



# spotlight on VET ICELAND

## VET in Iceland

Almost all vocational education and training (VET) in Iceland is offered at upper secondary level, where studies at school and workplace training form an integral part. 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. Most students in workplace training receive salaries, which are a (growing) percentage of fully-qualified workers' salaries. Companies training students can apply to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture for a subsidy to fund training.

At upper secondary level (ISCED 3) several qualifications are offered, 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 (ISCED 4), for example tourist guides and captains at the highest level, plus degrees for all masters of trade. These programmes last one to two years and lead to qualifications giving professional rights.

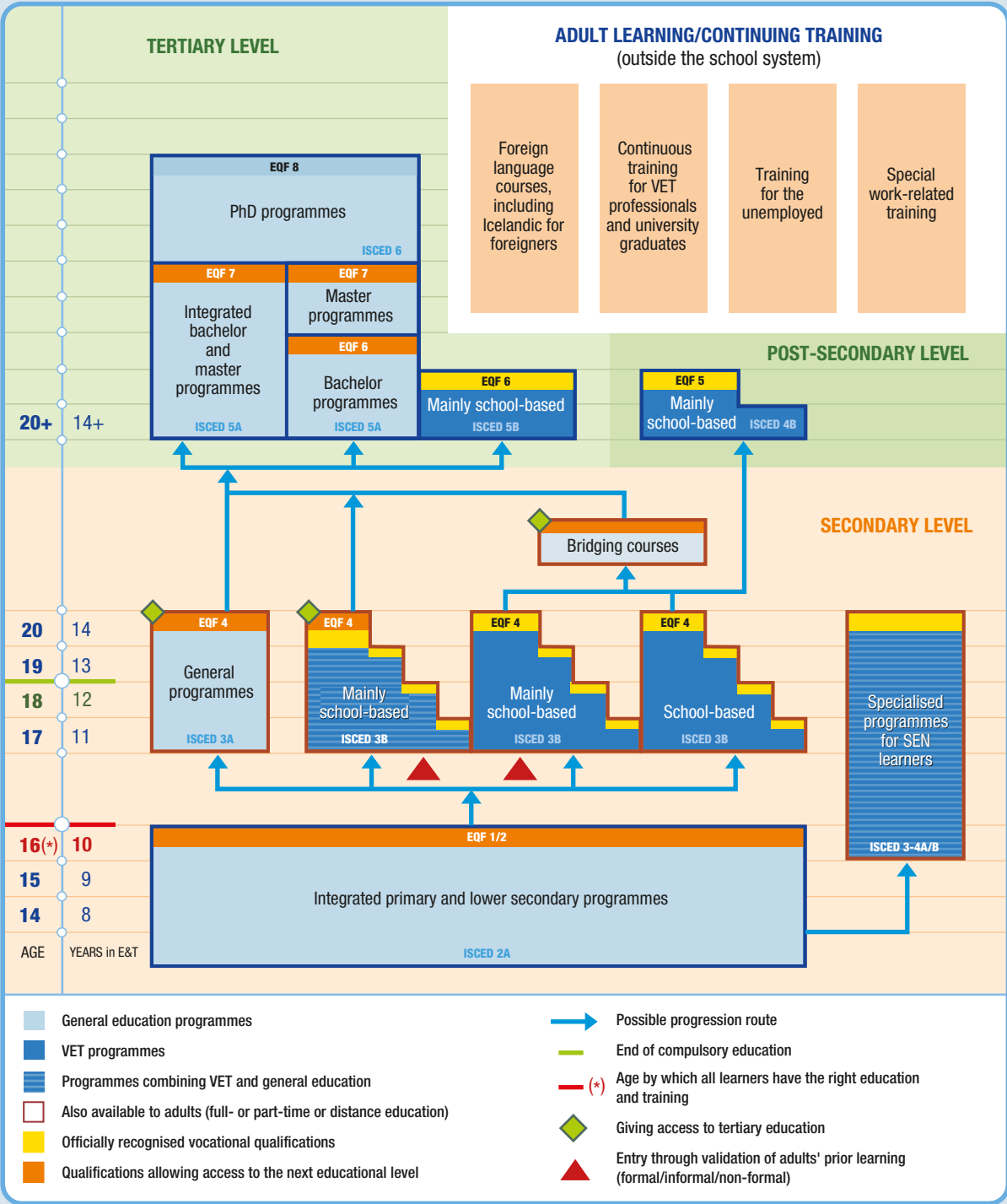
The overall emphasis of the educational system is to keep its structure simple and easily understandable so students can move relatively easily between study programmes. Thus, students can finish upper secondary school with both a vocational and a general degree (matriculation exam) and access to higher education is open to all who have acquired the necessary number of points.

For those who have not, it is easy to attend further education to qualify. Courses which give study points at upper secondary schools must be approved by an official validation body, according to standards approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Upper secondary schools create descriptions of new study programmes and submit them to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Upon approval, programmes become part of the national curriculum guide. When formulating ideas for new study programmes, schools cooperate closely with occupational councils, which form the link between the ministry and the world of work.

Iceland is in third place among 33 European countries in learning among 25 to 64 year-olds. Adult learning is available in upper secondary schools (day classes or special adult evening classes), nine lifelong learning centres, training centres owned and operated by social partners for skilled workers in certain trades, and in numerous private training institutions. For example, two institutions owned by employers' and employees' organisations offer courses for journeymen and masters of trades in the latest technology. For the healthcare sector, retraining courses are offered by universities and there are specific training institutions for several professions. In connection with labour agreements, from 2000, specific training funds for employees were established, into which both employees and employers pay a certain percentage of all salaries. Both parties can apply for funding towards training.

# VET in Iceland's education and training system



NB: ISCED 1997 was used on the chart. Conversion to ISCED 2011 is ongoing.  
 Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Iceland.

## Distinctive features of VET

- The Icelandic VET system originates from 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 training is still of great importance and the journeyman's exam is centred on demonstrating skills students have learned at a workplace.
- General education is much more popular than VET, despite numerous attempts to make VET more attractive. Surveys have shown that despite many young persons' desire to choose vocational pathways, pressure from their parents to enter university is strong. Some students add a vocational degree to their general studies so the average age of VET students is higher than that of general students.
- In 2008, the legal framework for all education and training was completely revised in Iceland and four new acts were approved by Parliament (on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education and training of teachers). These acts aimed to improve quality of the education and training system, make it more student-oriented, flexible and transparent and ease progression through educational levels.
- The Upper-Secondary School Act of 2008 emphasises meeting individual learners' needs and schools responding better to the labour market's skill needs.
- More demands have gradually been made on teachers, both in VET and general education. Since 2008, to qualify as teachers, they need at least a master degree, either as a master of education or as a master of trade, plus a 60 ECTS course in pedagogy at a university.
- Students with severe learning difficulties are offered special programmes at mainstream upper secondary schools. There are several VET pathways on offer that lead to a diploma giving students a possibility to continue their education.

## Challenges

For a long time, the greatest challenge for all education has been dropout rates of students with the result that one third of the adult population has not completed a degree after compulsory education. The government and social partners have signed a declaration of intent saying that by 2020, 90% of the adult population should have completed an upper secondary degree. To reach this goal, it is necessary for schools, adult training centres and workplaces responsible for training to work well together and act swiftly.

Another challenge is lack of people with advanced technical training. The number of graduates has grown rapidly but there is still a skills shortage, since many Icelanders with such training have acquired well-paid jobs abroad.

In November 2012, the Office of the Prime Minister published a set of proposals aimed at closer cohesion between studies and the world of work, where everybody should be able to find studies that interest and suit them.

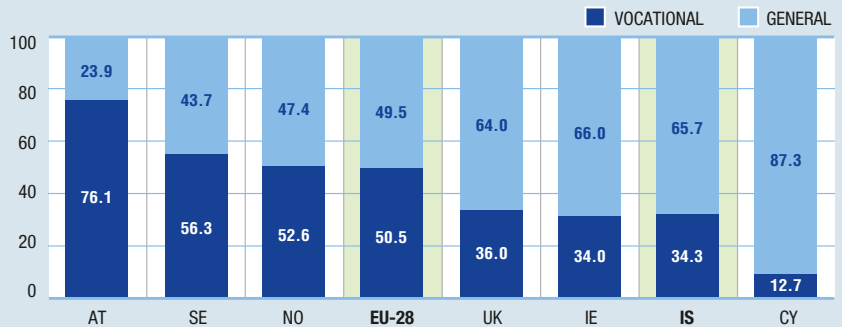
For students from the countryside, it can be quite challenging to attend studies of their choice. In many villages, small upper secondary schools have opened in recent years in cooperation with larger schools elsewhere, for example through distance learning. However, some students may still have to move to Reykjavík to complete their studies.



## Education and training in figures

### Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

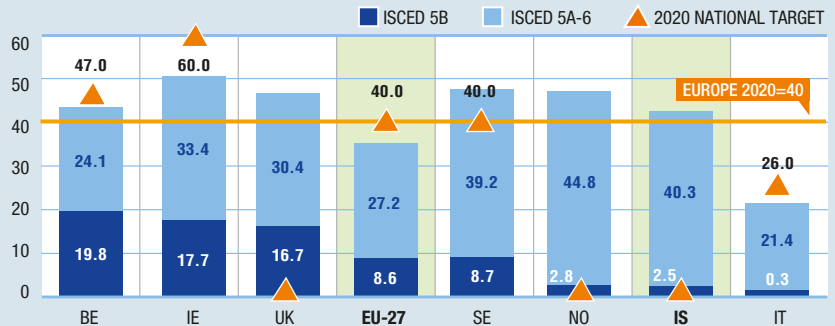
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2011



Source: Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 28.6.2013.

### Tertiary education by type

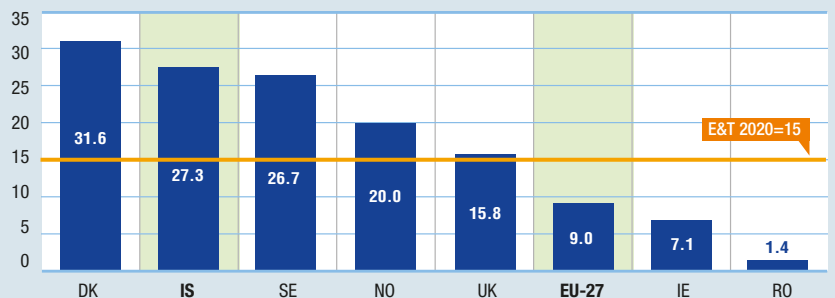
% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type, 2012



NB: Data for Sweden are provisional. No target has been established by Iceland, Norway and the UK.  
Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 8.7.2013.

### Lifelong learning

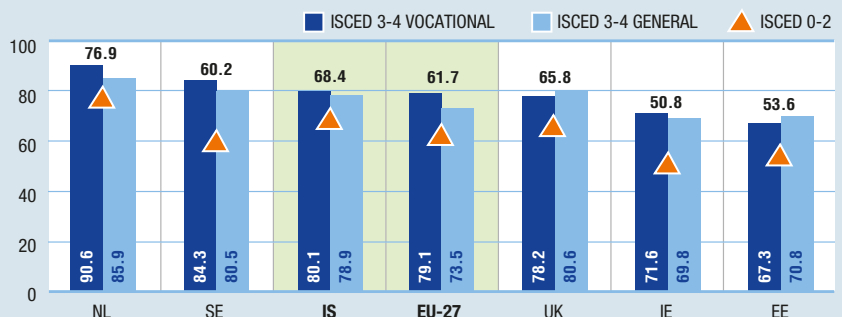
% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2012



NB: Data for the UK are provisional.  
Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 3.7.2013.

### Employment rates by highest level of educational attainment

20-34 year-olds no longer in education by highest level of educational attainment, 2009



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, 2009 ad hoc module of the EU labour force survey, date of extraction 19.9.2012.



## Further information

- Cedefop ReferNet Iceland (2012). *VET in Europe: country report Iceland*.  
[http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2012/2012\\_CR\\_IS.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2012/2012_CR_IS.pdf)
- Eurydice (2013). Iceland: overview. In: European Commission (ed.). *Eurypedia*.  
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Iceland:Overview>

<a href="http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is">http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is</a>	Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
<a href="http://rannis.is/english">http://rannis.is/english</a>	Rannís – Icelandic Centre for Research (ReferNet coordinator from 1.1.2013)
<a href="http://rthj.hi.is/en/research_liaison_office_university_iceland">http://rthj.hi.is/en/research_liaison_office_university_iceland</a>	Research Liaison Office of the University of Iceland (ReferNet coordinator from 15.7.2007 to 31.12.2012)
<a href="http://hagstofa.is">http://hagstofa.is</a>	Hagstofa Íslands (Statistics of Iceland)
<a href="http://www.refernet.is">http://www.refernet.is</a>	ReferNet Iceland



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE  
PO Box 22427, 551 02 Thessaloniki, GREECE  
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, E-mail: [info@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:info@cedefop.europa.eu)

Copyright © European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2013  
All rights reserved.

visit our portal [www.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)



Publications Office

978-92-896-1391-0



9 789289 613910