4

150 Reykjavík

Tel. +00-354 560 9500

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e-mail: postur@mrn.stjr.is

<http://menntamalaraduneyti.is/>

Dóms- og kirkjumálaráðuneytið (Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs.)

Arnarhvoli við Lindargötu

150 Reykjavík

Tel. +00-354 5609010

Fax +00-354 5527340

e-mail: postur@dkm.stjr.is

<http://www.domsmalaraduneyti.is/>

Heilbrigðis- og tryggingamálaráðuneytið (Ministry of Health and Insurance)

Laugavegi 116

150 Reykjavík

Tel. +00-354 560 9700

Fax +00-354 5519165

e-mail: postur@htr.stjr.is

<http://heilbrigdisraduneyti.is/>

Iðnaðar- og viðskiptaráðuneytið (Ministry of Industry and Commerce)

Arnarhvoli

150 Reykjavík

Tel. +00-354 560 9070

Fax +00-354 5621289

e-mail: postur@ivr.stjr.is

<http://idnadaraduneyti.is/>

Landbúnaðarráðuneytið (Ministry of Agriculture)

Sölvhólsgötu 7

150 Reykjavík

Tel. +00-354 560 9750

Fax +00-354 5521160

e-mail postur@lan.stjr.is
<http://landbunadarraduneyti.is/>

Samgönguráðuneytið (Ministry of Transport)

Hafnarhúsinu við Tryggvagötu

150 Reykjavík

Tel. +00-354 560 9630

Fax +00-354 5621702

e-mail postur@sam.stjr.is

<http://samgonguraduneyti.is/>

Sjávarútvegsráðuneytið (Ministry of Fisheries)

Skúlagata 4

150 Reykjavík

Tel. +00-354 560 9670

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<http://sjavarutvegsraduneyti.is/>

Other organisations

Mennt (Educate Iceland)

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Alþýðusamband Íslands (The Icelandic Federation of Labour)

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Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)

Vocational education and training in Iceland: Short description

Dóra Stefánsdóttir

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The great majority of students in upper secondary and tertiary education in Iceland choose general rather than vocational subjects. In an attempt to increase the number of vocational graduates, educational authorities have made the changing of pathways easier and increased the possibilities of credit-transfer. Several pathways that used to be at vocational upper secondary level have also been changed and are now at tertiary level. A polytechnic institute was established in 2002 and the system of apprenticeship training is under revision.

PANORAMA

Vocational education and training in Iceland

Short description



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