

New times in VET

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 ICELAND

Timeline



ID number 28907

Background

With a chronically low enrolment of young learners into VET, the education ministry, as well as industry and local authorities, all want to contribute to strengthening VET in general by making it more visible, accessible and attractive to young learners in particular.

Objectives

Increasing the numbers of young learners choosing VET following compulsory education, as well as the numbers of learners who finish their VET studies and training.

Description

In February 2020, the education minister, along with the Federation of Icelandic Industries and of the Association of Local Authorities, introduced a strategy and priorities on how to strengthen VET in Iceland. Among the priorities introduced there were new policy (proposals) developments such as:

- (a) transferring the responsibility for finding workplace contracts for apprentices from the learners themselves to the VET schools. When the digital logbook is in full use, schools will be responsible for finding workplaces for learners;
- (b) VET learners should have the same access to tertiary education as learners with the matriculation exam;
- (c) easier access to qualified guidance counselling in lower and secondary schools;
- (d) making access to VET education in rural areas more flexible.

These policy proposals have been implemented, i.e. via legal amendments by parliament. The education minister was responsible for introducing implementation measures by 1 June 2020, but the COVID-19 challenges redefined many priorities within both the ministry and parliament, delaying some measures.

2020 Legislative process

An agreement on concerted arrangements was signed between the interested parties

on 25 February 2020.

2021 Implementation

The new regulation on apprenticeship has been valid from August 2021. It transfers the responsibility for finding workplace contracts for apprentices from the learner to the VET schools.

The arrangements agreed on 25 February 2020 culminated in five projects:

- (a) increasing emphasis on the fact that all learners in compulsory schooling receive instructions in engineering, technology and art subjects, as is specified in the National Curriculum Guide (this has been lacking in some schools);
- (b) amending the law on universities, so that vocationally educated people will enjoy the same rights to apply for university studies as those learners who have completed a matriculation examination;
- (c) simplifying the organisational aspect of vocational and technical studies, so that the schools are more clearly responsible for the progress of the learners, from enrolment to graduation;
- (d) improving 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 learners after having completed compulsory school;
- (e) strengthening study and career counselling in primary schools, both for young learners and their parents, so that their decision-making concerning study choices is based on detailed and good information about studies, opportunities and job prospects.

Projects slowed down due to school closures shortly afterwards. Concerning the progress/status of these projects, the following applies:

- (a) the first project has been carried out by the Office of schools, sports, and youth affairs. This is a monitoring 'project', carried out by the education ministry. Following monitoring findings, the ministry posted delegation letters to all compulsory schools that were not complying with the *National curriculum guide*. As this is not a formal project, it is up to the schools to comply;
- (b) The second project has been completed. Regulation on access to tertiary education for VET learners was approved in May 2021. This change is intended to give learners with VET exams at ISQF level 3 (EQF level 4) equal opportunity to access higher education as those with matriculation exams;
- (c) the third project is under progress;
- (d) the fourth project is under progress;
- (e) the fifth project, with the title *#ForMe* (*#FyrirMig*), is an action plan launched in February 2020, intended to increase young people's interest in vocational and technical education, and increase the number of individuals with such education in the labour market. The action plan is supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities and the Confederation of Icelandic Industries.

All projects carried out on behalf of the education ministry are described in detail in Government's financial plan for 2023-27.

2022 Implementation

Concerning the status of the projects mentioned in 2021 progress stage, the following applies:

- (a) first project was completed;
- (b) second project was completed;
- (c) the third project was under progress. This project is related to the Digital logbook. The responsibilities refer to the school administration assisting the VET learners in finding placements. This part has not been finalised, but the idea of the Digital Logbook is to make things run more smoothly on an organisational level;

- (d) the fourth project is under progress. This is done, for instance, through the Municipalities Equalisation Fund, which has the task of distributing grants to local authorities with the aim to even out differences in the cost of running schools and ensuring that all municipalities meet minimum requirements for schools;
- (e) the fifth project was completed in 2022 (spring). The #ForMe campaign was a promotion campaign that all vocational and technical schools, in collaboration with the Federation of Icelandic Industries, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, and the Ministry of Education were responsible for. The aim of the initiative was to draw attention to vocational and technical studies and the opportunities that such studies offer.

2023 Implementation

On March 2, 2023 the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs introduced the result of a report on the need for housing in secondary schools for the next ten years. Learning facilities for vocational training in secondary schools need to be significantly increased based on the forecast for a rise in the number of students in secondary schools until the year 2033. It can be assumed that the number of students in vocational training will increase by 1 500–1 800 students per year or 18% in the next 5–6 years. At the same time, the number of students in theoretical studies decreases by 510 or 3%. From 2028–2033, it can be expected that the number of students in vocational studies will reach parity, but that there will be a decrease of more than 2 000 students or almost 13% in theoretical studies. This trend needs to be addressed. One of the main reasons why the vocational schools have rejected learners' applications for vocational training in recent years is the lack of suitable housing as well as the lack of professionally trained teachers. Housing needs to be increased by 16 000–19 500 square meters to accommodate the increase in the number of internship students in the coming years. The construction of a new and larger technical school in the town of Hafnarfjörður is in progress, and on 19 January 2023, a contract was finalised for the further expansion of the vocational training facilities of the polytechnic in Breiðholt, which amounts to a total of 2 400 square meters.

2024 Implementation

On 26 November 2024, construction began on a 2 654 square meter vocational training facility for carpentry, electrical engineering and arts at the Polytechnic School in Breiðholt (FB), Reykjavik. The new extension will greatly increase access to work and apprenticeships in the capital area and more than double FB's apprenticeship facilities.

According to a 2023 report by the Ministry of Education and Children on the number of students in secondary schools, the number of those who will choose vocational education in the next ten years is expected to rise from 33.5% in 2023 to 42.5% in 2033.

The initial state cost of the new buildings is ISK 6.6 billion, partly shared by the municipalities to an amount of ISK 2.6 billion.

2025 Implementation

This year marks the launch of the second phase of the government's investment plan for vocational schools, focused on designing and planning new extensions in multiple regions.

Four additional vocational schools are advancing through the preparatory stages for major infrastructure development: Ísafjörður Upper Secondary School (MI), Sudurnes Comprehensive College (FS), Comprehensive College of Northwest Iceland (FNV) and Akureyri Vocational College (VMA). These projects are being developed in close cooperation with local municipalities, ensuring that the new facilities are tailored to regional labour market needs and community expectations. Final architectural designs and budget planning were completed in summer 2025, with tendering procedures scheduled for early autumn 2025. Construction is expected to begin in winter 2025.

In parallel, construction is progressing steadily on the extension of the Polytechnic School in Breiðholt (FB), which began in late 2024. This extension includes specialised facilities for carpentry, electrical engineering, and visual arts. Once completed, the new 2 654 m² building will significantly enhance the school's ability to deliver high-quality, hands-on apprenticeship training in the capital region.

The Ministry of Education and Children has earmarked ISK 2.6 billion in previously accumulated funding for these projects. These resources remain protected from reallocation, as confirmed in the fiscal plan presented to Alþingi. Upon completion of the planning and design phase, updated cost estimates and implementation timelines will be integrated into the government's next financial plan. In doing so, the government maintains a long-term vision for the expansion of vocational education that aligns with demographic trends and employment forecasts.

The new facilities are expected to accommodate the projected increase of 1,500–1,800 additional vocational students per year through 2033, as outlined in the Ministry's 2023 Housing Forecast Report. At the same time, they support the broader policy goal of improving accessibility to VET in rural and regional areas, in line with the original 2020 reform strategy. Ensuring that young people across the country can access high-quality vocational education without needing to relocate remains a government priority.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (until 2021)
- Ministry of Education and Children

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Education professionals

School leaders
Guidance practitioners

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs

Lifelong guidance

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

European priorities in VET

Osnabrück Declaration

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[A news story on the education ministry's website \(in Icelandic\)](#)

[Government financial plan for 2023-27](#)

[2023 report by the Ministry of Education and Children on housing needs in secondary schools](#)

[Project #ForMe \(#FyrirMig\)](#)

[Extensions to all the upper secondary schools that provide vocational training](#)

[More and better vocational training with the expansion of Fjolbrautaskolinn i Breidholt \(FB\)](#)

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