

## Education Policy 2030 - Iceland

### ***Motion for a parliamentary resolution on an Education Policy for the period 2020 to 2030 from the Minister of Education, Science and Culture***

The Althing resolves that work to further the education of the Icelandic nation is to proceed in accordance with the Education Policy outlined herein.

#### I. Vision, values and pillars of the Education Policy

The vision of the Education Policy 2020 to 2030 is High-quality education throughout life. The vision is underpinned by the values of the policy: perseverance, courage, knowledge, and happiness.

The Education Policy rests on five pillars that support the vision and its values, under which there are a series of objectives delineating areas of emphasis, and associated key issues. The five pillars are:

- A. Equal opportunities for all
- B. Superior teaching
- C. Skills for the future
- D. Putting well-being first
- E. Quality at the forefront

#### ***Implementation of the Education Policy***

Implementation will take place in three phases. Each phase will be preceded by the presentation of an implementation plan and associated actions and measures of performance. The Minister will present the first plan within six months after the passing of the parliamentary resolution. A successful implementation will be achieved through strong co-operation between the education system and society as a whole. There needs to be agreement on the vision for the Education Policy and the systematic utilisation of the most recent research findings applying to progress and achievement in education.

#### ***Explanatory notes***

##### *Introduction*

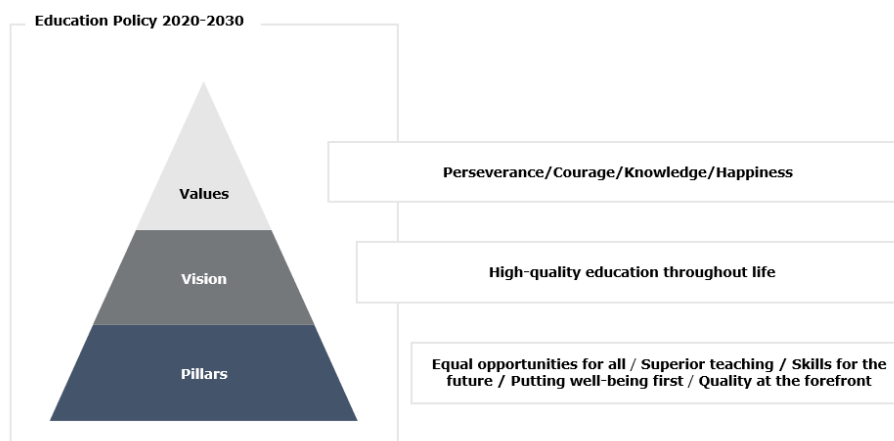
Education is the key to future opportunities and one of the prime movers of societies and human prosperity. In times of unprecedented transformation, uncertainty and rapid technological change, the world's nations must prepare for increased volatility and challenges of ever-increasing complexity. The future prospects of the Icelandic nation are predicated upon the competitiveness and sustainability of the Icelandic education system. Its success is dependent on having highly educated citizens who are capable of creative and critical thinking and have the social skills and the command of Icelandic and other languages necessary to tackle global challenges.

Education strengthens, maintains and stimulates the resilience of individuals and societies. Emphasis will be placed on improving Icelanders' attitudes to their own education, using the idea of a growth mind-set as a guiding principle. The quest for knowledge never ends, and education—whether formal or informal—is a lifelong process.

Schools and other educational institutions have to be attractive workplaces and teaching must be an interesting career, considering that it is among the most important of all professions.

A strong and flexible education system should contribute to equal opportunity in education, given that everyone can learn and everyone matters. All individuals should have the opportunity to develop their potential and increase their competence.

**Figure 13. Education Policy 2030**



The aim of the Education Policy is to provide excellent education in an environment where everyone can learn and everyone matters. Accordingly, the guiding values of the Education Policy, which are intended to support the vision, are: perseverance, courage, knowledge and happiness.

A clear policy on the priorities to be made in the interests of education and knowledge creation will lead to increased quality of life and added value. Through it, the foundations of a stronger society are laid.

This Education Policy was elaborated in broad consultation with stakeholders, including through the Consultation Portal (Samráðsgátt). A total of 38 sets of generally positive comments were received. The comments contained a number of useful suggestions which were taken into account.

Box 4 sets out the pillars and focus areas of Education Policy 2030.

#### **Box 4. Education Policy 2030: Individual pillars and focus areas**

##### ***A: Equal opportunities for all***

**A.1. Education for all:** Schools and other educational institutions must consider the needs, abilities and aptitudes of each student and base their work on each individual's strengths and interest. Society has an obligation to safeguard the welfare of children and young people to the extent possible, and to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive and prosper on their own terms within the education system. It is important to ensure that everyone feels at home in the education system, and to work to make it a place of equal rights.

**A.2. Education throughout the country:** People's educational opportunities must not be determined by where they live. Improvements in the transport system and technological advancements are to be used to provide everyone with access to education regardless of place of residence, thereby increasing the viability of successful knowledge communities in sparsely populated regions. Educational offerings outside of the main urban centres are to be improved, including through the expansion of vocational and technical training throughout the country, based on the consideration that education available locally plays a decisive role in the educational choices that young people make after they complete compulsory school.

**A.3. A diverse educational community:** Iceland is a multi-cultural society that takes advantage of the resources inherent in a multi-cultural school environment, welcomes the diversity of the students, and harnesses that diversity for the benefit of society. It is important to expand efforts to evaluate the education of immigrants and refugees so that their knowledge can be put to use both for their own benefit and for that of society.

**A.4. Early support:** Children and young people must receive appropriate help and support as early as possible in their schooling, and assistance must be provided before any problems become significant. Special attention must be given to strengthening pre-schools. Support can be directed to the students themselves or to their environment, and it is important to adapt it to the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups. This requires interdisciplinary co-operation.

### ***B: Superior teaching***

**B.1. Teacher education and recruitment:** The content of teacher education must take account of society's needs and support the Education Policy. An effort will be made to raise the status of the teaching profession and strengthen teachers' professional independence. Ways to prevent teacher shortages will be explored, including by ensuring adequate recruitment.

**B.2. Knowledge and courage:** Students will be enabled to gain new knowledge and skills, and to use and apply the knowledge acquired. Students will be made aware of the importance of being creative and responsible when searching for knowledge, reflecting upon it and formulating arguments, and of not being afraid to try new things.

**B.3. Competence development of educational professionals:** It must be ensured that competence and knowledge development is defined as an integral part of teachers' and school leaders' work at all school levels, so as to ensure that their skill levels remain consistent with changing needs and their professional independence. Emphasis will be placed on the link between educational professionals' basic education, vocational training and competence development to enable everyone to grow professionally and systematically increase their knowledge and skills, keep abreast of professional trends and increase their collaboration with each other.

**B.4. The legal framework governing education:** In order to make the best use of the available human resources and safeguard the quality of the working conditions and the work environment, the effective implementation of the Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper-secondary schools must be ensured.

**B.5. Variety:** The education system of the future will be dependent on increased innovation and close co-operation. The involvement of people with varied specialist knowledge is required for its development.

### ***C. Skills for the future***

**C.1. Reading literacy:** Part of our national culture is that everyone is able to read for purpose and pleasure. Reading skills are a key to a higher quality of life and reflect people's ability to take in and interpret their surroundings, the natural environment and society in a critical way, enabling them to actively participate in the shaping of those surroundings. Reading is the most potent tool to acquire knowledge available to students, and the ability to communicate verbally and in writing is a pre-requisite for participation in a democratic society. Therefore, the Education Policy places particular emphasis on language comprehension, reading comprehension, communication, writing and listening, as well as measures to help those with reading difficulties. Every effort will be made to engage all of society in improving reading literacy, and in particular to involve homes, libraries, authors and media outlets.

**C.2. The advancement of Icelandic:** We seek to maintain and nurture interest in the language and culture of Iceland among all generations. We must promote the use of Icelandic and Icelandic sign language in all areas of society, strengthen Icelandic teaching at all school levels, and safeguard the future of the Icelandic language in a digital world.

**C.3. Science and research:** Science and research are the foundations of a strong knowledge society that fosters education, innovation, culture, welfare, democracy and human rights. The unfettered search for knowledge, grounded in the interest, curiosity and innovative spirit of scientists,

is a key factor of progress, besides being the basis of societal change. The effective communication of scientific knowledge to people of all ages must be promoted.

**C.4. Vocational, trade and technical education:** The innovation-driven society of the future necessitates an increased emphasis on vocational, trade and technical education. These types of education will be strengthened with a view to ensuring that the development of skills matches society's needs and the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Young people, whatever their gender, are to be offered appropriate vocational training, and instruction in trade and technical subjects should be made available in compulsory schools. Students are to be made familiar with the many types of vocational, trade and technical training at the upper-secondary level and systematically introduced to the programmes available and the job opportunities opened by those programmes.

**C.5. Art and crafts:** Arts and crafts education provides opportunities to develop mental and physical skills through solution-based tasks and innovative thinking. Artistic creation in education and an increased emphasis on practical subjects support the practical application of knowledge, and positively influence students' future environment.

**C.6. Creativity and critical thinking:** Everyone is capable of rational thinking, reflection and creative courage. Emphasis is to be placed on creativity in all aspects of schooling in order to promote personal development, initiative and innovation. The interaction of critical and creative thinking is to be exploited to develop students' independent values, strengthen their ability to see the context in which different outcomes exist, and promote their capacity to engage in societal debate. In order to activate and sustain students' creative ability and courage, they must be provided with a learning environment that promotes initiative, independence and creative thinking in all areas.

**C.7. Digital living:** Students must have an understanding of both the opportunities and the challenges of digital living. Students should receive training in information, media and technology literacy. In addition to the practical application of digital technology, students should be given opportunities to increase their familiarity with data protection and information management and analysis. Attention will be given to students' use of social media and they will be taught about responsible online behaviour and the principles of safe digital communication.

**C.8. Lifelong education:** High-quality, diverse education at all school levels and the ability of people of all ages to access education are the prerequisites for ensuring that the inhabitants of Iceland have the knowledge and skills to explore new paths and create new opportunities. Lifelong education enhances society's capacity to react to the rapid and constant changes occurring in the economy, and ensures professional development and mobility in the labour market.

#### ***D. Putting well-being first***

**D.1. Health promotion:** It is important to monitor the well-being of all students and take appropriate action quickly, in close co-operation with homes, schools and other experts, in response to any signs of distress among students or of violent behaviour of any kind. It is important to uphold principles of equality and to ensure that students are not at risk of becoming victims of psychological, physical, gender-based or sexual violence, harassment or bullying. In that context the importance of sex education is reaffirmed. Ways will be sought to facilitate health promotion at all school levels.

**D.2. Mental health:** Efforts must be made to safeguard the emotional and social health of students and to create an environment for their daily lives that promotes their well-being. The best opportunity to strengthen people's mental health is when they are young, and it must therefore be a priority during that period to reinforce those protective factors that are of greatest importance for mental health.

**D.3. Prevention:** Emphasis will be placed on prevention at all school levels, in every type of school and in after-school activities, including by empowering students through instruction and training in

behavioural, social and emotional skills. This simultaneously lays the foundations for preventing the establishment of unhealthy interaction patterns and violent behaviour.

**D.4. School counselling:** A successful education pre-supposes that students make informed and considered decisions about their education based on their own fields of interest, strengths and values. Educational and vocational guidance supports both individuals' continuous professional development throughout their careers and their ability to chart their own educational and professional paths in light of economic and societal changes. Priority is placed on ensuring that all persons are able to find productive uses for their competence and a purpose with their education, an approach which can help to reduce early school leaving and support participation in the labour market. Educational and vocational guidance should be made available at all school levels irrespective of the individual's age and place of residence, and should be provided by qualified specialists.

**D.5. Students' voices:** Students must be given the chance to have their voices heard from the outset, and they should have the opportunity to influence their learning environment. Care will be taken to ensure that students of all ages have the possibility to express their views and that their opinions are given due weight in accordance with their age and level of maturity. The implementation at the level of schooling of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes it possible to systematically harness children's increased participation in all aspects of decision making and student democracy. Students should have the opportunity to participate in the creation of a positive school atmosphere and social rules. It is a priority to ensure that students know how to take responsibility for their own learning, that they form sound working habits, develop a growth mind-set, and understand how to set their own goals. This priority applies both within schools and in the work of after-school centres, youth centres, and other types of organised sports and youth activities, considering that a democratic approach is the foundation of all work with young people.

**D.6. Everyone's well-being:** Everyone's happiness and well-being must be put first. To ensure that no one is left out, emphasis must be placed on equality, shared responsibility, solidarity, recognition of different opinions, and respect for students' diversity and varied cultural background. Work is ongoing in schools and in sports and youth activities to strengthen tolerance and human rights and democratic awareness.

### ***E. Quality at the forefront***

**E.1. Accountability and co-ordination in service systems:** Co-operation, clear accountability and integration within and between systems is a common thread running through the Education Policy. At all school levels the focus will be on integrated school services with an emphasis on shared responsibility, multi-level learning support, and support for parents and school staff. In connection with all support and intervention it is of importance that society's support systems serve students in a unified way and intervene where needed to ensure continuity in the services of different responsible parties and professional groups. Focused management and professional leadership, and efficient co-operation within the education system, are crucial.

**E.2. National Curriculum Guides as factors supporting the Education Policy:** The National Curriculum Guides must reflect the aims of the Education Policy and promote the development of future competencies. They will be re-evaluated with this objective in mind and to ensure that they align with international obligations undertaken by Iceland. There will be an emphasis on providing access to a broad range of learning resources that take advantage of the potential of digital communication and respect the diversity of the student population.

**E.3. Assessment:** Student assessment should evaluate students' competencies in a transparent and guiding manner, while taking into account the different competencies of each individual. Special attention must be paid to the equal rights of students with disabilities and to those of students with learning or social difficulties. It is important to develop a common understanding of the main priorities

of student assessment and ensure that they are in line with the priorities laid down in the National Curriculum Guides. Assessment must be designed to provide, at regular intervals, clear information about the learning progress, including a varied evaluation of the student's learning, well-being and welfare.

**E.4. Expectations for students:** Students will be under increased expectations to succeed academically, demonstrate perseverance, and progress in their learning, subject to needs and circumstances. The education system must offer a certain amount of flexibility to those students who need it, and provide appropriate support for all students in their learning and play. The development of a sense of responsibility, social skills and community and environmental awareness among students is to be emphasised. There must be a requirement for both children and adults whose native language is not Icelandic to improve their proficiency in Icelandic, and for students to be given opportunities to further advance their knowledge of their native languages along with that of Icelandic.

**E.5. Expectations for parents:** Parents are important allies of the education system who are in possession of inestimable knowledge that must be put to use for the benefit of students. Priority is placed on well-functioning co-operation between homes and schools, based on mutual respect and trust. There is a lot to be gained from promoting academic achievement and fostering students' knowledge, perseverance and happiness. Parents of children who are still minors are responsible for their children's upbringing and education, even as the students take responsibility for their own learning in accordance with their age and level of maturity.

**E.6. Continuous improvement and quality assurance:** External and internal reviews of schools and educational work must be strengthened taking account of the Education Policy and standardised measures of performance. Reviews must be based on clear and well supported criteria and must involve the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of relevant data. Clear responsibilities as regards the provision and quality of school and education activities are essential. Internal reviews are the responsibility of the educational institutions themselves, while external reviews are conducted by the Ministry and local authorities. External reviews are to be conducted at regular intervals, and are to be followed up by targeted reform support in co-operation between central and local government and other education providers. The Ministry gathers information about schools and educational settings, including through participation in international surveys of academic achievement. It is a priority to use the results of external and internal reviews for the purposes of reform, student self-assessment, and learning. Key benchmarks must be defined, published at regular intervals and scrutinised for improvement.

**E.7. Efficient use of funds:** Iceland places the highest priority on investments in education and insists on the efficient use of those investments, the attainment of the aims of the Education Policy and the development of an education system that meets society's needs. This means that the education system must be adequately financed and appropriations must be clearly defined and decided on having due regard to the needs of the sector as revealed by an efficient analysis.