

# ICELAND:

## National Report on the Bologna Process

### Introduction: Higher education Institutions in Iceland

Presently there are eight institutions of higher education in Iceland. Most of the institutions are run by the state. Private parties with state support run three institutions. Institutions of higher education differ in the extent to which they engage in research and the number of programs of study offered. In total there were in the autumn of 2001 some 11.883 students.

The University of Iceland is the largest. It has 11 faculties. These are: humanities, economics and business administration, engineering, law, medicine, pharmacy, nursing, natural sciences, odontology, social sciences and theology.

The University of Akureyri has five faculties: health sciences, business management studies, fishery studies, teacher education and information technology.

The Iceland University of Education is responsible for education of teachers at the pre-school and compulsory school levels, as well as physical education and developmental therapy.

The Technical University of Iceland offers programs in business, civil, industrial, mechanical and electrical engineering technology, laboratory and radiology technology.

The Hvanneyri Agricultural University offers a three year **program** in agronomy.

The Bifröst School of Business is a private university institution that offers programmes in business administration and law. The university is divided into three departments: business and management, law and distance learning. In addition, the university operates a preparatory department.

The Reykjavík University is a private institution with three faculties: computer science, law and business administration.

The Iceland Academy of the Arts is a private institution and has four departments: design, visual arts, drama and music.

Most of the higher education institutions offer distance learning courses in some areas of study.

For admission to institutions at the higher education level students must have passed the matriculation examination or its equivalent. In some cases applicants with substantial work experience who have not completed their matriculation examination may be admitted. For vocational and technical courses in higher education institutions, practical experience in an appropriate field of study is usually required.

The legislation on higher education institutions of 1997 includes provisions for all higher education institutions to set their own admission criteria. Admission may also be granted to students who have completed studies abroad which ensure sufficient preparation for university studies and are equivalent to the Icelandic matriculation examination. Institutions of higher education may also grant admission to students who have completed other studies in Iceland.

## **The Bologna Declaration - Implementation in Iceland**

Generally speaking, the Bologna Declaration is in line with the developments in the area of higher education in Iceland over the last decades and has therefore not led to any major changes or reforms in the Icelandic higher education policy or in the organization and structure of the system. In spite of this the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has decided to formalize and strengthen the implementation process. A special coordination and advisory committee has been established consisting of representatives from all higher educational institutions in Iceland and from the Ministry. The committee will monitor the progress of the Bologna process in Iceland and give input and make suggestion as to changes in laws and regulations that might be necessary to secure successful implementation.

### **Implementation of the individual objectives:**

#### **Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees based on two main cycles.**

The degree system in Icelandic universities is still twofold. **On the one hand** there is the dominating bachelors/masters degree system. The bachelors degree is obtained after 3-4 years and the masters degree after two additional years. In some disciplines it is also possible to study 3-4 years for the doctors degree. The two cycle system (3+2) was established in the humanities already in 1942 by a university regulation, introducing the bachelors degree after 3 years of study. The same system is now also used in the natural sciences, engineering and economics. **On the other hand** there is the older and gradually disappearing candidates degree system, the degree is obtained after 4-6 years of study; mainly in the traditional professional/academic disciplines f.ex. theology, medicine and law. Since 1942 the traditional candidates system has in some disciplines been changed into the bachelors/masters/doctors system, i.e. the 3+2+3 system (or 4+1+3), or there is a mixture of both systems.

Thus: There is in place a system that is generally based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle requires successful completion of first cycle, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle is in general terms also relevant to the European labor market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle leads to the masters degree as in many other European countries.

#### **Establishment of a system of credits - as in the ECTS system**

In Iceland there is a national credit system, based on the same principle of student work-load as the ECTS system. Studies are divided into study credits (*namseiningar*), 30 credits corresponding to one academic year of full-time studies, 15 credits corresponding to one semester of full-time studies. As a general rule 30 (Icelandic) credits correspond to 60 ECTS credits. All universities in Iceland use ECTS credits in student exchange. However, the ECTS grading scale is not yet obligatory but the Ministry is considering carefully whether it should be made obligatory.

#### **Implementation of the Diploma Supplement**

All universities in Iceland have so far been positive towards the use of the Diploma Supplement and the University of Iceland has been entrusted with its promotion. After consultation with the newly established Committee the Ministry will decide whether implementation of the Diploma Supplement will in the future be compulsory for all Icelandic

universities, or just recommended and whether it should be obligatory to issue the supplement or whether it should only be issued on demand.

Iceland did notify the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2000.

### **Promotion of mobility**

In Iceland there is a long tradition for mobility of students and staff. About 16% of all Icelandic university students either study abroad full time or go abroad for one semester or more, as a part of their regular studies in Iceland. University teachers have the right to take a sabbatical year every seventh year (of full time teaching).

Mobility of students to Iceland is steadily growing in spite of the small language community and in the last few years courses in English are being offered in several disciplines.

### **Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance.**

By law all universities in Iceland are obliged to adopt a formal system of quality assurance. The form and method of the quality assurance is further articulated in a contract between the Ministry and individual institutions. Methods of evaluation and quality control are constantly in the process of development. When external evaluations are undertaken evaluators from other countries are always recruited to sit on the evaluation committees.

A Division of Evaluation and Supervision was established within the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 1996 and is an active member of ENQUA and also the Nordic network for QA Agencies.

### **Promotion of the European dimensions in higher education.**

There have been no specific measures undertaken to define “the European dimension” in respect to university education in Iceland. However, the close and wide-ranging cooperation and contacts with other European institutions and international organizations have both directly and indirectly had an effect both on the structure and content of higher education in Iceland. The issue of “the European dimension” will be discussed by the committee mentioned in the introduction in the near future.

### **Social dimension.**

The Icelandic Student Loan fund guarantees that students studying abroad either for a whole degree or a shorter period as a part of their studies in Iceland keep their national support and receive an extra amount to cover their additional expenses as well as travel costs.

### **Life Long Learning**

Since 1998 nine Life Long Learning Centers have been established in Iceland, one in each of the main regions of the country. Distance learning courses are increasingly being offered and some universities run institutes of continuing education and some offer specific courses.