
SUPPORTING TEACHERS
AND TRAINERS FOR
SUCCESSFUL REFORMS
AND QUALITY OF VET

ICELAND

Mapping their professional
development in the EU





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

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1. Introduction

The following categories of upper secondary school teachers and trainers exist in Iceland:

- school teachers of general subject's (languages, mathematics, social science, etc.);
- school teachers of vocational subjects (both the theoretical part and the hands-on approach);
- workplace trainers.

VET teachers have not been given specific attention in Icelandic national policy; all teachers are grouped together according to the school level at which they teach (e.g. compulsory school teachers or upper secondary school teachers). Recently the main law on teachers was changed fundamentally (see Section 2) and since then, a regulation for the content of teachers' education has been adopted ⁽¹⁾. The legislation and the regulations concern all teachers in pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. Article 5.3 deals specifically with teachers of vocational and technical subjects in upper secondary schools, stating that they need to be masters of trade in their respective fields or have completed other vocational training and have completed at least 60 ECTS of teachers' training.

As for workplace trainers, no significant policy change has taken place in recent years but several Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus+ projects are or have been dealing with different aspects that should make their working conditions better (see chapter 5).

Available data on the teaching staff of VET schools is neither very detailed nor very recent. In the school year 2011/12, 1 203 people were engaged in teaching in upper secondary schools which offer VET of some sort, thereof 1 063 with a teacher's licence (source: Statistic Iceland). The 140 people who do not have a teacher's qualification have most probably been temporarily employed due to a lack of fully qualified teachers.

When asked about whether they had received any 'new-recruit ⁽²⁾' training, teachers responded in the following manner:

⁽¹⁾ Regulation number 872/2009. Available in Icelandic at <http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/log-og-reglugerdir/>

⁽²⁾ Defined as 'organised work to support you in the beginning of your career as a teacher, e.g. working with other teachers, guidance by more experienced teachers, etc.'

Table 1. **Share of teachers who received newcomer training of various types in the beginning of their career**

Type of newcomer training	Share (%)
I took/take part in newcomer training	30.1
I took/take part in informal presentation for newcomers, but not in a formal newcomer training	34.6
I took/take part in a general presentation of the organisation and governance of the school	36.9

Source: OECD, 2014.

A really worrying factor about all upper secondary teaching staff (no separate data exist for VET teachers) is their age:

Table 2. **Age of all upper secondary school teaching staff 2011/12**

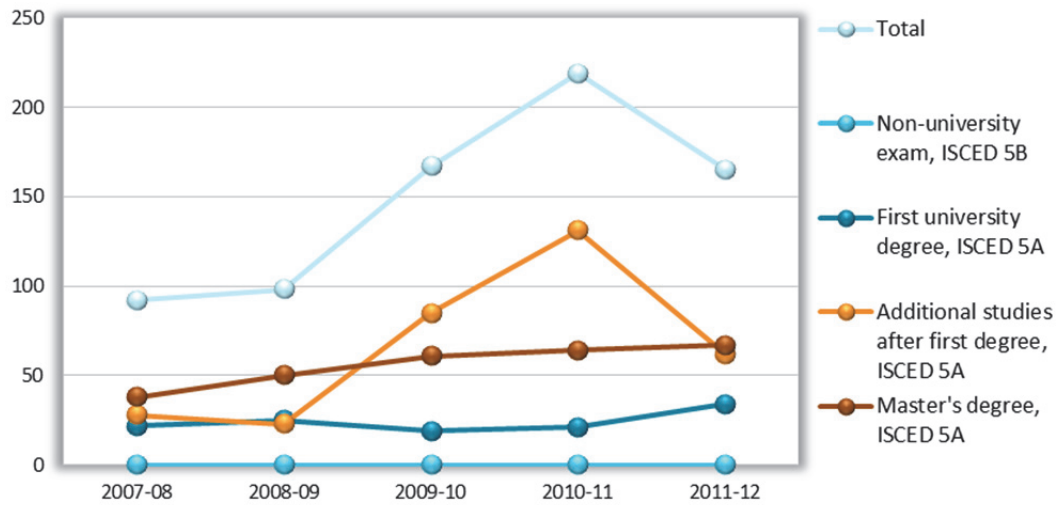
Age	Number
29 years and younger	93
30-39 years	373
40-49 years	518
50-59 years	597
60 years and older	330
Total	1 911

Source: Statistics Iceland.

The legal retirement age in Iceland is 67 but many of the older teachers were employed according to older contracts which stipulate that they can retire earlier. This means that almost half of all upper secondary school teaching staff will retire sometimes in the next 10-15 years. Even though there is no statistics available solely for VET teachers, experts in the field have pointed out that they tend to be older than other teachers as teaching is most often their second career; they start teaching after having spent years on the labour market. The ageing of the teaching staff is therefore even more worrying for VET than for general education.

At the same time, data on graduations from the department of education from the four universities in Iceland that educate teachers, reveal that recent years, only a couple of hundred people have graduated with a degree in education, which is necessary to become a teacher.

Figure 1. **Graduates – degrees in education 2007-12**



Source: *ibid.*

These are teachers for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools in total. There was a dip in 2007/08 when, according to new legislation a teacher's degree became a university degree; previously teachers had graduated from a non-university college. The fall in 2011/12 can be explained by the implementation of the new legislation where a teacher's degree became a master's degree instead of a bachelor's degree.

An obvious shortage of qualified teachers looms on the horizon. Counteracting it for a few years are two facts; the coming cohorts youngster at the age of upper secondary school students are smaller than has been for some time and the shortening of upper secondary school education from four year to three, as is the vision of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. This will however only postpone the problem instead of eliminate it.

Women among teachers in VET schools are slightly more numerous than men (637 against 566 – source: *ibid.*). No detailed statistics exist on the gender of vocational subject teachers versus teachers of general subjects.

2. Teaching and training professionals in school-based settings

The roles of all teachers in Iceland, whether in VET or general education, are defined by the Act on the education and recruitment of teachers and administrators of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools number 87/2008 ⁽³⁾. According to the act, upper secondary school teachers of general subjects (e.g. mathematics and languages) must have a master's degree in education or its equivalent. VET teachers must have a master of trade degree in their profession or a similar technical exam and 60 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) in teaching or pedagogical studies or a diploma in the relevant technology or arts. Schools can apply for an exemption from this rule if fully qualified teachers cannot be found, but only for one semester at a time.

According to article 2.1.6.2. of the central wage agreement between the state and the Union of Upper Secondary School Teachers ⁽⁴⁾, teachers are to use at least 80 hours every year, in addition to the time spent at school, for their continuous professional development (CPD). Each teacher is responsible for planning this CPD and neither the principals nor the Ministry checks whether they do indeed use this time for CPD.

There is a wide variety of courses on offer, teachers can apply for a fully paid study leave after five years of teaching and the schools tend to make demands for them to upgrade their knowledge and skills (see further below). The indirect demand for trainers to upgrade their skills is also very strong. In certified trades they own and operate a company which would simply not be competitive if it did not follow the latest technology and in the health care sector, the demand for the continuous professional development of all staff is extremely strong.

Iceland participates in OECD's Teaching and Learning Survey (TALIS), which has been carried out twice, in 2008 and 2013. The information below is based on the 2013 data ⁽⁵⁾.

When asked about their participation in professional development ⁽⁶⁾, projects teachers ⁽⁷⁾ give the following response:

⁽³⁾ Available in English at <http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/law-and-regulations/Act-on-the-education-and-recruitment-of-teachers-and-administrators-of-pre-, -compulsory-and-upper-secondary-schools-No.-87-2.pdf>

⁽⁴⁾ Available in Icelandic at http://ki.is/images/Skrar/FF/Samningar/FF_kjarasamningur_010205_300408.pdf

⁽⁵⁾ Available in Icelandic at http://www.namsmat.is/vefur/rannsoknir/talis/talis_skyrsla_2014.pdf

Table 3. **Teachers' participation (%) in professional development 2013**

Type of professional development projects	Iceland	TALIS
Courses/workshops (e.g. in teaching material or methods and/or other pedagogical issues)	70.0	70.9
Educational conferences or workshops (where teachers and/or scholars present their research findings and discuss educational topics)	58.2	43.6
Visits to other schools	52.1	19.0
Visits to companies, institutions or organisations	15.1	12.8
Training courses in a company, institution or from an organisation	9.3	14.0

Source: OECD, 2014, p. 26.

When asked about their participation in a specific type of professional development projects in the last 12 months the following responses were obtained:

Table 4. **Teachers' participation (%) in specific professional development projects 2013**

Type of professional development projects	Iceland	TALIS
Studying towards a qualification (e.g. towards a degree)	10.8	17.9
Participating in teachers' cooperation, specially organised with professional development in mind	56.3	36.9
Working alone or in cooperation with others in research projects within own field of interest	20.7	31.1
Gave guidance and/or followed and trained a colleague which was a part of the formal school work	15.1	29.5

Source: *ibid.*

According to the TALIS survey, 74.5% of the teachers who had participated in professional development projects did so during their working hours, 6.7% received a salary increase for projects carried out outside normal working hours and 15.3% got support in the form e.g. less teaching hours, days off, study leave or similar non-financial measures.

(⁶) Professional development is defined as: 'actions that have the objective of enhancing the skills, knowledge, special knowledge and other work-related qualities of a teacher' (OECD 2014 p. 25. Translation by the writer of this article.

(⁷) The cohort is all teachers, specific statistics for VET teachers is not available.

In the TALIS survey, teachers were asked for their needs for professional development and the following responses were obtained:

Table 5. **Percentage (%) of teachers who believe they have great needs for professional development projects in a specific field – Comparison to other TALIS countries**

Field	Iceland	TALIS
Knowledge and understanding on main teaching subject(s)	9.1	8.7
Teaching competences on main teaching subject(s)	8.7	9.7
Knowledge on curricula	22.5	7.9
Assessment methods	18.3	11.6
ICT skills teaching	28.8	19.9
Students' behaviour and government of the class-room	14.3	13.1
School's governance and management	4.9	8.7
Methods for individual teaching	11.9	12.5
Teaching students with special needs	16.0	22.3
Teaching in a multicultural environment	8.9	12.7
Teaching in multi-subject environment (e.g. problem solving and study technique)	6.5	11.0
Methods for developing cross-sectoral skills for a future job or studies	7.5	10.4
New technology in the workplace	18.9	17.9
Counselling for students and jobs	6.4	12.4

Source: OECD, 2014:31.

The great interest in learning more about curricula probably derives from the fact that many upper secondary school curricula have been changed since the main Acts on education and training ⁽⁸⁾ were adopted in 2008. The need for ICT training has greatly increased from 2008, where 17.3% of teachers said that they badly needed such training. The need for learning more about teaching students with special needs has also risen, from 15.5% to 23.2%.

The following financial schemes exist to support teachers in their professional development:

⁽⁸⁾ The Compulsory School Act and the Upper Secondary Education Act.

- according to regulation 762/2010 ⁽⁹⁾ upper secondary school teachers (as well as headmasters, counsellors and teaching specialists for students with special needs) can apply for a fully paid study leave from the state for up to a year and additional funding to pay e.g. school fees or other costs. Only between 1/4th and 1/3rd of teachers who apply for the study leave get it each time it is granted. VET teachers have been underrepresented in the group of applicants and in 2014 a special initiative was launched to draw their attention to the possible grants, whether they are on a study leave or not (see below under the possibilities offered by the University of Reykjavík). The most important factor in the selection criterion of those who get the leave is the number of years they have worked and it is common that they have taught for 25 years or more and are nearing retirement age. Younger teachers have criticised this but the argument for it has been that the teachers who need retraining the most are those who have been the longest without it;
- schools can also apply for funding to train their teachers in a specific field for up to three months at a time. This possibility opens the doors for younger teachers who often are the ones dealing with new approaches;
- teachers can apply for funding from the state to attend courses, conferences and seminars abroad and schools can apply for funding to get foreign guest teachers;
- the Union of Upper Secondary School Teachers administers a Science Fund (*Vísindasjóður Félags framhaldsskólakennara og Félags stjórnenda í framhaldsskólum*), from which teachers can apply for funding towards school fees, seminar fees and travelling expenses as well as university courses that do not give professional certificates. The funding comes from the state.

Table 6. **Funding (in million IKR) for teachers' professional development 2012 and 2013**

Name of measure	2012	2013
The Science Fund	134.8	128.0
Study leave for teachers	201.3	215.9
Funds to attend courses etc.	40.5	14.2 (*)
Total	386.2	373.3

(*) The main reason for the sharp fall between years was overspending in 2012.

Source: Vésteinsdóttir, 2014, pp. 15-17 and 36.

⁽⁹⁾ Available in Icelandic at <http://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?ID=427f95a1-31b6-4613-a5d8-02bd8c03c8e8>

For teachers, there are various possibilities of professional development:

- The School of Education at the University of Iceland offers teachers the possibility to attend courses with student teachers. It's Educational Research Institute which is in charge of teachers' professional development on behalf of the University, offers a variety of courses. Furthermore, Menntakvika (the Educational Magma) is an annual conference hosted by the University where innovation in educational research is presented;
- Endurmenntun Háskóla Íslands (Continuing Education of the University of Iceland) offers regular courses on various subjects related to pedagogy and teaching. They vary in length and are offered both during the school year in the afternoon, weekends and evenings and during the summer holidays;
- The University of Akureyri operates a Centre for School Development with has the main objective of supporting professional development and change in at all school levels. There, all school staff gets support in the form of counselling, re-training and in other relevant issues;
- The Icelandic Academy of the Arts offers courses, lectures and development projects on the utilisation of art in teaching. Teachers can also attend courses for teacher-students at the Academy;
- The University of Reykjavík (in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture) offers the special technical training for VET teachers in the field of electricity/electronics, building/construction, mechanics/engineering and business who can take individual courses and gradually complete a diploma degree in a technical trade. They can get a grant to pay (at least part if) the school fees and the studies are organised as a combination of a distance study and two weekends at classes on campus. These studies offer them offer various possibilities on the labour market or a salary increase if they continue teaching. In the autumn semester of 2015 a pilot group of 17 teachers were enlisted for these studies, which is very good in the light of this being a new and un-tested offer.
- The Icelandic Teachers' Union offer short courses and seminar on subject field teaching and other relevant educational issues;
- Private course providers sometimes offer courses that can benefit teachers, e.g. computer related courses or courses based on physical exercise;
- Menntamiðja (Educational Plaza)⁽¹⁰⁾ is a cooperation forum for educators, educational administrators, policy makers, the academic community and other stakeholders, working in communities of practice, both online and in physical spaces. Its main objectives are to support communities of practice and

⁽¹⁰⁾ <http://menntamidja.is/education-plaza/>

professional development, particularly in areas involving new media literacies and technologies, to strengthen links between community members and associated networks, to encourage open communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing and to build bridges between key players in the Icelandic education system.

3. Apprentice tutors or practical training instructors in companies (work-based settings)

The legislation for trainers at workplaces varies between sectors. The basic rule is that the person in charge of the training must be fully qualified in the profession (e.g. a master of trade for certified trades and a nurse for assistant nurses) and have an extensive experience in his or her field.

For workplace trainers, continuous training varies according to the profession in question:

- for certified trades two In-service training centres offer regular courses; lðan for the construction, auto, printing, food and catering and the metal sector and Fræðslunefnd rafiðnaðarins for electricity and electronics. The centres both carry out annual surveys among its target groups on the training needs for different professionals and bases its offers on the responses received. Most offers are related to technological development in the respective fields but general courses (such as ICT, bookkeeping or management) are also on offer. Trainers at workplaces have the same right to attend these courses as other professionals and for them, the training is free of charge. In recent years, it has become more common to provide the training in the workplace ⁽¹¹⁾ and trainers there benefit from it in the same degree as others;
- for the health care sector, two hospitals in Iceland (*Landspítali and Sjúkrahúsið á Akureyri*) offer regular courses for their teaching staff, depending on the needs in each division;
- several smaller schools, e.g. for police officers, fire fighters, customs officers etc. offer courses for their teaching staff on e.g. new safety features or other relevant issues.

Courses for VET professional trainers tend to be short and concise. They do not give formal rights and are not obligatory. However, the need for training is so strong that the training centres struggle to meet it.

⁽¹¹⁾ In 2015 around 30% of lðan's courses took place at companies.

The validation of competences acquired on the job has grown in recent year through the Raunfærnimat (Real Competence Validation). However, this is not relevant for VET trainers as they must already have e.g. a Master of Trade degree before they can be responsible for the training of apprentices.

4. Cooperation and partnerships between the world of education and the world of work in support to teachers and trainers' CPD.

The official link between education and the world of work is through the Occupational Councils, defined in the Education legislation and managed by representatives of social partners, schools and representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The Councils do not deal with the professional development of teachers and trainers as their roles are mainly curricula development and changes in the structure of initial VET.

However, there are other bodies dealing with the professional development of VET teachers and trainers:

- (a) the Council for Teachers' Continuous Training and Professional Development (*Fagráð um símenntun og starfsþróun kennara*) was established in 2014 and has the main objective of cooperating on projects in this field. Members of the Council are from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Icelandic Associations of Local Authorities, the Icelandic Teachers' Union, the University of Iceland, the University of Akureyri and the Icelandic Academy of the Arts. The main task of the Councils is to propose new infrastructure for teachers and administrators in the national schools system.

On behalf of the Council, the Research and Development Centre at the University of Akureyri carried out a study on teachers' possibilities for grants toward professional development in 2014 (Vésteinsdóttir, 2014 ⁽¹²⁾), which forms one of the bases for this article;

- (b) the overall umbrella organisation for all teachers is the Icelandic Teachers' Union, with around 10 000 members. The Union is, according to its web ⁽¹³⁾, the largest professional organisation in Iceland. The roles of the Union are:
 - (i) to safeguard the rights and interests of its members, encourage cooperation between them, and strengthen professional and trade union awareness. The

⁽¹²⁾ Available in Icelandic at <http://www.rha.is/is/rannsoknir/utgefid-efni/2014>

⁽¹³⁾ <http://ki.is/>

Icelandic Teachers' Union also works to improve teachers' training and continuing education for its members;

- (ii) to serve as a forum for informed discussion of current trends in education and promote and encourage progress and innovation in teaching and education;
- (iii) to cooperate with teachers' associations in other countries and other trade unions in Iceland;
- (iv) to work to ensure that preschools, primary schools, music schools, and secondary schools always have the most capable teachers, student counsellors, head teachers, and assistant heads. In this way, the KI encourages quality in teaching and continuity in education;
- (v) to promote solidarity among all teachers (source: <http://ki.is/icelandic-teachers-union>).

Several educational committees operate under the auspices of the Teachers' Union, discussing educational issues related to professionalism in education and work to improve teachers' training and the continuing education of union members in preschools, elementary and secondary schools, and music schools. Taken together, these committees form the Educational Council which discusses current issues relating to education and schools and advises the Union executive on educational policy objectives.

Under the umbrella of the Teachers' Union are the following associations:

- the Association of Teachers in Upper Secondary Schools;
- the Association of Teachers in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools;
- the Association of Retired Teachers;
- the Association of Teachers in Preschools;
- the Association of Deputy Head teachers in upper secondary schools;
- the Association of Head teachers in Preschools;
- Association of Music School Teachers;
- the Association of Head teachers.

The Icelandic Teachers' Union collaborates closely with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture on issues which could advance teachers' rights and their professional development.

The Union is a member of EI (Education International), and is an active participant in the NLS (Nordic Teachers' Council), a cooperative forum for teachers' associations in the Nordic countries. It also cooperates with several Icelandic union organizations, including the BSRB (Confederation of State and Municipal Employees) and BHM (Association of Academics), on issues of common concern, such as contract conditions and rights for salaried employees.

National and EU-funded projects to support VET teachers' and trainers' professional development.

The Council for Teachers' Continuous Training and Professional Development Projects on teachers and trainers is gradually building up an information web⁽¹⁴⁾ to assist teachers in their CPD. On the web, information on courses that may be relevant for teachers are shared as well as video recordings from conferences on education, articles on education and training and links to relevant organisations.

VET teachers have been one of the target groups for first the Leonardo da Vinci and in recent years the Erasmus+ programme funded by the European Union. VET teachers are also able to apply for funding for further training in other Nordic countries from the Nordplus Junior fund. Detailed statistic for the latter is not available but data for the LdV is below:

Table 7. **Leonardo da Vinci funding (in EUR) for continuous education for VET teachers**

Year	Amount in EUR
2012	126 414
2013	125 754

Source: Vésteinsdóttir: 46.

VET teachers have also participated in Leonardo da Vinci transfer of innovation projects, the most recent being Work Mentor⁽¹⁵⁾, Plastic Procession Education (PPE)⁽¹⁶⁾ and WorkQual⁽¹⁷⁾

The Cedefop's study visit programme, which terminated at the end of 2013, was also very popular among VET teachers. However, also school administrators and other school officials participated in the programme so the figures below are not exclusively for VET teachers:

⁽¹⁴⁾ <http://starfsthrounkennara.is/>

⁽¹⁵⁾ http://workmentor.vma.is/index.php/Work_Mentor

⁽¹⁶⁾ Its website is no longer available.

⁽¹⁷⁾ <http://workqual.vma.is/index.php/WorkQual>

Table 8. **Funding (in million IKR) for Cedefop study visits 2012-13**

Year	Amount in million IKR
2012	1.6
2013	3.8

Source: Vésteinsdóttir:46.

The Innovation Fund (*Sprotasjóður*) awards grants for innovation in pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. The initiatives which the schools apply for can involve training their teachers in working with a new tool or teaching method.

5. Conclusions

There will be some major changes in the working environment for VET teachers and trainers looming in the coming decade or so; there is a need to recruit almost half of the present number of teachers and the need for continuous professional development of the teaching staff is likely to grow as the technological development in many sectors continues. The increased emphasis on learning outcomes as the basis for validating learning instead of just using the time spent at learning either in a school or at a workplace will also present a challenge to teachers. Students should be able to travel through an education at a different speed, depending both on their prior knowledge and how fast they are in acquiring new skills. There is already an increased demand on workplace trainer for filling out log-books and other documentation to demonstrate that their students have mastered different tasks. At the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the work on policy development in VET continues and only the future will tell how that reflects on the work of teachers and trainers.

The need for teachers' and trainers' continuous professional development is likely to increase and, as Dr Jón Torfi Jónasson, professor at the School of Education of the University of Iceland said at a conference on re-thinking educational policy, they will need to increasing degree to be masters of their own fortunes in that respect ⁽¹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁾ The interview in English is available at <https://youtu.be/XtTEutJImVk>

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Sigurjón Mýrdal, head of department, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Sigrún Ólafsdóttir, Rannís, project manager for the Cooperation Committee for Teachers' Study Leave

Thórir Ólafsson, project manager, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Thór Pálsson, deputy principle of the Technical Collage Reykjavík