

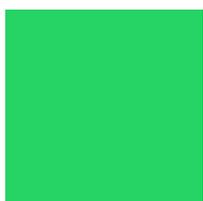
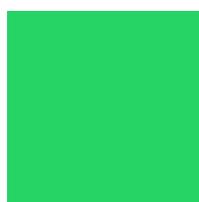
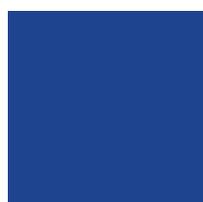
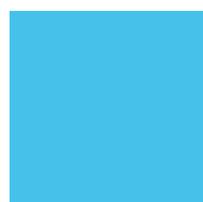
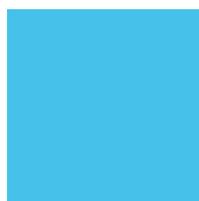
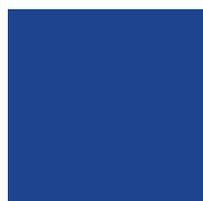
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# TEACHERS AND TRAINERS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Building up competences for  
inclusive, green and digitalised  
vocational education and training

## ICELAND

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# **Teachers and trainers in a changing world**

## **Iceland**

Building up competences for inclusive, green and digitalised vocational education and training (VET)

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The thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) systems provided in '[VET in Europe database](#)'. The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

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## CHAPTER 1. Introduction

The Icelandic vocational education and training system originates from the time when Iceland was still part of the Danish kingdom. At that time, apprentices learned from their masters by working alongside them. Gradually, schools took over parts of the training and more theoretical subjects were added. Workplace learning is still important, and the journeyman's exam is centred on demonstrating skills learners have acquired. Several qualifications are offered at upper secondary level (ISQF 3/ EQF 4) some of which are preconditions for holding relevant jobs. The most common are journeyman's exams but there are also exams for healthcare professionals and captains and engineers of ships and planes. In other professions, a VET degree is not a precondition for employment, but graduates enjoy preferential treatment for the jobs they are trained for. A few VET programmes are available at post- secondary non-tertiary level (ISQF 4/EQF 5), including tourist guides and captains at the highest level. Certificates for all master craftsmen are also awarded at this level. These programmes last one to two years and lead to qualifications giving professional rights.

The strengths and challenges of the Icelandic VET system are reported by the OECD in a review of Education Policy Outlook in Iceland (OECD, 2016). The system offers both a broad programme and various modes of delivery. One of the main concerns regarding educational sustainability is the low enrolment rates of 31% (the OECD average is 46%). The VET programmes are offered in upper secondary education. However, they are also available in non-formal education, such as evening schools, workplaces, and adult education centres (OECD, 2016, p. 8). These programmes are aimed at preparing students for work or continued studies, and can thus lead to specific professional qualification and jobs (OECD, 2016, p. 8). In Iceland, re-entry to upper secondary education is assured, and as it stands, a 'high proportion of students (particularly in VET) over age 20 [...] have labour market experience' (OECD, 2016, p. 8). There is a concern about the transitions between the upper secondary vocational programmes and higher education, as they are both difficult to navigate and sometimes obstructed, and according to the 'Education Policy Outlook: Iceland' 2016 report: 'vocational progression routes can be unclear, and some vocational programmes do not easily allow for further studies' (OECD, 2016).

Although many dropouts return later to education and training, this still represents delay and inefficiency in initial education and training. In the past couple of years, we have however seen a sharp increase in the number of applications to

VET education, to the extent. This puts added pressure and demands on existing VET teaching staff.

### 1.1. Policy changes in 2015-21

The Minister of Education, along with the Federation of Icelandic Industries and the Association of Local Authorities, introduced in February 2020 a strategy on how to strengthen VET in Iceland. Part of the agreement included:

- (a) increased emphasis on all primary school students receiving instruction in engineering, technology and art subjects according to the National Curriculum Guide;
- (b) to amend the law on universities, so that vocationally educated people enjoy the same rights as those who have completed a matriculation examination, to apply for university studies;
- (c) simplify the organisation of vocational and technical studies, so that the studies become increasingly the responsibility of schools from enrolment to graduation;
- (d) improve access to vocational and technical education in rural areas, as the range of courses available in the local area largely determines the study choices of young people after compulsory school;
- (e) strengthen study and career counselling in primary schools, both for young people and parents, so that the decision on study choices is based on detailed and good information about studies, opportunities and job opportunities. (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2020).

A new regulation on workplace learning in Iceland has been approved and took effect in August 2021, as part of a comprehensive reform of the Icelandic VET-system. The responsibility for finding a suitable workplace for apprenticeship is now in the hands of the VET schools and not the sole responsibility of the learner anymore. This means that if a learner is not able to find a place for an apprenticeship, a so-called school-based apprenticeship programme comes into play and the VET school will have to ensure that the learner has access to the workplace training needed. Also, with this new regulation, the exact timeframe for workplace learning will not be determined at the outset. Instead, the length of the on-the-job training will be determined by how quickly the student masters a predetermined set of skills. Thus, the focus will be on competencies gained in the place of work, not the length of time spent there (*Reglugerð um vinnustaðarnám* 180/2021).

The University of Iceland School of Education, The Icelandic Teachers' Union, Reykjavik City/Department of Education and Youth, University of Akureyri, Iceland University of the Arts, and the Association of Local Authorities have made an agreement to continue the project entitled 'Education Plaza'. The project originally started in 2015, but the new agreement secures that it will continue between 1 February 2021 and 31 January 2024. The aim of the Educational Plaza is to provide a platform for the continuing education of teachers and others who work within the educational system (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2020).

In 2019, the University of Iceland introduced an initiative as an effort to make teaching more attractive in the final year of the teaching programme. This entailed that, students can now apply for a salaried training period for a maximum period of 1 school year. Furthermore, in 2020, the University of Iceland announced that it would hire four active teachers or headmasters to work part-time at the university as leaders in education. The main goal is to create a stronger link between the students and the professionals working in the field of education (*Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið*, n.d.). It is believed that this measure will achieve this as it pertains to professional development, which strives to 'improve knowledge and skills in order to facilitate individual, school-wide, and district-wide improvements for the purpose of increasing student achievement'.

In a new parliamentary resolution (ice. *Menntastefna 2020-30*) one of the objectives mentioned is to put added emphasis on VET hand in hand with the needs of the society and challenges of the 4th industrial revolution (*Þingskjal 310/2020-2023. Tillaga til þingsályktunar um menntastefnu fyrir árið 2020-30*) This resolution presents five pillars for the future vision and values of the Icelandic education policy. These pillars are described as:

- (a) Equal opportunities for all;
- (b) First class teaching;
- (c) Competences for the future;
- (d) Well-being as a priority;
- (e) Quality in the foreground (*Þingskjal 310/2020-23. Tillaga til þingsályktunar um menntastefnu fyrir árið 2020-30*).

## CHAPTER 2. Types of teaching and training professionals

### 2.1. Main types

Vocational education usually takes place both at school and the workplace. A good deal of the studies involves students being trained to apply various methods and techniques. The training, on the one hand, takes place in specialised vocational studies under the supervision of teachers and, on the other hand, in organised work-based learning and on-the-job training. The concepts *organised workplace learning*, and *on-the-job training* are synonymously used for vocational education and training. 'Work-based learning is defined as making added demands for systematic, organised teaching, guidance and supervision from what is normal in on-the-job training' (*Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið*, 2011, p. 40).

In Iceland, categories of teachers in upper secondary schools that have VET programmes are the following:

- (a) teachers of general theoretical subjects in VET schools/centres: these teachers teach general subjects, such as mathematics, social science and science;
- (b) teachers of theoretical and practical subjects in school or simulated workplace learning environments: these teachers teach specialised subjects in relation to a specific vocation;
- (c) apprentice tutors in companies: these are not part of the school-based education. In order to become an apprentice tutor, one has to hold a master craftsmanship diploma.

### 2.2. VET schools

In Iceland, currently 13 of 30 upper secondary schools offer diverse Vocational Study Programmes. These can range from short programmes, with no workplace training, to longer programmes, with workplace training, leading to industrial certification (*löggilt iðngrein*).

Most VET programmes offered at upper secondary level, include both studies at school and workplace training. Study programmes vary in length from one school year to four years of combined school and workplace training. Workplaces responsible for training need official certification and training agreements with both the student and the school, stipulating the objectives, time period and evaluation

of the training. However there exist VET programmes which do not include work place training, example is technical drawing.

The Upper Secondary Act from 2008 called for VET programmes that better responded to labour market skill needs. The Act, as well as The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools from 2011 provides for a decentralised approach to designing study programmes and curricula. This means that upper secondary schools are entrusted with great responsibility and enjoy much autonomy in developing study programmes both in general education as well as VET using an approach combining learning outcomes, workload and credits. The current form of monitoring the progress in workplace learning has been in the form of a written logbook.

Special programmes for young people who have dropped out or enrolled in second chance exist in Fjölsmiðjan (n.d.) and Hringsjá (n.d.). Fjölsmiðjan is a non-profit organisation with the aim of running a training centre for young people aged 16-24. Likewise, people aged 25 and over have access to Fjölsmiðjan if they have a special need in that field. Fjölsmiðjan is a recognised further education provider according to the Directorate of education. Hringsjár's goal is to provide study and vocational rehabilitation for individuals, 18 years of age and older, who due to illness, accident, disability, or other trauma need rehabilitation to cope with their studies and / or to work in the general labour market.

## CHAPTER 3. Teaching and training professionals in school-based settings

### 3.1. Legislation

The main legislation and regulations on education in Iceland, which apply to all education, are the following:

- (a) National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools (*Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið*, 2011);
- (b) Act on upper secondary schools. Act No 92/2008 (*Lög um framhaldsskóla nr. 92/2008*);
- (c) Act on the education, competence and employment of teachers and school administrators at pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools. Act No 95/2019 (*Lög um menntun, hæfni og ráðningu kennara og skólastjórnenda við leikskóla, grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla nr. 95/2019*);
- (d) Regulation on workplace learning (*Reglugerð um vinnustaðarnám 180/2021*).

The Act on the education, competence and employment of teachers and school administrators at pre-schools, compulsory and upper secondary schools contains information on the requirements for teachers in both VET and general subjects.

### 3.2. Qualification and competence requirements

Teacher's license for teachers of vocational subjects is accorded by the Directorate of Education. It specifies that the right to call oneself a teacher and work as such in Iceland as stated in Act No 95/2019 on the education, skills and employment of teachers and school administrators at pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools and the conditions for obtaining an operating license (Directorate of Education, 2019). It reiterates that according to Act No 95/2019, one teacher's license is issued but not separated between school levels as stipulated in previous laws. Previously issued licenses for pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers meet the requirements for a license with specialisation at the school level covered by previous teaching qualifications. Among the general competences required of a teacher by the above law is: 'Ability to be a professional leader who strives to create a reform-oriented learning community and take responsibility for one's own career development and work on it throughout one's

working life' (*Lög um menntun, hæfni og ráðningu kennara og skólastjórnenda við leikskóla grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla nr. 95/2019*).

According to the act on the education, competence and employment of teachers and school administrators at pre-schools, compulsory schools, and upper secondary schools a vocational teacher shall have completed a master craftmanship in a certain trade or a certified vocational qualification examination from an upper secondary school in addition to 60 ECTS credits in teaching. A 60 ECTS course in teaching for masters of craftmanship is offered in the University of Iceland. The contents of the above mentioned 60 credit teaching qualification are described on the university website broadly as follows: The study is defined as a part-time study with work completed in two years (four semesters). The programme is both on-site and distance learning with a defined attendance requirement in standard sessions. Standard sessions are held twice a semester, but in addition, the studies are conducted in a flexible manner. Field studies are taken in the second year of the study and take place in an upper secondary school under the guidance of a teacher. Compulsory attendance is in on-site training. Among the topics covered are pedagogy, curriculum studies and relationship between school and business (Kennsluskrá Háskóla Íslands, n.d.).

### 3.3. Initial training programmes

At the University of Iceland, on entering teaching studies (for teacher certification), VET students (in this case, aspiring teachers doing teacher education in their trade) will do a 60 ECTS undergraduate diploma. The object of this programme is to 'provide the students with the knowledge, skills, and competences needed to work as teachers in their field (trade) (University of Iceland, n.d.). This programme is intended for those who are Certified Masters of Trade and want to teach their subject at the compulsory elementary level or upper secondary level of education (University of Iceland, n.d.). It is both available as a one-year full-time study programme and a two-year part-time study programme. The University of Akureyri offers a 60 ECTS diploma degree in vocational studies for licensed practical nurses. This certification is designed 'to educate licensed practical nurses for diverse jobs in the health service sector, by providing additional studies at university level in different specialisations. The special fields are gerontology- and home-care nursing (beginning fall of 2021) and later Social-nursing with emphasise on mental- and rehabilitation nursing' (University of Akureyri, n.d.).

### 3.4. Requirements for continuous professional development

According to Act No. 95/2019 the law requires teachers to take responsibility for their own professional development, in the sense of continuing education. This means that they must take initiative to do so, but they have support of their trade union to finance this initiative, and must, to all purpose and intents, do so in cooperation with their employer. Article 4.7 states that the teacher as a professional leader should strive to create a reform-oriented learning community and take responsibility for their own career development and work on it throughout their working life (Lög um menntun, hæfni og ráðningu kennara og skólustjórnenda við leikskóla grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla nr. 95/2019).

According to legislation on study leaves, teachers who have worked for at least five years can apply for a special study leave to enhance their knowledge and teaching skills. They shall send a request for study leave to the Ministry of education. The Ministry may, after receiving the opinion of the headmaster, grant the study leave for up to one year on a fixed salary. A teacher who enjoys study leave can also apply for a grant to cover the costs of travel and subsistence in connection with the study leave. The person who receives leave submits a report to the ministry on how it was spent. These provisions also apply to principals and other professional administrators (*Lög um framhaldsskóla nr. 92/2008*). A list of applicants for study leave as well as information on planned studies can be found on RANNÍS (The Icelandic Centre for Research) website (RANNÍS, n.d.a.). Teachers have access to several funds to sustain their professional development. However, little information is accessible on the contents of the professional development undertaken. Information on applicants for study grant can also be accessed on RANNÍS website.

Information on needs for professional development is available in the TALIS study (Teaching and Learning international study) conducted by the OECD and collaborating countries. In the Icelandic context, this is done by the Directorate of Education. The data is retrieved from OECD. It devotes a passage to the topic of professional development. Results from Iceland indicate that the main obstacles to professional development are difficulties in combining professional development and job demands. There is no time set aside for professional development. Secondly, there is a lack of formal incentive to seek out professional development. The minister of education appointed in 2016 a collaboration council on professional development. The council points out that in current trade union agreements there is a new clause about providing a personal wage supplement upon completion of ECTS units. In trade union agreements with primary, secondary schools and music schools it is specified that a certain time should be set aside for teachers for

professional development. According to Article 2.1.6.6.1 of the wage contract of upper secondary school teachers (including VET teachers) and school managers, teachers are entitled to 80 hours of CPD per year (*Kennarasamband Íslands og Kjara- og mannauðssýslu ríkisins, fjármála- og efnahagsráðuneytinu, 2014*). The Collaboration council proposed that greater support should be given to schools for developing a learning community, thus providing teachers and principals with time within *their normal working hours* to devote to professional development. (*Samstarfsráð um starfsþróun kennara og skólastjórnenda, 2019*). However, as of yet, nothing has been formally implemented.

IÐAN and Rafmennt (see below) are two lifelong centres that offer courses as part of Continuous Professional Development, accessible to people of different trades. The topics of these courses change regularly, and therefore, specific topics cannot be named. These courses are free of charge for VET teachers and enable them to develop as professionals. It should be noted that the work of IÐAN and Rafmennt (and thereby the courses they provide) is not specifically aimed at VET teachers. However, some of them can be beneficial to them and are as open to VET teachers as others. Furthermore, from time to time, the Institute of Continuing Education, University of Iceland, offers courses aimed at VET teachers (*The Institute of Continuing Education, n.d.*). Also, VET teachers frequently return to work in their own trade during shorter periods of time, in order to keep their knowledge of the trade up to date. In Iceland, validation of prior learning (or of competences) is not being carried out for teachers.

The Icelandic Research Centre (RANNÍS) maintains a fund which VET teachers can apply to organise presentations and courses. This is the Sabbatical Fund for Teachers and Administrators at Upper Secondary Level (RANNÍS, n.d.b).

### 3.5. Data on teachers and trainers in school-based settings

The Icelandic Research Centre (RANNÍS) collects statistics on VET teachers that have been granted study leave (RANNÍS, n.d.a):

**Table 1. Statistics on VET teachers that have been granted study leave**

Year of study leave	Number of teachers on full study leave	Number of teachers on partial study leave	Total number of teachers on leave
2021-22	4	37	41
2020-21	5	35	40
2019-20	6	35	41
2018-19	4	36	40

2017-18	0	42	42
2016-17	5	35	40

## CHAPTER 4. Training professionals in work-based settings

### 4.1. Definitions

The main concepts are *vocational teacher* and *master craftsman*. The term *vocational teacher* applies to instructors with certification at all levels of the education system who work at a school. The term master craftsman (*iðnmeistari*) applies to those who have obtained the qualifications required to take pupils for training. Master craftsmen can in some cases refer their students to the supervision of so-called '*tilsjónarmenn*', who may not have the qualifications of the craftsmen. These will then work under the responsibility of the master craftsman.

Education on how to take on students for workplace education and training is a vital part of master craftsman's education programme (Námsbrautir.is, n.d.).

### 4.2. Legislation

The law of craftsmanship states that only those who have finished the study of master craftsmanship are entitled to receive the craftsmanship diploma. The master craftsmanship study is aimed at preparing students to stand up to their duties as masters in individual trades. The curriculum varies from one trade to another. In some trades great emphasis is laid upon professional qualifications whereas the craftsmanship diploma gives more rights than the journey man's diploma. This refers particularly to construction, metal and electric industries. In other trades greater emphasis is laid upon management and finance and the foundation of SMEs (*Iðnaðarlög nr. 42/1978*).

Trades that are operated as handicrafts are certified in accordance with the industrial education act and regulations. Only those who have a journeyman's certificate or a master craftsman certificate in the industry have the right to identify themselves as such in their job title in a licensed industry.

Persons may claim a master's certificate if they fulfil the legal conditions and have completed a journeyman's degree in the trade, and if they have since worked on the trade under the direction of a master for no less than a year and completed a master's craftsmanship in the craft from a master's school. If there is no master's school in the trade, each person can claim a master's certificate if he has worked under the direction of a master in the trade or a closely related trade after completing a journeyman's examination for no less than two years (*Iðnaðarlög nr. 42/1978*).

#### 4.3. Provisions for continuous professional development

The two main providers of professional development are Iðan and Rafmennt. They offer refresher courses in their trades to their members (and, thus, not in teaching/specialisation in education). In this way, they receive retraining in their profession. There are no requirements for CPD of the apprenticeship mentors in companies.

- (a) **IÐAN** (IÐAN, n.d.) is a private non-profit education and training provider supported by the federation of employees and unions represented by the industries they serve nationwide (RANNÍS, n.d.a).
- (b) **The Rafmennt Electrical VET Centre** (Rafmennt, n.d.) is a VET centre for electricians, electronic technicians in all industries and sectors and technicians in the fields of telecommunication, information technology, audio-visual, broadcasting and the creative industries. Their main area of responsibility is continuing education, trade master education, validation of prior learning, skills validation, workplace training and journeyman's exams. They also provide services such as educational and vocational counselling, online library and job opportunities in the field.

Paramedics tutors who accept learners must attend a pedagogical course for supervisors in the workplace at Framvegis (2019) lifelong learning centre before they can accept learners. This service, including other lifelong learning courses for paramedics, is run in cooperation with the Icelandic Nursing Assistants' Association, and is therefore an exception to the above cases. The Education department of the University of Iceland offers regularly courses for working teachers.

#### 4.4. Data on trainers in work-based settings

Comprehensive information about CPD in general is difficult to access since it is rather decentralised. There is no relevant data available for this section.

## CHAPTER 5. Partnerships between schools and companies

### 5.1. Examples of practice

In most VET disciplines, there is a lot of collaboration between schools and the workplace.

In an attempt to speed up workplace learning a new reform makes VET schools responsible for securing suitable on-the-job apprenticeships. This new regulation on workplace learning and apprenticeship has been approved and will take effect on 1 August 2021 (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2021). Competency factors have been defined for each subject and the student needs to master the elements specified therein. The on-the-job training will be much more competency-driven than before. Learners will be able to graduate earlier instead of being held up waiting for the appropriate apprenticeship to come along. The skills and competencies the learner must have acquired at the end of the workplace learning will be defined for each VET-programme and stored in a digital logbook for each learner. The overarching goal of the logbook is to enhance the quality of workplace learning by creating a communication platform for the learner, the workplace, school, and others involved in workplace learning. This new system will ensure that apprentices get the training they need and not be hampered by eventual difficulties in finding a suitable apprenticeship themselves.

### 5.2. Cooperation between VET schools and companies

In Iceland, social partners have several roles in the design and steering of the system, in particular, through the occupational councils and the occupational committee. Twelve occupational councils in 12 fields of study advise the Ministry of Education on the labour market needs and the provision of courses in VET at upper secondary level. Each occupational council according to the regulation on the occupational councils includes five to nine representatives out of which two to four are nominated by federations of employers, two to four by federations of employees from the relevant occupations and one representative jointly nominated by the Association of Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools and the Icelandic Teachers' Union. These councils deal with curriculum projects and participate in quality assurance initiatives, such as improvements of the work of the

journeymen's examination committees and apprenticeship committees. (*Reglugerð um skipan og störf starfsgreinaráða* nr. 711/2009). According to Article 5 of the new regulation on workplace learning, the school, the company, and the student enter a contract about the workplace learning of the student. The common practice is that the trainers are already employed at the company. When entering the aforementioned contract, the company states who the trainer or supervisor (see below) will be, and according to the regulation (on workplace learning), the master craftsman at the company is responsible for the fulfilment of the contract. According to this regulation (Section 1.1), the workplace school is 'responsible for ensuring that the student's competence is ... adequately fulfilled, as the digital logbooks cannot be used to assess the learners' competences' (*Reglugerð um vinnustaðarnám* 180/2021). In other words, there is not a statutory co-operation between the supervisor (*tilsjónarmaður*) at the workplace and the school.

Currently, the occupational councils are, under the coordination of the Directorate of Education. The occupational councils assist the Directorate in listing and describing the competencies required for each occupation. This work consists partly of updating pre-existing job descriptions and competency requirements (Menntamálastofnun, n.d.).

#### **5.2.1. Digital Logbook for VET students.**

Modernisation of the logbook system was among the VET working group's proposals from 2015 as well as one of the suggestions made in the White Paper published in 2014 (*Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið*, 2014). The logbook is currently being implemented. It contains 15 trades, but by January 2022 it will cover all study programmes that include workplace learning.

The main goal of the project is to enhance the quality of workplace learning by creating a communication platform for students, workplaces, schools, and others involved in workplace learning. The digital logbook contains description of skills and competency requirements the learners must have obtained at the end of workplace learning. The objective of the virtual logbook is to increase the overall quality of workplace learning and will ensure that apprentices do get the training they need. The system will function as a venue for schools to assist learners in finding work placements for the apprentices and for the workplaces to advertise their apprenticeships. It is foreseen that the digital logbook will assist both VET schools to plan learning pathways as well as to give the student a better overview of the progress. Also, the modernisation of the logbook and the efforts to simplify and clarify responsibilities in the VET system will hopefully make VET more attractive to students and increase attendance in VET.

The content of the logbook is based on job descriptions and competency requirements that the professional councils are currently working on updating. Job descriptions and competency requirements are the labour markets way of defining the needs for skills and competences on which qualifications in the upper-secondary school system are based on. These data are being reviewed in the light of the rapid changes that have taken place in many professions. The plan is to launch the new logbook gradually as small groups consisting of people working in the trade and representatives of the school community will be established for each profession in order to define skills for workplace learning in the logbook (Cedefop, 2021).

### 5.3. Hybrid teachers and trainers

The concept of hybrid teachers/trainers does not exist nor apply in Iceland.

### 5.4. Data on cooperation and hybrid teachers

There is no relevant data available for this section.

## CHAPTER 6. National and EU-funded projects and initiatives

Schools in general in Iceland are encouraged to apply for EU funding and co-operation with schools in Europe and the Nordic countries is very strong.

### 6.1. Digital skills for remote and blended teaching

The University of Iceland provided a platform for academics of any discipline to share the studies they had planned or conducted to assess response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many projects were presented there, including research projects in education (Háskóli Íslands, n.d.-a).

In response to the Covid-19 situation, a combination of in-school and at-home approach was employed regarding a number of VET studies. The problem with VET is that in many cases, the teaching depends on the accessibility of equipment other than books, pen and pencil. The situation was tackled in the e.g. Catering and food technology studies by allowing students to come to school to collect cooking materials (food) and then go home and do the cooking exercises at home instead of at school. During the project, students took pictures. They then submitted recipes, layout, pictures, and reflections electronically to the teacher. The project and the arrangement were successful and well received by the students and their families (Veitingageirinn, 2020).

Research on teaching methods in Icelandic upper secondary schools shows that distance teaching is common for lectures, training exercises and written assignments. However, the variety of teaching methods is growing. Icelandic upper secondary schools enjoy some freedom when it comes to teaching and assessment, and decisions are made within each school individually, even by individual teachers (Björnsdóttir et al., 2020). This also includes VET in upper secondary schools.

During Covid-19, the Universities of Iceland and of Akureyri offered distance learning camps on Zoom in collaboration with the Education and Training Service Centre. The camp provided a forum on distance and online teaching and the use of information technology in learning and communication at the upper secondary and university level and in adult education (Menntaskólinn á Akureyri, n.d.).

A questionnaire given to all upper secondary school staff (including VET staff) by the University of Iceland reveals aspects of the work within the upper secondary school during the Covid restrictions. About nine out of ten upper secondary school

teachers did their job entirely or for the most part elsewhere than in a school building. Almost seven out of ten teachers felt much more or somewhat more stressed at work while schools were closed, and about a third of upper secondary school teachers felt that their duties were less clear or somewhat less clear in the assembly ban. These first results clearly show how challenging upper secondary school teaching was during the first outbreak period of covid-19. Teachers experienced more stress, workload increased, and teachers' work was less clear and complex than before (Háskóli Íslands, n.d.).

## 6.2. Green skills for sustainability

A number of Icelandic schools participate in the Eco-Schools project (co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union), that developed from a European educational programme to a global model for environmental education and sustainability at the international level. It encourages young people to engage in their environment by allowing them the opportunity to actively protect it. Through this programme, young people can have a say in the environmental management policies of their schools, ultimately steering them towards certification and the award of a Green Flag. The Eco-Schools programme is an ideal way for schools towards improving the environment in both the school and the local community while at the same time having a positive impact on the lives of young people, their families, school staff and local authorities. The large majority of Icelandic schools participate in this initiative (Ecoschools, n.d.; Landvernd, n.d.).

## 6.3. Preventing early leaving from VET

Measures against dropout from upper secondary school (including VET upper secondary schools) were undertaken in a special project in 2018. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture commissioned the Directorate of Education to manage the project. During the period 2016-18, screening tests were prepared for new students in all upper secondary schools to map what kind of risk factors characterised the student groups of the school in question. This information was used to predict and analyse subsequent drop-out. Schools obtained grants to help reduce dropout. In addition, schools obtained information and data that would be useful to schools in choosing measures that were suitable for different risk factors. A number of positive outcomes ensued for some of the schools, including less dropout, improved grades and increased wellbeing. (Menntamálastofnun, 2018)

There are also other organisations outside the formal school system that assist learners at risk. Fjölsmiðjan is a non-profit organisation with the aim of providing vocational training for young people aged 16-24. Likewise, people aged 25 and over have access to Fjölsmiðjan if they have a special need in that field. Fjölsmiðjan strives to meet students on their own terms and to fulfil their needs and wishes as they experience the job. Fjölsmiðjan's main goal is to strengthen social skills and strengthen individuals in personal growth, as well as to prepare them for increased schooling and participation in the general labour market (Fjölsmiðjan, n.d.).

In addition, Hringsjá's goal (a non-profit organisation) is to provide study and vocational rehabilitation for individuals, 18 years of age and older, who due to illness, accident, disability or other trauma need rehabilitation to cope with their studies and/or to work in the general labour market. The program is also suitable for those who have little basic education or specific learning difficulties. The aim is for those who graduate from Hringsjá to be able to take up studies in general upper secondary schools and find suitable jobs in the general labour market. The work of Hringsjá is based primarily on learning and teaching, counselling, support and cooperation and aims to help people towards self-help (Hringsjá, n.d.).

## CHAPTER 7. National surveys of teaching and training populations

As mentioned above a research team of scholars at the School of Education at the University of Iceland studied the effects of the first wave of COVID-19 on upper secondary school work (Háskóli Íslands, n.d.-a).

In Iceland, a number of researchers are doing assessments and studies on teaching and training populations, both in English and Icelandic. One, specifically incorporating surveys was done in 2007, and covered in a report from 2016. It also included a longitudinal dimension, covering the learners' circumstances 6 and a half years after taking the initial survey. It concluded that at that, at that point, learners doing general studies were more likely to have completed their studies 6 and half years after the 2007 survey and were also more likely to have completed their studies within the expected timeframe. Therefore, learners doing vocational studies, in this time period, were more likely to abandon their studies or take longer to complete them (Blondal et al., 2016). In 2020, a study incorporating surveys, studied how recently graduated journeymen, vocational teachers, and workplace trainers view the integration between learning at school and at work in a dual VET system, and how these views might be influenced by the duration and the sequencing of school- and work-based learning periods (Eiríksdóttir, 2020). The study concluded 'that the duration of the work-based learning period has a limited effect on how stakeholders perceive the integration of the two venues of learning at work and learning at school' (Eiríksdóttir, 2020). However, 'this says nothing about other effects that duration of work-based learning might have, such as student outcomes or identity formation. The results suggest that those involved in the four trades fitting the Either–School sequencing pattern have managed to establish better communication between school and workplaces than participants in trades that begin and conclude at school (*School–School*).' (Eiríksdóttir, 2020).

## CHAPTER 8. Conclusions

The 2014 White paper on education reform by the Ministry of Education pointed to the need for further developing practical training, underlining the extreme variability of workplace training in upper secondary VET.

Since then, an action plan on how to strengthen VET in Iceland has been formalised (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2020). Amongst the priorities to increase awareness of VET were new policy developments as: transferring the responsibility for finding workplace contracts for apprentices from the learners themselves to the VET schools. VET learners should have the same access to tertiary education as learners with matriculation exam. Prior to the new regulation coming into force, everyone had to acquire a matriculation exam, in order to gain access to universities, whereas now it is sufficient to have completed the final exam at the 3rd competence level. An exam from an upper secondary VET school is comparable to a matriculation exam. Access to qualified guidance counselling in lower and secondary schools should be easier, making access to VET education in rural areas more flexible.

A new parliamentary resolution (ice. *Menntastefna 2020-30*) presents five pillars for the future vision and values of the Icelandic education policy: Equal opportunities for all; First class teaching; Competencies for the future; Well-being as a priority; Quality in the foreground.

In August 2021, a new regulation on workplace learning took effect as a part of the reform of the VET system in Iceland. The responsibility for finding a suitable workplace for apprenticeship is now in the hands of the VET schools, rather than being the sole responsibility of the learner.

The main goal of the digital logbook is to enhance the quality of work-based learning by creating a communication platform for learners, enterprises, schools, and other stakeholders. The logbook contains descriptions of skills and competence requirements that learners must have acquired at the completions of learning and function as a venue for schools to assist learners in finding work placements and for enterprises to advertise their apprenticeships.

Changes in Act regarding universities has been made and approved (*Pingskjal* 898/2020-2021. *Frumvarp til laga um breytingu á lögum um háskóla*). These changes primarily involve a change in the admission requirements for universities, so that instead of students first and foremost having completed a matriculation examination, a new condition is introduced that learner must have passed a final examination from an upper secondary school on ISQF level 3 (EQF level 4). With this change, the conditions for admission to a university should be in

accordance with the competence, skills and knowledge of learners, but not be an obstacle for those who have passed VET examination.

An important challenge for the VET system in Iceland is the shortage of qualified teachers. Also, in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic the spotlight has been turned to teachers' digital skills showing a rising need for more support for both teachers and learners regarding online and blended teaching.

## List of abbreviations

CPD	continuous professional development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EQF	European qualifications framework
EU	European Union
ISQF	Icelandic National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SEMs	small and mid-sized enterprises
VET	vocational education and training

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