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Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency

Organisation of the education system in

Iceland

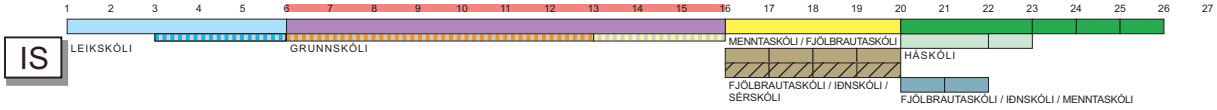
2009/2010

IS

European Commission

6. Tertiary Education

Organisation of the education system in Iceland, 2009/10



Pre-primary – ISCED 0 (for which the Ministry of Education is not responsible)	Pre-primary – ISCED 0 (for which the Ministry of Education is responsible)
Primary – ISCED 1	Single structure (no institutional distinction between ISCED 1 and 2)
Lower secondary general – ISCED 2 (including pre-vocational)	Lower secondary vocational – ISCED 2
Upper secondary general – ISCED 3	Upper secondary vocational – ISCED 3
Post-secondary non-tertiary – ISCED 4	
Tertiary education – ISCED 5A	Tertiary education – ISCED 5B
Allocation to the ISCED levels: ISCED 0	ISCED 1 ISCED 2
Compulsory full-time education	Compulsory part-time education
Part-time or combined school and workplace courses	Additional year
-/n/- Compulsory work experience + its duration	>> Study abroad

Source: Eurydice.

The higher education level in Iceland comprises seven higher education institutions. All the institutions are subject to the provisions of the Higher Education Institution Act of 2006. In the Higher Education Institution Act the Icelandic term háskóli is used to refer both to those higher education institutions which have a number of faculties, permanent research organization and undergraduate and graduate programmes, and institutions that do not have research responsibilities. Consequently there is no formal distinction between non-university and university institutions in Icelandic; but by law, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture determines the title of each institution in foreign language, i.e. determines whether it is to be called university or university college.

The Educational System in Iceland

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

Public Higher Education Institutions Act 2008

6.1. Historical Overview

The foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911 marks the beginning of the modern Icelandic system of higher education. This first national university was established by merging three professional schools founded during the previous century – a school of theology, a school of medicine and a law school – and adding a new faculty of arts. Before that time Icelandic students had mainly travelled to Denmark for higher education. The University of Iceland has grown rapidly during the past century.

In 1971, the Teachers College, originally founded in 1908 was upgraded to tertiary level and changed its name to the Iceland University of Education. The main function of the institution has been research and teaching of primary school teachers. In 2008, the Iceland University of Education merged into the University of Iceland following new act on the matter from 2007. In 1987, the University of Akureyri was established in Northern Iceland and thereby becoming the first higher education institution outside the capital area. At the beginning, the institution had two faculties, for health science and industrial management but has grown substantially in recent years.

Agricultural education at tertiary level was first established at the Hvanneyri agricultural school in West Iceland in 1947 and the school gained university status as Agricultural University of Iceland in 1998.

In the last three decades the higher education system has become more diverse. Bifröst Schoool of Business was established in 1987, Reykjavík University in 1998, Iceland Academy of the Arts in 1999 and Hólar University college in 2003. Several post-secondary institutions were upgraded to the higher education level. Thus four teacher training institutions merged at the beginning of 1998 to form the Iceland University of Education under a 1997 law, and three art colleges merged into one in 1999 when Iceland Academy of the Arts was founded. The Technical College of Iceland, established in 1964, gained university status under the Technical University of Iceland Act in 2002, and in 2005 it merged into Reykjavík University.

In July 2006, a new Higher Education Act entered into force. The Higher Education Institution Act, establishes the general framework for the activities of higher education. The role of each public higher education institution is further defined in a separate act of parliament on its activities. See **6.3.** With the Higher Education Act of 2006, the regulations of the Bologna Process are fully implemented.

In 2008 the Agricultural University of Iceland and Hólar University College came under the auspice of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Iceland University of Education merged into the University of Iceland.

In 2008 a new Public Higher Education Institutions Act was passed by the parliament. The Public Higher Education Institutions Act refers to the University of Iceland, the University of Akureyri, the Agricultural University of Iceland and Hólar University College. The Act describes rules and guidelines concerning the administration of these higher education institution.

A new organisation for science and technology policymaking and implementation was established in Iceland in 2003. The Icelandic Research Council, which had functioned for 62 years, was superseded by the Science and Technology Policy Council, which is headed by the Prime Minister of Iceland and includes three other ministers on permanent basis, i.e. the Ministers of Education and Science, of Industry and Trade, and of Finance. Fourteen other representatives of the science and industrial community sit on the new Council. The role of the Science and Technology Policy Council is to promote scientific research and research training in the sciences and encourage technological progress in Iceland, for the purpose of strengthening the foundations of the country's culture and boosting the competitive capacity of its economy. The secretariat of

the previous Research Council, retains its well-known acronym (RANNÍS) and logo and continues its operational support for scientific research and innovation under the new system. It will for example handle the grants allocation of the Icelandic Research Fund (created by merging the previous Science Fund and the Technology Fund) under the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, as well as the new Technology Development Fund under the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

Frá einveldi til lýðveldis

Iceland 1986, handbook

Saga Háskóla Íslands

Iceland Academy of the Arts

Iceland University of Education

Ministry of Industry and Trade

Reykjavík University

Science and Technology Policy Council

Technical University of Iceland

University of Iceland

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

Law on the merge of Iceland University of Education and the University of Iceland

Public Higher Education Institutions Act 2008

6.1.1. Short Tertiary Education Programmes

From the foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911, higher education institutions in the country have mainly offered undergraduate programmes that last from 3-4 years. Students had to go abroad for their postgraduate studies, although the number of post graduate programmes has multiplied in recent years.

Saga Háskóla Íslands

University of Iceland

6.1.2. Long Tertiary Education Programmes

Over the last decade institutions of higher education have increasingly started to offer postgraduate programmes. This has been to meet demand from society for more education and to accommodate an increasing number of students. However, programmes at master's and PhD level are still not offered in all

study fields. At present three higher education institutions offer PhD degrees. In spite of this development, Icelandic students continue to travel abroad for their postgraduate studies. See **6.19.**

6.2. Ongoing Debates and Future Developments

Following the economic crisis there is an ongoing debate about the structure and finances of higher education institutions. Substantial decrease in public funding has already become a reality. There is an ongoing debate about the size of the higher education system and the need for increased cooperation between institutions and possible mergers of higher education institutions.

Quality assurance in higher education is being emphasised and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is carrying out external evaluation according to the three year plan. The Minister of Education, Science and Culture has recently decided to establish an independent international quality board responsible for quality control of teaching and research in higher education institutions. The quality board should be operational in autumn 2010.

The National Qualification Framework for Higher Education is being revised by an international committee and is will undergo a self certification as required by the Bologna process.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

Law on education and hiring of teachers and head teachers in pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools

Public Higher Education Institutions Act 2008

6.3. Specific Legislative Framework

The Higher Education Institution Act, enacted in July 2006, establishes the general framework for the activities of higher education institutions. The role of each public higher education institution is further defined in a separate act on its activities. The charters of private institutions define their engagement in research, internal organization, etc. The Ministry concludes performance-related contracts with all higher education institutions under its administration.

Two higher education institutions were under the auspices of the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture, Hólar University College and the Agricultural University of Iceland, until 1 January 2008, when they came under the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

In June 2008, a new Public Higher Education Institutions Act was passed in parliament. The Public Higher Education Institutions Act refers to the University of Iceland, the University of Akureyri, the Agricultural University of Iceland and Hólar University College. The Act is fully compatible with the general Higher Education Institution Act from 2006. The Public Higher Education Institutions Act describes rules and guidelines concerning the administration of each higher education institution.

Legislation on the Science and Technology Policy Council was enacted in 2003 with the purpose of strengthening science, research education and technical development in the country. A council appointed by the prime minister is to make a policy declaration for science and technology for a three-year period.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture

Lög um búnaðarfræðslu/ Agricultural Education Act

Lög um Háskólann á Akureyri /Law on the University of Akureyri

Lög um Kennaraháskóla Íslands/Law on Iceland University of Education

Lög um vísinda- og tækniráð / Law on the Science and Technology Policy Council

Public Higher Education Institutions Act 2008

6.4. General Objectives

Under the Higher Education Act the general objectives of higher education institutions are to serve as scientific research and educational institutions, to provide students with education preparing them for working independently in science, innovation and the arts and to fill the various employment positions in society that require higher education. Higher education institutions are also to educate the public and to serve society through their knowledge. More specific objectives are outlined in legislation on individual higher education institutions.

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

6.5. Types of Institutions

At present there are seven higher education institutions in Iceland. Four higher education institutions are operated by the state, while private parties with state support operate three institutions. Institutions of higher education vary in the extent to which they engage in research and the number of programmes of study offered. The HEIs can also be categorized into four groups according to their specialization: two agricultural institutions, one academy of arts and four institutions offering a wide ranges of studies. Other differences include the number of enrolled students, the mix of programmes offered, and the level of education and research activity.

Four institutions of seven at the higher education level operate outside the capital and its vicinity. Apart from these institutions, all other institutions at this level are located in Reykjavík.

The Educational System in Iceland

6.6. Admission Requirements

As a main rule, students enrolling in higher education institution must have completed matriculation examination or equivalent study. Higher education institutions can accept students who possess equivalent level of maturity and knowledge as assessed by the respective higher education institution. It must be ensured that higher education institutions' admission requirements and study standards correspond to those demanded in certified higher education institutions within similar fields in other countries. The Higher Education Act allows higher education institutions to set specific admission requirements for students enrolling in study at higher education level, such as requiring students, who meet with the aforementioned demands, to pass an entrance examination or assessment.

Students enrol in studies at second cycle (Master's studies) shall have completed a Bachelor's degree or equivalent three year study at higher education level. Students are expected to enrol in a study programme that is based on learning outcomes which they have acquired during studies at first cycle.

Students that enroll in doctorate studies are normally required to have completed Master's degree or Candidatus degree. Higher education institutions that intend to apply for permission to offer studies leading to Doctorate degree shall set specific rules for their doctorate studies, including stipulations on students' admission. Doctorate studies in higher education institutions shall be organized according to regulations for doctorate studies that cover the demands and conditions that a higher education institution must fulfil in order to be granted permission to establish studies at doctorate level, according to paragraph 4, article 7 of the Higher Education Act no. 63/2006.

Admission of mature students to higher education institutions on the basis of professional qualifications and work experience without further tests is in the hands of each higher education institution.

The University of Iceland has no general restrictions on admission for those who have passed the matriculation examination. However, in the Faculty of Medicine there is a selection procedure for students of medicine and physiotherapy at the point of entry. Competitive examinations at the end of the first semester are held in the Faculties of Nursing and of Odontology. The number of students allowed to continue after a competitive examination is limited (numerus clausus). For admission to the Faculty of Pharmacy or of Science, students are required to have matriculated from a mathematics, physics, or natural sciences programme of an upper secondary school.

Higher education institutions other than the University of Iceland and the University of Akureyri have exercised selection in their admission of students and often give priority to students with particular work experience. Iceland Academy of the Arts, Department of Drama, holds an entrance examination.

To enter a postgraduate programme a first university degree (B.A., B.S. or B.Ed. degree) in the area of study is required. In some master's programmes the admission requirement is a B.A./B.Sc. degree with a 7.25 grade average on a scale of 1 to 10 (the highest grade is 10). Admission is based on selection by the respective faculties. The same goes for the PhD programmes offered. In research-oriented programmes students must reach an agreement with a supervisor on a research project for their master's thesis, and then file a joint application with that supervisor for a specific research project. The project must then be accepted by a review committee for the student to be allowed to enter the programme.

The Icelandic NARIC/ENIC office is situated at the Office for Academic Affairs, at the University of Iceland. Its role is to answer questions regarding the recognition of foreign credentials or qualifications. Certified copies of official transcripts or diplomas have to be enclosed with enquiries regarding recognition. The NARIC/ENIC

office offers a guiding assessment, but the final decision on academic recognition is taken by each individual university, faculty or institution.

Iceland Academy of the Arts

The Icelandic NARIC/ENIC Office

The University of Akureyri

University of Iceland

Public Higher Education Institutions Act 2008

6.7. Registration and/or Tuition Fees

Under the Higher Education Act of 2006, access to public educational institutions is free of charge apart from registration fees. The payments are made directly to the higher education institution in question.

Registration fees for public institutions are approx. ISK46,000 for each academic year, and the fee is the same for all fields of study. Included in the registration fee is a financial contribution for the institution's student union. In most fields of study, students can make voluntary financial contributions to student organizations in their fields of study in addition to the payment of fees.

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

6.8. Financial Support for Students

The government has operated the Student Loan Fund for several decades, with the aim of providing equal access for students with different socio-economic backgrounds and, based on the same principle, provides free tuition at public institutions.

The Fund offers student loans that are sufficient to cover costs incurred by the studies (tuition fees, books and materials, travelling expenses, etc.) as well as the cost of living.

The Fund provides assistance for the period of study or generally for two semesters of equal length for full-time studies (60 ECTS). For the academic year 2007-2008 basic living costs are estimated at €653per month. The amount takes into consideration the size of the student's family. For example, for a student cohabiting with a partner and with one child costs are calculated as 125% of the basic living costs, or €816 per month. All income forming the student's tax base will be subtracted by 10% of the amount of assistance during the study period. The rates of support for students living with low-income parents may be raised to 100% if the income of both parents is under the prescribed threshold.

In order to receive loans, students are obliged to complete at least 75% of full-time studies according to the programme of the educational institution, approved by the board of the Fund. Assessment of academic progress takes place each semester and if a student does not meet the required standards the loans will be reduced proportionally. For example, the loan to a student who completes 83% of full-time studies will be reduced by 17%.

Repayment of loans begins two years after the completion of studies. The interest rate on loans made by the Fund is 1% but can vary, although it is at no time higher than 3% per annum on the principal of the debt. Student loans are index-linked, based on changes in the consumer price index of the Central Bank of Iceland. The annual repayment of loans comprises two elements: one fixed annual sum, €681 (ISK 98000) in 2008, and one supplementary payment of 3.75% of the person's income, calculated on the previous year's tax base for municipal income tax purposes.

In accordance with the EEA Agreement, individuals from the European Union member states and the EEA-EFTA countries (Norway and Liechtenstein) who are residents in Iceland in connection with their work, their families, and others who are or have been supported by them, are entitled to student loans from the Fund. One condition for receiving loans from the Fund is that the applicant has been domiciled in Iceland for two continuous years, or has been domiciled in Iceland for three of the ten years preceding the beginning of the period for which the student loan is applied.

Students from the Nordic countries, who are permanent residents in Iceland and are registered at an Icelandic institution of higher education, are also eligible for student loans if they are not supported financially by their own country.

The Icelandic Student Loan Fund may grant loans to other foreign students if reciprocal agreements have been concluded between their countries of origin and Iceland.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture annually offers a limited number of scholarships to foreign students to pursue studies in Icelandic language and literature at the University of Iceland.

Grants are available for postgraduate, research-oriented studies at higher education institutions in Iceland. The grants are awarded on the basis of a research proposal submitted jointly by a student and a faculty member.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The Icelandic Government Student Loan Fund

University of Iceland

6.9. Organization of the Academic Year

In most institutions of higher education, the academic year is formally defined as lasting from August or September to the same time the following year. The teaching year usually lasts from September to May and is divided into two semesters, autumn and spring. The autumn semester starts at the beginning of September and lasts until approximately December 20. The spring semester lasts from the beginning of January until the end of May. Some institutions have summer sessions that last from May to August.

The holiday periods in higher education institutions are usually the following:

- Christmas holiday approx. two weeks
- Easter holiday approx. one week

- Summer holiday approx. three months for students

In addition to this there is no teaching activity in most higher education institutions on December 1 and other official holidays.

Each institution at the higher education level organizes its own timetable. The timetable can vary depending on the structure of the course. In Iceland, the Higher Education Institutions are bound by law to use the ECTS system, in accordance with the Bologna process. Studies are organized in course units each requiring a specified number of credit units, 60 credit units constituting one academic year of full-time studies, 30 credit units constituting one semester of full-time studies.

6.10. Branches of Study, Specialization

Below is an overview of the main branches of study at each higher education institution:

Branches of study	University of Iceland	University of Akureyri	Reykjavík University	Bifröst University	Iceland Academy of the Arts	Hvanneyri University of Agriculture	Hólar University College
Languages, humanities	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fine and applied arts	-	-	-	-	X	-	-
Teacher-training, education science	X	X	X	-	X	-	-
Social sciences, jurisprudence	X	X	X	X	-	-	-
Economics, business administration	X	X	X	X	-	-	-
Natural sciences, mathematics	X	-	X	-	-	- x	-
Engineering	X	-	X	-	-	-	-
Agriculture, food sciences	X	X	-	-	-	X	X
Medicine, nursing, etc.	X	X (nursing)	-	-	-	-	-

All higher education institutions in Iceland, accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture according to the Higher Education Act no. 63/2006, shall follow the National Qualification Framework for higher education in Iceland. The National Qualification Framework is in accordance with the European Qualification Framework and describes the qualifications, graduated students are to master, when they finish their studies on different levels. The NQF also demands that each higher education institution describes the learning outcomes of each study programme and each course.

The NQF for higher education and degrees are a description of the structure for studies and degrees, where emphasis is placed on a description of a student's knowledge and competence at the end of a course of study. The NQF has a clear guidelines for the structure of courses of studies and for the degree the universities will award. According to the framework, there are three subsequent cycles of higher education: Bachelors degree, Masters and Candidatus degree; and Doctorate degree. As each cycle can cover different qualification objectives, the cycles are divided into levels.

As a general rule, studies at the higher education level in Iceland are divided into three degree programmes:

- a bachelor's degree, which normally takes three to four years to complete (180 – 240 ECTS credits),
- a 60- to 120-credit master's degree (MA, MSc, MBA, MEd, MPaed, etc.) with a duration of one to two years,
- a doctoral degree, with a duration of three years.

Traces of the old professional degree system (*Candidatus* degrees of 4-6 years) remain. Below is an overview of the main stages of study in each higher education institution:

Stages of study	University of Iceland	University of Akureyri	Reykjavík University	Bifröst University	Iceland Academy of the Arts	Agricultural University of Iceland	Hólar University College
Diploma	X	-	X	X	X	-	X
Bachelor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Candidatus	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
Postgraduate diplomas	X	-	-	-	-	-	-
Master's	X	X	X	X	-	X	-
Ph.D	X	-	X	-	-	X	-

Diploma courses

In a number of higher education institutions a diploma or certificate is awarded after one or two years' study in various subjects, such as pedagogy, business and languages. The diploma courses are short, practically-oriented and theory-based. It is not common for these courses to be combined with placement (in industry).

Bachelor's degrees

The Bachelor's degree is a three to four year study programme providing 180-240 credits at cycle 1, level 2. Full workload in one year should correspond to 60 credits. Admission requirements are matriculation examination or equivalent education. Higher education institutions can set specific demands as to the combination and focus of the matriculation examination. Bachelor's degree provides access to further studies at level 3 and 4, or Master's and Candidatus study programmes. Still, higher education institutions and departments can demand certain minimum grades for access to level 3 and 4 studies.

On completion of a Bachelor's degree, the following criteria shall be fulfilled, in addition to the criteria fulfilled at the former level:

Knowledge and understanding

- Students possess a general understanding of theories, criteria, concepts and methods within a specific subject.

- Students can apply their knowledge and understanding to their theoretical practice, or within their profession, and have competences to sustain theoretical and practical solutions in the relevant subject.

Type of knowledge

- Students have adopted extensive knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas within their subject. The scope of the knowledge shall cover the most recent findings in the subject.

Practical skills

- Students can analyze practical, complex subjects in a professional context and are able to justify decision on a professional basis.

- Students can work in an autonomous and organized manner on subjects.

- Students can set goals for their work, devise a work schedule and follow it through.

- Students are capable of acquiring further knowledge and maintain their knowledge in their field of study.

Theoretical skills

- Students have the competences to formulate and describe complex theoretical subjects and research outcomes.

- Students can apply scientific and critical methods in analyzing their subject.

- Students have acquired understanding and insight into main theories and concepts within the subject and can evaluate the methods used in an autonomous manner.

Communication skills and information literacy

- Students can participate actively in cooperation within their field of study, share their competences, ideas and knowledge, and can lead work groups.

- Students are capable of interpreting and presenting outcomes in the relevant subject.

- Students can apply relevant technology and software, which are useful for their study and profession.

- Students have improved their moral and social competences for active participation in a democratic society.

Learning skills

- Students have developed the necessary learning skills and autonomy that enables them to continue to further studies.

- Students have adopted broad-mindedness and originality of thought which will be useful for study and/or occupation.

The candidatus degree

Candidatus degree entails a five or six year studies providing 300-360 credits at cycle 1 and 2, levels 1-3. Full workload in one year should correspond to 60 credits. Admission requirements are matriculation examination or equivalent study. Higher education institutions can set specific demands as to the combination and focus of the matriculation examination. Candidatus degree provides access to further study at cycle 3 in the relevant field of study.

Postgraduate diplomas

Postgraduate diplomas in upper-secondary teacher education, social work, student counselling, journalism and mass communication are offered after one year of postgraduate study in the field in question (after a bachelor's degree). The diplomas in social work and upper-secondary teacher education are professional qualifications.

Master's degrees

Degrees belonging to this definition can vary in duration and content. Therefore, the definitions in the list below apply only when referring to full two-year study at master's level. Study cycle leading to diploma or other final examination belongs only partly to this definition, so the list below is structured accordingly. The criteria for each category are put forth according to depth of content. Various degrees should assumingly comply with at least one item from each category according to duration and extent of the study programme.

The graduate studies at master level entail half year to two year study programme, providing 30-120 credits at cycle 2, level 3. Full workload in one year should correspond to 60 credits. Admission requirements are final examination from cycle 1, level 2, or equivalent. First class grade is usually required. Higher education institutions and departments can decide on further admission requirements for studies at level 3.

Vocational degree at master's level normally does not provide access to further studies at cycle 3.

Degrees that come under this definition provide various access points to further study at cycle 2 depending on the content of the study. Higher education institutions or departments can decide on specific admission requirements based on minimum grade before granting access to studies at levels 3 and 4.

On completion of graduate study at master level in addition to first cycle studies, the following criteria shall be fulfilled, in addition to the criteria fulfilled at former level(s):

Knowledge and understanding

- Students have acquired a general understanding of theories, ideology, concepts and methods within a specific field of study. In addition to the knowledge criteria for first cycle, students at second cycle shall have deepened or widened the knowledge obtained at former cycles.

- Students can use their knowledge and understanding in a professional manner and have the ability to reason and substantiate solutions to problems within the relevant subject/profession.

- Students have acquired systematic understanding of the most recent findings available within specific field of study and/or profession. In addition to the criteria for first cycle, students at second cycle shall have deepened or widened the knowledge obtained at former levels.

Type of knowledge

- Students have acquired knowledge by attending courses and/or carrying out research in an area of expertise.

- Students have general knowledge and comprehension about theoretical subjects and problems being dealt with at the time within the relevant field of study/profession.

- Students possess significant understanding of problems and subjects, based on the most recent information and research in the relevant field of study.

Practical skills

- Students have adopted work methods which are accepted within the relevant profession.

- Students can make decisions in an independent, professional manner and sustain them on the basis of a field of study/profession.

- Students possess the knowledge and skills that enable them to develop and utilise ideas in an original way within a professional context of a relevant field of study.

- Students have the ability and skills to evaluate, analyse and gather scientific data.

- Students can understand and tackle complex subjects in a professional context/occupational environment.

- Students can recognize innovation and developments which are based on relevant studies, theories and/or experiments.

- Students can apply studies and methods of a field to formulate, develop and complete projects in the subject and/or occupation.

Theoretical skills

- Students can utilize their knowledge, understanding and problem solving skills in new and unfamiliar situations in a broad or interdisciplinary context connected with the relevant field of study.

- Students can demonstrate increased and deeper understanding, and more extensive perspective of their area of expertise than contained in studies at first cycle.

- Students can make autonomous assessments, when different methods of analysis and complex theoretical issues are appropriate.

- Students can apply their knowledge and competences to tackle new and unfamiliar subjects or situations within the relevant field of study.

- Students are capable of integrating knowledge, tackling complex subjects and formulating opinions based on limited information.

- Students can apply their knowledge and skills to tackle complex subjects that demand integration, insight and professional decision making based on limited information.

- Students are familiar with research methods in their field of study and comprehend research and research outcomes.

Communication skills and information literacy

- Students have adopted necessary skills to use techniques and software which is useful for the relevant profession/field of study.

- Students possess skills and knowledge to analyze and communicate statistical data.

- Students can initiate projects in a field of study, manage those projects and take responsibility for the work of individuals and groups.

- Students can communicate theoretical information, ideas, problems and solutions, to specialists as well as to the general public.

- Students can communicate, clearly and unambiguously, complex theoretical subjects and/or theoretically supported conclusions to specialist and non-specialist audiences, individually or in cooperation with others.

- Students can take responsibility for the work of individuals or groups, initiate projects and complete them.

- Students can assume major responsibility for the work of individuals and groups, lead and initiate projects.

- Students are aware of ethics of science.

Learning Skills

- Students have adopted the necessary learning skills and work methods to undertake further study, where significant autonomy and independence is demanded.

- Students have developed the necessary learning skills and autonomy to continue to further study which are largely based on autonomy and independence.

Master's degree (level 4)

The Master's degree is a one and a half to two year study programme providing 90-120 credits at cycle 2, level 4. Full workload in one year normally corresponds to 60 credits. Admission requirements are final examination from level 2 or equivalent. First class grade is usually required. Higher education institutions and departments can decide on further admission requirements for studies at level 4.

Master's degree provides access to doctorate studies at cycle 3. Higher education institutions can demand a minimum final grade for admission. The scope of research and/or final project shall cover at least 30 credits.

On completion of a Master's degree, the following criteria shall be fulfilled, in addition to the criteria fulfilled at former level(s):

Knowledge and understanding

Students have acquired systematic understanding of the most recent knowledge available within the relevant field of study/profession. In addition to the knowledge criteria for first cycle, students at second cycle shall have deepened or widened the knowledge base obtained at former levels.

Students can use their knowledge and understanding in a professional manner and have the ability to reason and substantiate solutions to problems within the relevant field of study/profession.

Type of knowledge

- Students possess significant understanding of problems and subjects, based on the most recent information and research in the relevant field of study.

- Students have acquired knowledge by attending courses and/or carrying out research in an area of expertise.

Practical skills

- Students can make decisions in an independent, professional way and sustain them on the basis of a field of study/profession.

- Students have the ability and skills to evaluate, analyze and gather scientific data.

- Students can develop projects and put them in context by applying methods based on relevant studies, theories and/or experiments.

- Students can understand and tackle complex subjects in a professional context.

Theoretical skills

- Students can make autonomous assessments, when different methods of analysis and complex theoretical issues are appropriate.

- Students can demonstrate increased and deeper understanding, and more extensive perspective of their area of expertise than in studies at first cycle.

- Students can utilise their knowledge, understanding and problem solving skills in new and unfamiliar situations in a broad or interdisciplinary context connected with the relevant field of study.

- Students are capable of integrating knowledge, tackling complex subjects and formulating opinions based on limited information.

- Students are familiar with research methods in their field of study and comprehend research and research outcomes.

- Students can apply the research process in an effective way and carry out smaller research projects.

Communication skills and information literacy

- Students can initiate projects in a field of study, manage those projects and take responsibility for the work of individuals and groups.

- Students can communicate, clearly and unambiguously, complex theoretical subjects and/or theoretically supported conclusions to specialist and non-specialist audiences, individually or in cooperation with others.

- Students possess skills and knowledge to analyze and communicate statistical data.

- Students have adopted necessary skills to use techniques and software which is useful for the relevant profession/field of study.

- Students are aware of ethics of science.

Learning skills

- Students have developed the necessary learning skills and independent work methods to be able to continue to further study at cycle 3 which is largely based on autonomy and independence.

Doctorate Degree (level 5)

The Doctorate degree is a three to four year study providing 180-240 credits at cycle 3, level 5. Full workload in one year normally corresponds to 60 credits. Admission requirements are research based Master's degree, Candidatus degree or equivalent final examination from cycle 2, level 4. Higher education institutions can demand a certain minimum grade for admission.

Higher education institutions are assumed to set specific rules regarding the organization and structure of their doctorate studies.

On completion of a Doctorate degree, the following criteria shall be fulfilled, in addition to the criteria fulfilled at former level(s).

Knowledge and understanding

- Students possess extensive and in-depth understanding of main theories, principles, concepts and of the latest findings available within a specific field of study or profession. The knowledge shall be more in-depth than that acquired at cycle 1 and 2.

- Students have contributed important innovation to the field of study in the form of new knowledge or significant adaptation, innovative utilization or interpretation of existing knowledge.

Type of knowledge

- Students possess knowledge and understanding which they have acquired from research carried out on individual basis.

- Students' research findings shall contribute in a significant way to the development of the relevant field of study or profession

- Students have initiated new knowledge, and its interpretation, with research or other acknowledged scholarly activities which measure up to reviews and critique of other scholars in the relevant field.

Practical skills

- Students can apply critical analysis, evaluation and integration to new and complex projects.

- Students can tackle complex tasks which widen and/or redefine existing methodology in the relevant field of study.

- Students can apply in an extensive way the basic skills, technology, methods, material and sources connected with the relevant field of study.

- Students can utilize, on a broad basis, general and specialised research equipment and research technology.

- Students can organize and carry out research and explore or develop projects which tackle new problems and subjects within a subject.

- Students shall demonstrate originality and creativity in developing and utilizing new knowledge, understanding and methods.

Theoretical skills

- Students have carried out innovative research or developed work methods which add to, or widen the existing knowledge of a relevant subject.

- Students have presented an important and well organized dissertation which is suitable for publishing in a peer-reviewed publication at national or international level.

- Students can tackle very complicated and/or new subjects and formulate an autonomous and informative opinion.

Communication skills and information literacy

- Students can communicate, in an effective way, with their peers, other scholars and the general public about their area of expertise.

- Students can demonstrate extensive professional autonomy and initiative in their professional work.

- Students can take full responsibility for their own projects as well as assuming responsibility for the work of others.

- Students are able to present technological, social and cultural progress, connected with the knowledge society, in a theoretical setting.

- Students can participate in critical debate, initiate and lead theoretical discourse.

- Students can use software to support and enhance work in the relevant field of study, and can specify specialized software for the improvement of methods and work processes.

- Students can assess statistical and graphical data in a critical way.

- Students shall demonstrate their awareness of ethics of science and that they have formed a considered opinion regarding their own research, and that of others, based on their own ethical consciousness.

Learning skills.

- Students have adopted a critical stand towards knowledge.

Iceland Academy of the Arts

Iceland University of Education

Reykjavík University

The Bifröst School of Business

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The University of Akureyri

University of Iceland

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

Public Higher Education Institutions Act 2008

6.11. Curriculum

A higher education institution that comes under the Higher Education Act no. 63/2006 shall define learning outcomes for each study programme. The higher education institutions' definition shall be a specialized description relevant to the study programmes offered. The higher education institutions should preferably demonstrate in which way the objectives of the definition are attained by each course or each study level, i.e. by defining their learning outcomes.

Higher education institutions shall specify, in their Diploma Supplements, to which cycle and level each study programme belongs to, according to National Qualification Framework for Iceland.

Higher education institutions have a significant degree of academic freedom and autonomy; as a result the institutions largely determine the nature and structure of their educational curricula and courses.

Higher education institutions vary in terms of their course offerings. The University of Iceland offers a variety of degree courses of different types and levels in a wide range of subjects. Other institutions are more specialized.

Specialisation in a subject begins right at the start of higher education studies, i.e. higher education studies do not include a general studies component. This general background knowledge is obtained in upper secondary schools.

Icelandic is the language of instruction in higher education institutions. However, in recent years some institutions have started to offer courses in English. Textbooks are in many cases in English or another foreign language (mostly Scandinavian languages).

Kennsluskrá Háskóla Íslands / Curriculum for University of Iceland

Kennsluskrá Háskólans á Akureyri /Curriculum for University of Akureyri

Kennsluskrá Kennaraháskólans fyrir skólaárið 2004/2005 / Curriculum for Iceland University of Education

University of Iceland

6.12. Teaching Methods

The governing bodies of each institution are responsible for the organization of teaching, learning and assessment. Teaching methods are decided by the individual teacher, department, faculty, institution or a combination of these. Teaching methods vary somewhat between programmes and level of study. In most cases there is a combination of lectures, seminars, individual assignments and group work. In technical and science programmes laboratory work and practical training are more prevalent. Teaching materials are also decided by the individual teacher, department, faculty, institution or a combination of these.

Increasingly instructors integrate the newest information technology with their teaching methods. For example they use WebCT and other teaching software to post course-related material and interact with students on the Internet. Some programmes are offered by distance learning via the Internet and/or through video conferencing.

At the graduate level much emphasis is placed on students gaining practical experience in scientific work by engaging them in research under the supervision of a professor. Teaching also takes place through seminars, lectures, individual tutoring and individual training in thesis writing.

Most higher education institutions offer courses for new teachers as well as more specific courses for example on information technology.

6.13. Student Assessment

Student assessment at the higher education level is generally based on written, oral or practical examinations, semester papers and assignments carried out throughout the whole course of study. Teachers are responsible for assessment, but each department provides the overall organization of the examinations within the regulatory framework of the institution. In some cases there are external examiners. Examinations are generally held at the end of each semester. Degrees are only awarded after students have written a final dissertation or completed a research project.

At oral examinations an external examiner is often present, but written examinations are marked by the teacher in question. Teachers are required to explain the basis of their assessment to students upon request. Students who fail an examination can request that the head of the respective department appoint an external examiner to review his or her examination.

At the University of Iceland competitive examinations are held in the Faculties of Nursing and of Odontology at the end of the first semester. The number of students allowed to continue after this examination is limited. Students who pass examinations in all subjects of the first semester of the first year are ranked, and the students with the highest grades go on to the second semester. Competitive examinations are also held in the Department of Nursing at the University of Akureyri. For all competitive examinations the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture appoints an external examiner for a three-year term on the recommendation of the educational institution.

As a general rule grades are awarded on a scale of 0-10, where the passing grades are 5 and above, or by the assessment pass/fail. Course grades are usually given in increments of 0.5, and averages computed to two decimal places.

Most higher education institutions classify grades as follows:

Grade	Classification
9.0 - 10	Distinction (Honors)
7.25 – 8.99	First Class
6.0 – 7.24	Second Class
5.0 – 5.99	Third Class
< 5	

University of Iceland

6.14. Progression of Students

Rules regarding progression of students vary between institutions and faculties. In the professional programmes towards the candidatus degree students have to pass all examinations, or a certain percentage of each year's examinations, in order to be able to continue to the next. Students are allowed to repeat examinations in an individual course once. Students who fail to meet the requirements have to repeat the whole year of study, but can do so only twice during their studies.

In the programmes for the bachelor's degree there is more flexibility, but there is a limit on the overall time spent on studies towards a degree.

Special rules for progression between years apply to the competitive examinations held at the end of the first semester in dentistry and nursing. Only a limited number of students are allowed to continue after the competitive examinations, but those students who fail the examination may repeat the first semester the next year. For the competitive examination a predetermined number of students is allowed to continue (numerus clausus). Based on the weighted mean of grades from written examination in several subjects, the predetermined number of students selected is allowed to continue on to the second semester.

Transfer from one course of study to another or from one institution to another is always subject to the approval of the academic authorities of the receiving faculty or institution. The receiving faculty decides how many credits can be transferred towards a new programme, usually on recommendations made by study committees, composed of students and teachers in each department. Transfers between subjects within the same faculty are usually easily arranged, but may involve some loss of credits earned. Intermediate qualifications from higher education institutions may in some cases be recognized as part of a degree course, usually as a minor subject. See **6.9.**

6.15. Certification

Higher education institutions offer courses which lead to the granting of a certificate and/or a degree or a title. Examination results and assessment are stated on the certificate, as is the degree/title to which the course gives entitlement. These are awarded when the student successfully completes the examinations, projects or dissertation described by the subject regulations. A dissertation or research project is almost always a pre-requisite for obtaining a degree. Some degree courses may lead directly to professional qualifications, while in other cases additional training specific to the profession, such as additional specialized study programmes, sometimes combined with practical training, is required.

Bachelor's degrees do usually not confer professional qualifications, except in nursing (BSc) and teaching (B.Ed.) The bachelor's degree constitutes a formal qualification for post-graduate study. The ministries in question issue certification for different professions. For example the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues certification for teachers.

As required by law, and subject to review by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, higher education institutions are responsible for issuing certificates and defining the content and examination methods of courses leading to certification.

To improve international transparency and facilitate academic and professional recognition of qualifications, all higher education institutions have since spring 2005 introduced the Diploma Supplement (DS) for graduates.

Under the Universities Act, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is to issue a list of degrees recognized by the Ministry, and their content.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

6.16. Educational/Vocational Guidance, Education/Employment Links

Student counselling centres are operated at most higher education institutions. Counselling centres provide courses and counselling for students regarding the choice of programmes, the organization of their studies, career opportunities, as well as personal problems. Some higher education institutions offer preparation courses e.g. in mathematics before student start their higher education.

Permanent faculty members have regular office hours for students and are available during those hours to give educational advice. No set rules apply for the educational counselling provided by teachers or regarding the referral of students to other counselling parties.

All foreign exchange students in Iceland may use the support services offered by the Office of International Education.

In the professional disciplines, students are required to gain practical experience in their field of study. A part of this experience is frequently achieved through employment, and the respective higher education institution often serves as the mediator for the placement of students for practical training.

Research institutions at the higher education institutions hire students to work on research projects that have been negotiated with state and private agencies. At the University of Iceland students also run a company that does contractual work for outside agencies where students are hired to work on projects related to their field of study. The Icelandic Students' Union at the University of Iceland also runs a placement service for students for summer work, where an effort is made to place students with employers in their field. Thus relations with possible future employers are cultivated.

Faculty members, companies or entrepreneurs can apply to an Innovation Fund, established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, to hire students to work on defined projects. The Fund pays the student salaries, while the company or the supervisor for the project provides workspace and materials. This gives students the opportunity to gain practical experience that may open future job opportunities and promotes innovation.

University of Iceland

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

6.17. Private Education

There are three private higher education institutions (government-dependent private institutions) in Iceland (of eight institutions at this level). Private institutions receive considerable financial assistance from the state under service contracts made with each institution. The institutions are subject to the provisions of the Universities Act.

The institutions have private boards and they have a significant degree of autonomy, and can for example decide such matters as admission requirements, progression of students from one year to the next, certification etc. These matters do not differ much between public and private institutions.

The tuition fees for private institutions vary between higher education institutions and fields of study. The tuition fees for undergraduate programmes are approx. ISK 140,000 – 350,000 for each school year. In private institutions students pay additional payments to student organizations.

Private institutions are recognized by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and are subject to the same provisions as public institutions concerning external reviews and quality control.

The private higher education institutions are:

- Bifröst University
- Reykjavík University
- Iceland Academy of the Arts

The distinction between public and private HEIs is mainly based on legal differentiation. The role of public institutions is defined in separate laws and regulated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture or Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture. Additionally, the public institutions are legally obliged to follow various laws and regulations applying specifically to them, such as laws on budgetary responsibilities, access to information and transparency, and recruitment procedures. The private institutions also operate under the Universities Act.

The Universities Act stipulates internal financial and management autonomy of the HEIs. The formal relationship with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is further defined in performance-related agreements with public institutions and service contracts with private institutions. The private institutions receive more than 50% from core funding for teaching and facilities from the central government, according to the same funding formula as the public institutions. In addition they charge students tuition fees, whereas the public institutions do not have the legal authority to do so. The research allocation is based on a three-year agreement between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and individual institutions under its auspices. The institutions differ in the extent to which they engage in research. In 2002 the income ratio of the University of Iceland was balanced between research and teaching, whilst the other institutions received most of their income for teaching. Furthermore, all institutions operate on a non-profit basis.

Institution	Separate law	Charge tuition fees	Funding formula for teaching
Public	Yes	No	
Private	No	Yes	Yes

Iceland Academy of the Arts

Reykjavík University

The Bifröst School of Business

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture

University of Iceland

Higher Education Institution Act 2006

Public Higher Education Institutions Act 2008

6.18. Organizational Variations, Alternative Structures

In recent years providing access to higher education via distance learning has become an increasingly important aspect of the Icelandic higher education system. Most of the higher education institutions offer distance learning courses in some areas of study. There is no specific legislative framework for distance learning at higher education level.

There are no international schools operating at higher educational level in Iceland. However, some higher education institutions offer programmes and/or courses in cooperation with foreign higher education institutions.

6.19. Statistics

See subdivisions.

6.19.1. Total number of students studying at higher education level, autumn 2009

Total	Males	Females
18.226	6.671	11.555
Day courses		

Number of students at tertiary level by degree, 2007 annd 2008

	ISCED97	2007	2008
Tertiary level non-degree programmes	ISCED5B	501	423
Short diploma programmes	ISCED5A	153	147
First university degree	ISCED5A	11532	11.646
Additional study after first university degree	ISCED5A	747	737
Master's degree	ISCED5A	3433	3.709
Ph.D.	ISCED6	264	282

Landshagir 2009

6.19.2. Number of students at Higher Education Institutions, autumn 2007-2009

Institution	Total 2007	Total 2008	Total 2009
Public institutions:			
University of Iceland	9.586	11.847	13.785
Iceland University of Education	2.241	-	-
University of Akureyri	1.305	1,352	1,496
Hvanneyri Agricultural University	286	294	338
Hólar University college	121	112	144
Private institutions:			
Bifröst University	744	727	627
Reykjavik University	2.907	2,974	2,890
Iceland Academy of the Arts	380	429	425
Total	17.570	17.735	19.705

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Iceland Academy of the Arts

Iceland University of Education

Reykjavík University

The Bifröst School of Business

The University of Akureyri

University of Iceland

6.19.3. Percentage of students by field and gender (ISCED 5), autumn 2008

Area of study	Total % students	% male students	% female students
Education	16,4	7,5	21,3
Humanities and arts	13,6	12,6	14,1
Social sciences, business and law	39,3	43,1	37,2
Science, mathematics and computing	7,1	12,6	3,9
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	9,3	17,3	4,8
Agriculture	0,5	0,6	0,5
Health and welfare	12,5	5,1	16,5
Services	14,2	1,1	1,6
Total	100%	100%	100%

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6.19.4. Number of students in higher education by programme of studies and age group, autumn 2008

First stage of tertiary education (ISCED 5)

Area of study	Total	17-19 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-39 years	40 years and over
Education	2.725	2	541	597	823	762
Humanities and arts	2.261	21	818	585	409	428
Social sciences, business and law	6.550	31	2.180	1.614	1.548	1.177
Science, mathematics and computing	1.177	17	531	279	238	112
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	1.545	27	899	403	165	51
Agriculture	88	3	24	27	13	21
Health and welfare	2.078	9	794	535	388	352
Services	238	0	88	63	51	36
Total	16.662	110	5.875	4.103	3.635	2.939

Second stage of tertiary education (ISCED 6)

Area of study	Total	17-19 years	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-39 years	40 years and over
Education	28	0	0	1	5	22
Humanities and arts	40	0	0	2	21	17
Social sciences, business and law	52	0	0	7	16	29
Science, mathematics and computing	84	0	5	39	36	4
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	14	0	1	8	3	2
Agriculture	3	0	0	0	3	0
Health and welfare	60	0	1	17	23	19
Services	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total	282	0	7	75	107	93

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6.19.5. Students in higher education (ISCED 5) by domicile, autumn 2008

Domicile	Number	Percentage
Reykjavík	7.721	46,34
Capital area excluding Reykjavík	4.178	25,08
Sudurnes	837	5,02
West	643	3,86
West Fjords	257	1,54
Northwest	280	1,68
Northeast	1.294	7,77
East	407	2,44
South	809	4,86
Abroad	236	1,42
Total	16.662	100%

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6.19.6. Enrolment rates of age cohorts 20-29, autumn 2007 and 2008

Age	2007	2008
20 years	51%	52%
21 years	51%	50%
22 years	48%	49%
23 years	44%	42%
24 years	41%	37%
25 years	34%	31%
26 years	29%	28%
27 years	24%	24%
28 years	22%	21%
29 years	19%	20%

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6.19.7. Graduation by programmes of studies, diplomas and degrees 2007/2008

Area of study (ISCED 5)	Total	Males	Females
Education	825	130	695
Humanities and arts	390	137	253
Social sciences, business and law	1.354	561	793
Science, mathematics and computing	231	138	93
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	249	170	79
Agriculture	14	8	6
Health and welfare	491	57	434
Services	57	14	43
Total	**3.611**	**1.215**	**2.396**
Area of study (ISCED 6)			
Education	4	2	2
Humanities and arts	0	0	0
Social sciences, business and law	1	1	0
Science, mathematics and computing	5	5	0
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	5	5	0
Health and welfare	8	2	6
Total	**23**	**15**	**8**
Diplomas and degrees	**Total**	**Males**	**Females**
Tertiary level, non-university diploma	198	92	106
First university degree	2.374	809	1.565
Diploma after first university degree	304	31	273
Master's degree	735	283	452
Ph.D	23	15	8

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6.19.8. Number of Icelandic students studying abroad autumn 2008 by geographic area

Area	Number	Percentage
Nordic countries	1.247	52,4%
United Kingdom	378	15,9%
European Continent	377	15.8%
North America	333	13,9%
Other	45	1,9%
Total	2.380	100%

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6.19.9. Educational staff at higher education level in November 2008

	Total	Number		Percentage	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Rectors	11	9	2	82%	18%
Assistant rectors	4	1	3	25%	75%
Professors	282	215	67	76%	24%
Associate professors	246	165	81	67%	33%
Lecturers	305	152	153	50%	50%
Other teachers	1.222	543	679	44%	56%
Total	2.070	1.085	985	52%	48%

The drop-out rate from higher education is around 30%. This figure is based on a cohort study where a group of new entrants in higher education were followed over a period of ten years. At the end of that period 70% had graduated with a degree.

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