



**THE ICELANDIC  
NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE  
GENERAL SECTION  
2004**

## ADVERTISEMENT

### **On amendments to the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools – General Section**

#### **Article 1**

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture has issued an amended version of the existing National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools – General Section, published with advertisement no. 274/1999 on the entry into force of the National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools, dated 31 March 1999, which took effect on 1 June the same year. The amended version replaces text on pp. 1 – 57 in the General Section of a special version of the National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools, published in the wake of advertisement no 274/1999.

#### **Article 2**

This advertisement shall take immediate effect.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 28 January 2004.



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**THE ICELANDIC  
NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE**

**GENERAL SECTION**

**2004**

**Ministry of Education, Science and Culture**

**2007**

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Layout: Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Cover: Kvika ehf

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April 2007

ISBN 978-9979-777-45-8

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools took effect on 1 June 1999 and came into force as of the academic year 1999-2000. Individual schools, however, were given authorisation to postpone its implementation for one year. The curriculum will therefore be in full force in all schools by the end of the 2003-2004 academic year.

The curriculum was released according to provisions in Act 80/1996 on Upper Secondary Schools. Also released were a general section of the curriculum, curriculums for academic study programmes leading to matriculation, and curriculums for artistic study programmes. Curriculums for vocational training programmes incorporated in that particular version were from an earlier time and have been under consistent review. Any changes or additions to the National Curriculum Guide have been published in the Official Journal when they have taken effect.

Since the publication of the curriculum, minor flaws and shortcomings have become evident that needed to be addressed. Also, decisions on specific aspects that had not been dealt with have now been made. The 1999 curriculum had become obsolete in part and its review and re-release was therefore considered appropriate. The new version does not incorporate any changes to the educational policy that was set along with the 1999 release.

Among the most significant amendments are:

- Text has been reviewed and an effort made to simplify and re-word sentences that seemed vague or obscure.
- Criteria regarding additional study leading to matriculation for vocational study programmes has been incorporated.
- The arrangement of study in the study programme in social sciences has been amended, in that the number of credit units in English has been raised, while the number of credit units in social studies has been accordingly lowered, as per the school's decision. This is done to simplify the administration of national final examinations.
- The subjects physiology and nutrition have been added to the area of specialization in the natural sciences study programme.
- The list of subjects in the area of specialization in the social sciences study programme has been amended, so that the terms business administration and macroeconomics have been replaced by the term business studies. Hence schools have added flexibility when it comes to offering business subjects. Philosophy has also been added to the list.
- General subjects in vocational study programmes have been coordinated.
- Evaluation of informal studies and work experience is specifically discussed.
- Standards for grading are specified.
- Self-evaluation and external evaluation of school operations are discussed.

The general section of the curriculum is now published in two parts. This section deals with major areas in the operations of upper secondary schools and the main criteria that schools must follow. The second section is a description of study programmes and is published separately.

Both sections will be published on website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (hereafter referred to as the Ministry of Education), along with other curriculums. They will also be released in print. An effort will be made to ensure that the website version is always up to date; in other words, any amendments will be published there as soon as they have been approved by the Minister of Education.



## **2 BASIS AND ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE**

Education is one of the major cornerstones of democracy, culture and general prosperity. All persons have the right to education, as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland and the United Nations Human Rights Convention, to which Iceland is party. Further, the Act on Upper Secondary Schools stipulates that all those who have completed a primary education or equivalent basic education shall have the opportunity to embark on studies in an upper secondary school.

The National Curriculum Guide is the primary guide for school operations at the upper secondary level. It is published by the Minister of Education in the same way as regulations. The National Curriculum Guide contains a more detailed description of the educational and school policy in Act 80/1996 on Upper Secondary Schools, as well as any amendments and interpretations of specific provisions. The National Curriculum Guide gives a description of academic study programmes and an outline of school operations at the upper secondary level. It also describes the framework created by laws and regulations for upper secondary schools, also in line with special provisions in other laws on education at the upper secondary level. The role of the National Curriculum Guide is extensive:

1. The National Curriculum Guide is the main tool used by educational authorities to ensure coordination and synchronisation in upper secondary schools in the execution of a common educational policy. The National Curriculum Guide is therefore one of the main criteria allowing the Ministry of Education to fulfil its assigned role in directing and controlling the quality of education.
2. The National Curriculum Guide defines the work of administrators and staff of individual upper secondary schools in the planning, execution and evaluation of school work that they must carry out, as detailed in the school curriculum Guide, among other things.
3. The National Curriculum Guide provides information about the government's educational policy, academic programmes and study requirements. Upper secondary schools are to follow its specifications in educational planning. It provides information about the primary guidelines on which school operations are based for students in upper secondary schools and their custodians. The National Curriculum Guide is intended to provide teachers and students in primary schools, as well as custodians, with information on how students are prepared for the labour market or for further study upon graduation from upper secondary schools. The curriculum is also a guide for those that train upper secondary school teachers and staff, as well as those who make educational materials and study and evaluate educational work. Further, the curriculum is useful for all those who want or need to become familiar with school operations at the upper secondary level.

The National Curriculum Guide introduces the main objectives of upper secondary schools and the specific objectives of individual study programmes, subjects, course units and graduation. It also defines the scope and composition of individual study programmes, their general arrangement and requirements, and the average duration of study in each programme. It discusses admission requirements for individual study programmes, the rights and responsibilities of students, assessment and testing, exemptions from study in individual course units or subjects, additional study for vocational study students who wish to pass a matriculation examination, the handling of disputes, and more.

### **3 ROLE, OBJECTIVES AND WORKING METHODS OF UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Upper secondary schools are required to tend to all students, regardless of the arrangement of their primary education.

According to Article 2 of the Act on Upper Secondary Schools, the role of upper secondary schools is to:

- Encourage the overall development of students in order to prepare them as well as possible for active participation in a democratic society
- Prepare students for employment and further study
- Cultivate responsibility, broad-mindedness, initiative, self-confidence and tolerance in students
- Train students in disciplined, independent working practices and critical thinking
- Instruct students in the value of culture
- Encourage students to seek knowledge on a perpetual basis.

For upper secondary schools to be able to fulfil their assigned role, operations must be made up of diverse aspects and they must have the ability to meet various demands. School operations must be flexible, allowing for easy introduction of new elements in the schoolwork.

The major objectives of upper secondary schools are defined in the curriculum and described in greater detail in the curriculums of individual schools.

Upon graduation from an upper secondary school, students should:

- Have received a comprehensive education to suit their individual requirements
- Be prepared for further study and/or work in a perpetually-changing society
- Be aware that education does not end with the completion of formal studies; rather that one must continue seeking new knowledge and experiences
- Have gained good insight into Icelandic society
- Be aware of the rights and responsibilities of individuals in a democratic society
- Have learned to apply independent thought and working methods, taken responsibility for their own study progress, gained confidence, learned to respect themselves and others
- Have developed critical thinking, a good sense of judgement, and tolerance
- Be able to express their own opinions, make decisions, and not fear changes in their studies and work.

These objectives apply to all upper secondary school subjects and school operations. The subject life skills in particular is designed to work towards the above objectives, although obviously they cannot be adequately covered in a single subject.

The school curriculum guide should specify how these objectives are to be fulfilled.

Schools should take care to ensure that students are awarded equal study opportunities and should offer suitable study programmes and methods of teaching. It is vital for boys and girls to be introduced to work that traditionally has been considered gender-specific. Schools should also provide students with the opportunity to work on tasks of their own choosing. These must be geared equally towards boys and girls, regardless of origin, whether they live in rural or urban areas, whether they are healthy or disabled.

Schools should make an effort to allow disabled students, students with long-term illnesses and those with educational disabilities to study with other students, insofar as possible. Studies for handicapped students should also be offered in special study programmes.

Schools should make an effort to meet the needs of students of foreign origin through the active teaching of Icelandic, by educating them about Icelandic society and culture, and by providing other types of assistance, insofar far as possible.

It is vital for all students to be given an opportunity to engage in study that stimulates their interest and takes into account their capabilities and future plans. Schools should make an effort to reduce students' drop-out rates by providing clear requirements for learning, offering diverse forms of study, disseminating information, providing counselling and guidance, and by cooperating with custodians as far as possible.

Schools should also make an effort to stimulate students' interest in education, as opposed to making them into passive recipients. Teaching methods must therefore be diverse, flexible, and in line with the educational policy that the schools seek to follow.

Schools are to formulate a policy for drug prevention and related activities, and to support this work in various ways. This should incorporate factors such as depression, bullying, violence, suicide prevention and the use of intoxicants. The emphasis should be on helping students develop a positive outlook, a sense of responsibility and compassion, a healthy lifestyle, critical thinking, and respect for themselves and others. It is essential for students to learn to identify with others and to have the courage to make their own choices.

Distance learning creates a broader base for cooperation between schools, eliminates isolation and provides an opportunity for flexibility in both learning and teaching. It increases opportunities for schools to offer specialised course units and gives students systematic access to a wide range of knowledge.

Cooperation between schools makes it possible to utilise the best that each school has to offer and facilitates efficient course offerings in the relevant area. Students in one school can thus take a course unit in a different school if the course in question is not offered in their particular school.

Information technology has created a new platform for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. Schools should aim to use information technology as a tool in all subjects and should seek effective ways to allow students to apply it in their learning.

Lifelong learning incorporates the premise that education is a life-long activity. It is important for schools to make this clear to their students. Continuous education is one of the factors that allows individuals to participate in a constantly developing democratic society.

The age of consent is 18 years. It is important for there to be two-way communication and cooperation with parents or custodians of students below the age of 18, and for parents and custodians to receive clear information about the school work and study progress of their children. Schools should also make an effort to inform custodians of students over the age of 18 about the study progress of their children.

Additional studies leading to matriculation have been specified for students that graduate from vocational study programmes, allowing them to prepare for higher education without taking a matriculation examination in an academic study programme. This has fostered greater equality between academic study and vocational study programmes at the upper secondary level when it comes to further education. It

is important that schools strive to develop such academic programmes in collaboration with the labour market and institutes of higher education.

## **4 STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES – PROGRAMMES OF STUDY**

### **4.1 Criteria**

Study programmes in upper secondary schools differ in duration and content, as the Act on Upper Secondary School states that the content and arrangement of education must be in line with the final objective of the programme of study. Study programmes can be from one semester to eight semesters in duration and they can focus on academic and/or practical applications, depending on the programme objectives.

Students who are starting upper secondary education differ in readiness, maturity, interests and learning capacity. Course planning in upper secondary schools takes these different needs into account and therefore an effort should be made to help all students find a suitable programme of study in which they can control their progression of learning as much as possible.

An effort is being made to prepare students as well as possible for continued study. Through increasing the areas of specialization and electives in academic study programmes and decreasing the number of general academic subjects in vocational programmes, specialised study will account for a larger share of learning leading to a final examination. Students receive sound education in Icelandic, mathematics and foreign languages, and learn to apply information technology in all subjects.

Knowledge and experience obtained outside the formal educational system will increasingly be evaluated as equivalent to education at the upper secondary level. Methods are currently being developed for the purpose of analysing and evaluating informal education, with the aim of creating study openings for a greater number of people at the upper secondary level. Regulations to that end, incorporating workshops, work experience and general experience in the home or in leisure activities, will be implemented in due course.

### **4.2 Structure of programmes**

The arrangement of learning and teaching at the upper secondary level may differ from school to school. Most schools operate according to a unit-credit system, while others employ a class-based system. However, all schools operate according to the National Curriculum Guide. Learning is organised into study programmes and the programme description outlines the objectives and arrangement of study.

In schools operating according to a unit-credit system, students studying in the same course unit make up a study group or groups, whereas schools employing a class-based system divide each year into classes, with students in the same class studying the same in all subjects, with the exception of areas of specialization and electives.

The school year is divided into two semesters, autumn and spring, both of which are approximately the same length. In schools operating according to a unit-credit system, students can begin and finish their studies in either semester. Schools that operate according to such a system plan school operations for one semester at a time, whereas schools operating according to a class based system plan for one year at a time.

## 4.3 Course unit descriptions

The subject curriculum divides course materials into course units, so that each course unit is suitable for teaching over one semester. Students receive a specific number of credit units for each course unit that they complete successfully. Course units are identified with a code system using a three-letter abbreviation representing the subject and a three-digit number. The first digit specifies the placement of the course in the order of study, the second digit differentiates a course unit from its prerequisite and the third digit specifies the number of credits awarded by the course unit.

Each course unit is a separate entity. Schools are authorised to plan courses in whole tasks across subjects, in order to divide tasks in specific course units into smaller study components, or to combine study components into a larger whole. Care should always be taken that the final objectives of the study programme and objectives of the individual course units are retained and that the name and number of the course units are correctly recorded on the students' diplomas.

The precursor to the course unit must be specified if it is a prerequisite.

Schools may create course descriptions in addition to those specified in the curriculum, including:

- Course units added to parallel courses specified in the curriculum, such as when a school chooses to offer more detailed study in a subject than specified in the curriculum
- Course units offered as an elective by the school
- Course units taught in a general academic study programme.

In creating such course descriptions, schools are reminded to take the subject curriculum into account. The course units should be identified as usual, though defined more closely, as specified below:

- Additions to parallel courses. The middle digit should be 8, for example: STÆ 883.
- Course unit offered as an elective. The middle digit should be 7, for example: KÍN 173
- Course unit in a general academic programme. The middle digit should be 9, for example: ÍSL 192.

## 4.4 Academic study programmes

### 4.4.1 Academic study leading to matriculation examination

There are three separate academic study programmes leading to matriculation. Each is divided into programme core, area of specialization, and electives. The programme cores are, in part, identical in all three programmes of study, and in most cases only one version of each course unit is described in the curriculum guide. That said, there are specific course units in mathematics for, respectively, the academic programme in languages and the academic programme in social sciences. In that way schools can provide students in those programmes with teaching that is in line with the final study objectives of the academic programme, if they so choose and if they have the facilities to do so. Otherwise it is up to individual schools to decide whether emphases in teaching will in any way differ from one academic programme to another.

The core in the academic programmes is as follows:

Subject	Study programme in languages	Study programme in natural sciences	Study programme in social sciences
Icelandic	15	15	15
Mathematics	6	15	6
Danish/ Norwegian/Swedish	9	6	6
English	15	9	15
Third language	15	12	12
Fourth language	9		
Social sciences	3	3	6
Geography			3
History	6	6	9
Social studies determined by the school			6
Natural sciences	9	9	9
Physics		3	
Chemistry		3	
Geology		3	
Biology		3	
Athletics	8	8	8
Life skills	3	3	3
Total	98	98	98

The area of specialization is made up of 30 credits in total. It incorporates specialization in the relevant field of study in accordance with the final objectives of the programme in question. Each academic programme has several subjects from which students can choose. They select at least three subjects in the relevant area of specialization, and these are then considered the student's area of specialization subjects. Students can thus add to a subject or subjects that they have taken in the core study programme or they can take an entirely new subject or subjects. Total area of specialization subjects in the programme core and electives must not be less than nine credits in each subject. The school principal may deviate from this rule in cases where the subjects in question are related.

In addition, students can take up to 12 area of specialization credits in academic study programmes other than those in which they are enrolled. In other words, a student enrolled in an academic study programme in natural sciences can take up to 12 credits in the specialization area of the academic study programme in languages, or the academic study programme in social sciences. Students enrolled in academic study programmes may also take up to 12 credits of specialised subjects in a particular vocational or artistic training programme, as part of their area of specialization. The rule stipulating a minimum of nine credits in a subject also applies in such cases.

Schools can plan areas of specialization at will, within the framework defined here. They are not obliged to offer all subjects listed in each area of specialization. In other words, a school can decide which subjects in the area of specialization it should offer, as well as determine the number of courses in each subject.

**The area of specialization subjects are as follows:**

Academic study programme in languages	Academic study programme in natural sciences	Academic study programme in the social sciences
Danish/Norwegian/Swedish	Physics	Sociology
English	Chemistry	Media studies
French	Geology	Philosophy
Icelandic	Geography	Icelandic
Latin	Physiology	Geography
Spanish	Biology	History
Mathematics	Nutrition	Psychology
German	Mathematics	Mathematics
Language of schools' own choice	Computer sciences	Pedagogy
		Business studies

Students who have successfully completed specific vocational studies, including basic studies or more long-term vocational studies, and who wish to enrol in an academic study programme, can have the specialised subjects in the vocational training programme evaluated for up to 12 credits in the academic study programme's area of specialization. They can do the same with electives. A student can in that way have up to 24 credits evaluated for a programme of study leading to matriculation.

The same applies to students that have successfully completed a programme of recognised artistic studies at a specialised vocational school.

Elective subjects account for 12 credits in total. Electives give students the opportunity to familiarise themselves with subjects that are not an inherent part of the area of study in which they are enrolled. Students can also use electives to add to their area of specialization. Should the school not offer courses that the student specifically wishes to take, he or she may take those at another school, through distance learning for example.

The matriculation examination does not guarantee admission to all courses of study at the higher education level. Individual universities or faculties can set requirements that students must fulfil. Students may have to take admission examinations in some cases. It is therefore vital for students seeking admission to specific higher education institutions to gather information about the admission requirements of the relevant institution.

#### 4.4.2 Additional study leading to matriculation

Students who complete vocational study at the upper secondary level have the option of taking additional courses in preparation for study at the higher education level. Such study ends in a matriculation examination, which is standardised in certain subjects.

To have vocational study and additional study approved for matriculation, students' overall study progress shall be as outlined below.

Students may:

- a. Plan their studies themselves in conjunction with the relevant upper secondary school, in line with defined objectives for further study at the higher education level, or

- b. Complete studies in the following subjects so that their overall study progress will be as outlined below:

b.1. Three to four years of vocational study

Students should have successfully completed their studies in a school, as well as the requisite workplace training in full. The Minister of Education can authorise exceptions from this rule if there is good cause. Students in certified trades are not required to have completed a journeyman's examination. Students should also have undertaken additional studies in general academic subjects, so that the total in individual subjects is not less than:

Icelandic	15 credits
English	12 credits
Mathematics	6 credits

Studies that students have previously undertaken in the above subjects are deducted against the whole, including courses in subjects classified as specialised training in vocational study programmes.

Students should also undertake additional studies in

Languages, or	
Natural sciences and mathematics, or	
Social studies	12 credits

of their own choosing. Previous study in the subjects specified here is not deducted against the whole. Studies in a particular subject should account for at least nine credits, although mathematics is exempt from this rule. Professions that fall under this paragraph are listed in Appendix I.

b.2 Two to three years of vocational study

Students should have successfully completed their studies and also the required workplace training in full, where applicable. The Minister of Education can authorise exemptions from this rule if there is good cause. Students in certified trades are not required to have completed a journeyman's examination. Students should also have undertaken additional studies in general academic subjects, so that the total in individual subjects is not less than:

Icelandic	15 credits
English	15 credits
History	6 credits
Natural sciences	9 credits
Mathematics	6 credits
Athletics	8 credits

Studies that students have previously undertaken in the above subjects are deducted against the whole, including courses in subjects classified as specialised training in vocational study programmes.

Students should also undertake additional studies in

A third language or mathematics	12 credits
and social sciences or natural sciences	
or athletics	15 credits



of their own choosing. Previous study in the subjects specified is not deducted against the whole. Studies in a particular subject should account for at least nine credits, although mathematics and history are exempt from this rule. Professions that fall under this paragraph are listed in Appendix II.

### b.3 Vocational training less than two years in duration

Students that successfully complete studies in this category and who wish to further their studies in another academic programme can have their studies evaluated as outlined below:

- Studies that students have completed in general subjects will in all cases be deducted against the whole in the same subjects of the study programme in which the students are enrolled.
- Students who enrol in an academic programme of study can have their specialised training evaluated by the school for up to 12 credits in the area of specialization of their programme of study, and for up to 12 credits in electives. Vocational studies that fall under this paragraph and that are defined in the National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools are listed in Appendix III.
- Upper secondary schools may also evaluate other vocational studies than those listed in the Appendix in the same way, if those studies have clearly defined objectives and a clear syllabus, and are officially recognised.
- Should students enrol in other programmes of study, each instance must be judged separately to determine whether the specialised training or part thereof may be evaluated as part of the programme of study that students wish to embark upon. The relevant upper secondary school is responsible for such a judgement.

### b.4 Artistic programmes of study

Those students that complete artistic study programmes must undertake further studies as outlined in section a. or section b.1 above.

#### 4.4.3 Artistic study programmes

Artistic study programmes are defined as three-year study programmes that among other things provide preparation for further artistic study in specialised vocational schools or institutes of higher education. Four separate artistic disciplines are offered: dance, design, fine art and music. Design incorporates, as areas of specialization, multi-media design, general design and creative design, the latter referring to textile design.

The core of the artistic study programme is as follows:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Number of credits</u>
Icelandic	9
Mathematics	3
Danish/Norwegian/Swedish	6
English	6
Sociology	3
History	3
Natural sciences	3
Artistic subjects	9
Athletics	6

<u>Life skills</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>51</u>

The area of specialization is made up of 45 credits in total. Students can choose from various artistic subjects, as outlined above. The studies take place either in the upper secondary school in question or at an arts institution operating according to a curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education. Students who so choose can undertake additional studies in academic fields to gain general permission to embark on studies at the upper education level, as outlined in the section on additional study leading to matriculation.

Elective studies amount to nine credits in total. The same applies to artistic study programmes as was previously outlined with regards to electives in academic study programmes.

#### 4.4.4 Vocational study programmes

Vocational study programmes are highly diverse, with their scope, composition and planning being dependent on the final objectives of the programme in question. The average duration of vocational study is less than four years, and can be as short as one semester. The programmes are both practical and academic and are generally taught in schools as well as in the workplace.

The Act on Upper Secondary Schools divides study programmes into programme cores, areas of specialization and electives. That being said, there is a lengthy tradition for vocational study programmes to be divided into general academic studies and specialised studies, and this is therefore the case in vocational study curriculums. How specialised studies are divided between study in a school and in a workplace varies from one study programme to another. The table below gives an overview of general academic subjects in vocational study programmes, divided according to the duration of study in a school. This only refers to course units common to all programmes in a given category. For instance, the average duration of study in two academic programmes is four years. One of the programmes is arranged thus: three semesters of study in a school for a total of 60 credits (12 credits in general subjects and 48 credits in specialised subjects), and workplace training in a recognised company for up to 120 weeks. The other programme is organised thus: seven semesters of study in a school for a total of 140 credits (26 credits in general subjects and 114 credits in specialised subjects) and workplace training in a recognised company for up to 24 weeks.

Generally the arrangement of studies in vocational programmes is as follows:

Vocational study, one semester of study in a school	
<u>General subjects:</u>	<u>6 credits</u>
Icelandic, ÍSL102	2 credits
Mathematics, STÆXXX	2 credits
Life skills, LKN101	1 credit
Athletics, ÍÞRXXX	1 credit
Specialised subjects: up to 14 credits	
Workplace training – varies according to study programme	

Vocational study, two to three semesters of study in a school	
<u>General subjects:</u>	<u>11-12 credits</u>
Icelandic, ÍSL102	2 credits
Mathematics, STÆXXX	2 credits
Life skills, LKN103	3 credit
Foreign languages	2 credits
Athletics, ÍPRXXX	2-3 credit
Specialised subjects: up to 48 credits	
Workplace training – varies according to study programme	

Vocational study, four to seven semesters of study in a school	
<u>General subjects:</u>	<u>23-26 credits</u>
Icelandic, ÍSL102, ÍSL202	4 credits
Mathematics, STÆ102+STÆXXX	4 credits
Life skills, LKN103	3 credit
Foreign languages, ENS102, DAN102 +XXX	8 credits
Athletics, ÍPRXXX	4-7 credit
Specialised subjects: up to 114 credits	
Workplace training – varies according to study programme	

Where reference is made only to “foreign languages” and neither English nor Danish are specified, students are expected to choose the language they wish to study. In some forms of vocational study it is considered more suitable, in consideration of continued studies or work, for students to select one or the other of those languages. When this is the case it is mentioned in the relevant prospectus, and also specified in the curriculum of the school in question.

An effort is made to divide vocational study programmes into different phases wherever possible, and for students to receive a certificate testifying to their level of competence upon completion of each phase. Basic study is made up of aspects of learning common to more than one study programme in the field in question. Basic study can be from one to four semesters in a school. The objective of basic study is to give students insight into different jobs and an opportunity to obtain basic know-how and skills in the field in question. On completion of basic study, students can embark on specialised study leading to specialization, where the ultimate objective is to prepare students for employment as fully-fledged workers.

Upper secondary schools provide students with a broad range of skills and knowledge in their chosen fields. Training is not specifically tailored to the needs of individual companies. On the contrary, students are taught to adopt the view that learning is a life-long occupation and that it is essential to maintain know-how and skills through lifelong learning after graduation from upper secondary school.

Generally speaking, vocational study may be divided into two categories. On the one hand, training that leads to certified work qualifications, such as training in the

medical field and in certified trades. On the other hand, study that prepares students for specific jobs but does not provide them with certified work qualifications.

#### Study in certified trades

Study in certified trades is conducted either through a master training programme or through school-based vocational training. With the former, students embark on studies either in a company or with a master craftsman and learn primarily through vocational training on the labour market, completing the academic portion of their studies in a school according to a set curriculum. With the latter, students are enrolled in a school in which they receive their basic and specialised training, followed by training in a workplace. Students studying in the master training programme are responsible for obtaining a work contract with a master craftsman. Similarly, students studying in a school-based vocational training programme are responsible for obtaining a workplace training position for themselves.

#### Other forms of vocational study

Students wishing to engage in other forms of vocational study enrol in a school in which the relevant study programme is offered. Training takes place largely in a school environment, although workplace training is often part of the programme also. Students can enrol in some vocational study programmes immediately upon graduation from primary school, while in other instances they must complete certain studies in an upper secondary school before enrolling in the relevant vocational study programme. Further information is given in the prospectus for that particular study programme.

#### Workplace training

The objective of workplace training is to give students the opportunity to further the skills they have acquired in the school environment and to learn new techniques and methods. In the workplace, students learn to work under the guidance of others and to meet production standards relating to quantity, quality and efficiency. In the workplace they receive training in human relations, learn decision-making and how to adopt independent working practices, and adapt to the customs and pace of the relevant workplace. Training in the workplace has an advantage over training in a school environment in that students are in situations that in many ways are compatible with those they encounter upon completion of the training.

The curriculums of vocational study programmes incorporate descriptions of workplace training in which a suitable arrangement of the training is specified as well as its objective, practical aspects, supervision of those practical aspects, and criteria that companies or institutions must fulfil in order to be able to take on students as apprentices. Each student has an apprentice handbook that is intended to provide support and help during training.<sup>1</sup>

A special apprenticeship contract is created for all vocational training in a workplace.

#### 4.4.5 General academic programme

Each school plans a programme of study in a general academic programme as defined by the school curriculum guide. While admission requirements for the programme are not defined, it is considered vital for students to have access to educational and vocational counselling.

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<sup>1</sup> Descriptions regarding on-the-job training are only available in some fields and are currently being prepared for others.

Students who have not decided on further study in upper secondary schools, and those who hold a compulsory school diploma but do not fulfil criteria for admission into longer academic programmes in upper secondary schools, have the option of enrolling in a general academic programme.

The objective of the programme is to provide a solid foundation in core subjects and to give students an opportunity to take on other tasks in their studies, partly of their own choosing.

The study programme can take one or two years, depending on individual students' needs and the schools' ability to meet those. The principal is responsible for both enrolment and graduation.

Students can enrol in a general academic programme with different needs in mind. Some may be only just short of completion in core subjects to be able to continue a programme of study in other programmes within the school, while others may need to add substantially to their compulsory education to be able to continue their studies. It is therefore important for students to receive guidance, assistance and encouragement to be able to embark on studies that are within their level of competence and which interest them. Therefore students must be able to select, to a certain degree, courses in subjects other than those that are traditionally academic. This may facilitate the possibility of engaging them in further study.

#### **4.4.6 Study in a special section disabled students**

Disabled students should have the opportunity to study with other students in a school environment whenever possible.

Students who are not able to engage in studies in specific study programmes in upper secondary schools or in a general academic programme have the option of enrolling in a special section for handicapped students. Care should be taken that such students do not become isolated and an effort should be made to ensure normal interaction between all students. Students in special section for handicapped students can enrol in study programmes lasting two to four years.

Students in a special section for handicapped students are taught according to a reasonable teaching plan for a group or an individual. The teaching plan should be based on the curriculum for special section for handicapped students of upper secondary schools. Both long-term and short-term teaching objectives should be defined.

## 5 ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Admission requirements are founded on the premise that students have obtained the requisite results in specific subjects in order to enrol in academic programmes in upper secondary schools, other than general academic programmes. Admission requirements are based on results from national final examinations and school examinations. In assessing applications a guiding grade is calculated, which is the average of total grades on a national final examination, as well as school grades. Regulations regarding the admission of students into upper secondary schools have been set on the basis of the above criteria, and their main specifications are detailed below. See also regulation no. 98/2000 regarding the enrolment of students in upper secondary schools.

- Anyone who has completed studies in a compulsory school has the right to embark on studies in an upper secondary school.
- Anyone who has completed compulsory school but has not taken the national final examinations at the end of compulsory school, or who does not fulfil the following criteria for enrolment into individual academic programmes, has the opportunity to embark on studies in a special section for handicapped students or a general academic programme. In the general academic programme, students can, among other things, choose a programme of study that allows them to improve their previous results in specific academic subjects, which would then prepare them for studies in other academic programmes.
- Students who have completed compulsory studies in line with the provisions of the National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools, including, at minimum, national final examinations in Icelandic and mathematics, and who have obtained the specified minimum grade or a higher guiding grade in those subjects, may enrol in specific academic programmes in upper secondary schools, as long as there are no additional requirements for results in other subjects.
- To embark on studies in academic programmes in upper secondary schools, students must fulfil requirements for guiding grades in key subjects. These subjects are:
  - Icelandic, English, Danish and mathematics for the study programme in languages
  - Icelandic, mathematics, natural sciences and English for the study programme in natural sciences
  - Icelandic, English, social studies and mathematics for the study programme in social sciences
- To embark on studies in an artistic programme, students must have obtained a specific guiding grade in Icelandic and mathematics, as well as having been successfully engaged in artistic study in a compulsory school or specialised vocational school, as evaluated by the receiving school. Failing that, they must demonstrate in other ways that they are suited for the programme.
- The principal can allow students who do not fulfil the academic programme's admission requirements to commence studies in the relevant programme if he or she considers it likely that the student will fulfil the requirements of the programme, provided that students who fulfil the admission requirements have not been previously turned down. Furthermore, as per Article 15 in the Act on Upper Secondary Schools, principals are authorised to admit students that have reached 18 years of age into specific study programmes in upper secondary

schools even if they did not fulfil the minimum requirements upon graduation from compulsory school.

Students who wish to be sure of their entitlement to study in all academic programmes must have obtained upon graduation from compulsory school the guiding grade in all subjects in which examinations are administered at a national level.

## 6 SCHOOL CURRICULUM GUIDE

Article 22 of Act 80/1996 on Upper Secondary Schools stipulates that each school must publish a curriculum that is updated regularly. The curriculum is prepared by the school staff under the direction of the principal. It constitutes both a policy and a working plan for the school and school staff is obliged to follow it. The school curriculum guide should describe the types of studies offered, the duration and arrangement of academic programmes and the division of subjects into semesters or school years.

The school curriculum guide executes in greater detail the various objectives of the National Curriculum Guide, as well as specifying the working regulations of the school. It should also discuss the school's codes of ethics and interaction, including regulations for employees' communication with parties outside the school. The school curriculum guide should include general guidelines about how various matters that may arise should be handled.

### 6.1 Composition of the school curriculum guide

The school curriculum guide should detail how the school intends to fulfil its role as described in Article 2 in the Act on Upper Secondary Schools, including how it will "encourage the overall development of students in order to prepare them as well as possible for active participation in a democratic society". It should also cover aspects such as emphases in the school's operations, teaching practices, assessment, administrative practices, educational and vocational counselling, and quality control.

The school curriculum guide should introduce the primary ideas and guiding principles in teaching, assessment, planning, selection of study materials, and more.

Laws and regulations on upper secondary schools as well as other laws, regulations and codes of conduct should be taken into account when the school curriculum guide is created, including the equal rights of all to education.

Among other things, the school curriculum guide should cover:

- School policy, future vision and uniqueness or unique emphases, for example aspects in the school's immediate surroundings, or services provided for specific groups
- The didactic policy of the school, organisation of teaching and teaching methods, and support for students with special needs
- The school's programme of activities, including the annual operational plan and school calendar
- The study opportunities and academic programmes offered by the school
- The execution in individual academic programmes of the goals and criteria of the National Curriculum Guide
- Methods of evaluation and any relevant regulations, types of assessment given and the criteria behind them
- School regulations, based on the National Curriculum Guide, which should cover such factors as the rights and responsibilities of the school and its students, and rules for attendance. They should also cover conduct, as well as student interaction and behaviour in school, at school events and in school dormitories.



Information about penalties for violating school regulations should also be included.

- Services for students with long-term illnesses
- Special projects, such as alcohol and drug prevention work
- The school's focus in environmental education
- The school's equal opportunity policy and how it manifests in daily operations, the teaching of specific subjects and general instruction in equality matters
- Conditions, facilities and general services for students
- How the school's social activities are organised
- The arrangement of health care
- A list of school staff, their education and work experience
- How communication with parents/custodians of students under the age of consent is carried out
- How communication with other schools in Iceland and abroad, when relevant, is carried out
- How communication with the labour market, when relevant, is carried out

Schools should make an effort to make information regarding studies and school operations accessible, for example by posting information on the school's website.

## **7 RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS**

### **7.1 Registration and services**

Applications for school admission must be signed both by the student and his or her custodian/s if the student is younger than 18 years of age. Older students are to sign their own applications. A signature on an application equals a statement that the student is familiar with the school's educational approach and that he or she intends to follow school regulations regarding behaviour, application and attendance. The school is obliged to notify the student as soon as possible whether admission has been granted. If the answer is positive, the student must pay an enrolment fee as confirmation that he or she intends to accept a place at the school and adhere to the school's regulations.

Services, in addition to teaching, with which students are provided and which do not carry a separate fee, are: a) access to a library and services by library and information technicians, b) school counselling services, c) assistance and services from the home room teacher, d) a school curriculum guide and teaching plans, a school timetable, and summary of absences and study progress, e) access to a study facility and a computer lab.

Disabled students are entitled to special support with regards to their studies. This support may be provided by specialised staff or assistants, or may be in the form of supporting equipment.

### **7.2 Attendance**

Students should attend all classes and arrive to class in a timely fashion. Individual schools' curriculums specify in greater detail the rules regarding attendance. Included in this should be information about the way students' absences due to illnesses or other unavoidable circumstances are dealt with. It should also give information about penalties for violating attendance rules.

Students' absences as a result of confirmed illnesses and/or medical treatment do not exempt them from examinations at the end of a school semester or year. An effort should be made to find appropriate ways for students suffering from long-term illnesses to graduate.

Schools are authorised to evaluate students' school attendance when it comes to awarding grades or for study credits, as per regulations set by the school's executive administration. Credits that students are awarded as a result of good attendance may be substituted for electives or added to the student's total credits upon graduation. In forming such regulations, special consideration should be given to students with long-term illnesses and students who are temporarily absent from school due to illnesses or other circumstances beyond their control.

Schools are authorised to evaluate for credits extensive work by students on behalf of a student association. Examples of this might be acting as head of the student association and being a member of its board, acting as a chairman in organisations or clubs working under the auspices of a student association, editing a school newspaper, participation in the national quiz competition "Gettu betur", or other similar contributions to the school's operations that are thought to warrant special recognition

through the granting of credits. Credits awarded in this way may be substituted for electives or added to the student's total credits on graduation.

### **7.3 Registering for examinations and termination of studies**

When a student registers for a course or class, he or she is agreeing to the method of assessment in that subject, a description of which has been given in the school's teaching plan or school curriculum guide. Schools announce deadlines for changes to enrolment and timetables at the beginning of a semester or year.

Students that wish to drop out of courses or school after that deadline has passed must inform the school of their decision in writing. They are then recorded as having terminated their studies on a particular day. The date of leaving school is recorded in the case of students whose studies are terminated for other reasons, such as unacceptable school attendance or expulsion, in the time from when the deadline for timetable changes runs out until examinations are held. Other students will be on examination lists even if they do not show up for the examination or do not fulfil the requirements of assessment on a continual basis or examinations. Those that do not show up for examinations receive the grade 0.

A principal can make allowances if there are changes to a student's circumstances, such as a long-term illness, accident, or a death in the family.

### **7.4 Teaching plans and assessment**

At the beginning of a semester or year, students are given a teaching plan in each course for which they are registered. The teaching plan should describe the course, provide information about study materials, teaching methods and study arrangements, procedures for handing in project work, the value of the final examination, and other aspects of assessment. Students should be informed about assessment methods, e.g. whether an assessment on a continuous basis is used, whether project work is evaluated, and the procedure for final examinations.

### **7.5 Regulations regarding student progress**

Students engaged in full-time academic study programmes are expected to complete some 17 – 18 credits per semester. Students in vocational study programmes are expected to complete some 20 credits per semester. The following regulations are general guidelines for planning and working methods of upper secondary schools. School principals oversee the execution of these regulations in the school curriculum guides.

Study availability should be organised in such a way as to allow students in full-time study to complete their studies in a specific academic programme within the time frame specified for that programme.

#### **7.5.1 Unit-credit system schools**

1. a. Students in full-time study should complete at least nine credits per semester or obtain satisfactory results in studies equivalent to 18 teaching hours per week, otherwise they shall be deemed to have failed that semester. Schools are authorised to waive this minimum requirement in the first semester. They are also authorised to expect students to complete 18 credits in two semesters. Schools are not required to re-admit a student that has failed two successive semesters.

- b. Should a student fail a semester, he or she has the right to let those courses be accredited in which he or she has received a grade of 7 or higher.
  - c. A student may take the same examination three times in a given course.
  - d. A normal programme of study leading to matriculation should take 11 semesters at most and a regular two-year programme of study should take seven semesters at most.
2. If a failing grade in a course during the final semester in a unit-credit school system prevents a student from graduating by taking a final examination, that student should be permitted to re-take the examination in that course at the end of that same semester.
  3. A student who receives a grade of 8 or higher in a course can apply to the school principal to be permitted to take the next course in that subject without attending classes (P-course).
  4. To take an examination in a course and be permitted to pass through to the next course, a minimum grade of 5 is required. However, the student may graduate with the grade 4 if the course in question is a final course or an individual course. Such courses do not provide credits.

### 7.5.2 Class-based schools

A student is deemed to have passed a matriculation examination when he or she has completed a final examination in all subjects and obtained the following minimum grades:

1. Main grade, i.e. an average of the final grades, minimum 5.0.\*
2. Test grade in each subject, not less than 4.

A student is considered to have passed a matriculation examination even if two test grades are below the minimum, though they may not be less than 2.

If a failing grade in one course during the final semester in a class-based school system prevents a student from graduating with a final examination, that student should be permitted to re-take the examination in that same course at the end of that school year.

To pass an examination in individual subjects, a student must obtain:

1. A spring semester grade of at least 4.0.
2. A final grade, i.e. the average of the autumn and spring semester grades, of at least 4.0.

To pass unconditionally through to the following year of study a student must fulfil minimum requirements for a final grade, i.e. 4.0, and the main grade must be at least 5.0.

Students in a class-based school who have obtained a main grade of 5.0 or higher at the end of a school year but have obtained a final grade below the minimum in two separate subjects, i.e. below 4.0, may resit paper at the end of that school year. Students are deemed to have passed a resit paper if their final grade in the subject is at least 4.0. They then have the right to pass through to the subsequent school year. Students who obtain three or more final grades below 4.0 are deemed to have failed the school year.

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\* Some class based schools use a mean grade, while others do not.

Students that fail the second resit paper may switch classes once during their studies, provided their grade is not below 2 and the subject is not a major in that particular academic programme, as stipulated by the school in question.

Students who resit a class are not required to attend classes in those subjects in which they obtained a grade of 7 or higher.

## 7.6 Evaluation of education from other schools, informal education and work experience

Students transferring to another school operating according to the National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools, who register in a specific academic programme, will have courses accredited that they have completed successfully, provided they are a stipulated part of the programme into which they enrol. Courses that are not a stipulated part of the programme may be accredited as electives.

The status of those students regarding the number of passed courses and number of credits they have obtained upon transferring to another school remains unchanged. The receiving school should respect the regulations of the school from which the student has transferred, where this has an effect on the student's credit status. Studies in other schools are evaluated with grades, i.e. the grades are transferred along with the student. Education that has been evaluated from other schools may be listed as such on the student's graduation certificate.

Principals of upper secondary schools are responsible for evaluating students' previous studies, whether they are formal or informal. Informal studies incorporate know-how or skills that have been obtained through means other than formal schooling, such as workshops given by independent instructors, or experience on the labour market. The evaluation should not require that the student's previous studies be identical to those specified in the curriculum. Instead, emphasis should be on determining whether they may be evaluated as equivalent to those and whether the student has what is required to complete them. Students may also be given the opportunity to have work experience evaluated at the outset of vocational studies. This may allow exemptions from study in specific vocational courses and/or permit a shortening of the students' workplace training. If doubts arise as to how evaluation should be conducted, students should be given the benefit of the doubt, or given a competence test to allow them to prove their competence in the relevant subject or field. That way, students' know-how and experience that has not been gained through traditional schooling can be evaluated, thereby shortening their study period leading to the final examination.

The Ministry of Education entrusts upper secondary schools with the carrying out of competence tests. They are conducted twice a year, or as needed.

Students that complete a higher examination in music education may have their training evaluated as area of specialization education in an artistic programme, for a total of 45 credits. The same applies to students who have completed a valid intermediate-level examination in two musical subjects and a higher examination in musical theory.

Musical study may be evaluated at the intermediate level or higher for up to 12 credits as an area of specialization in academic study programmes. Students are previously expected to have completed a foundation-level examination in a music school.

Principals are permitted to evaluate training in music recital/singing and music theory at the foundation level in music schools for a maximum of 8 credits, as electives in academic subjects.

Students who parallel to their studies in an upper secondary school are engaged in extensive physical training under the auspices of a special sports association and/or athletics association with a trained coach, athletics instructor or teacher, can apply to the principal to be exempt from specific courses or parts of courses in athletics or physical education.

### **7.7 No attendance study**

A principal can allow students to study outside a school. However, students who do so must meet the same study requirements as other students in the school. Those studying outside a school are generally not permitted to attend classes unless there are specific exercises that they must complete. They should make arrangements for handing in projects, essays and reports in collaboration with the relevant teacher. Some subjects, however, cannot be studied outside a school. General information regarding studying outside a school should be provided in the school curriculum guide.

### **7.8 Smoking and intoxicants**

Smoking is forbidden on upper secondary school premises. The handling and use of alcohol and other intoxicants is strictly forbidden on school premises. Upper secondary schools should set a policy in alcohol and drug prevention and include it in their school curriculum guides.

## 8 ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATIONS

The purpose of evaluation is to determine to what extent students have met the objectives of the National Curriculum Guide (school curriculum guide) in a given subject. Assessment can take place in various ways, as decided by the school, yet shall as a rule be in line with the scope of teaching in the relevant subject. Assessment is the responsibility of teachers, and they mark students' examination papers.

Schools should make every effort to publish a timetable for examinations prior to the deadline for timetable changes. The dates for resit paper in individual courses should be announced at the same time.

### 8.1 Examinations

The value of each question should appear on the examination paper. The teacher, or a teacher's substitute in the event of an authorised absence, shall be present during those written examinations that he or she is conducting. If this is not possible, the teacher must be able to be reached while the examination is taking place. If a teacher becomes aware of general confusion among students during an examination, the issue should be addressed in such a way that it is audible to everyone, whenever possible. Examination regulations should be outlined in the school curriculum guide.

When the examination is over, students should have the opportunity to go over their examination papers with a teacher within three days from the issuing of grades, at minimum. Should some sort of error in assessment or marking be discovered, it should be corrected as soon as possible and the result presented to the student in question, without delay.

Students intending to take a matriculation examination must complete national final examinations in at least two subjects. More details about examinations may be found in regulations on the administration of national final examinations in upper secondary schools.

#### 8.1.1 Illness during examinations

Students that cannot take an examination as a result of illness must report their condition to the school office on that same day, as per school regulations. Students who become ill during an examination should alert the invigilator who will make a note on the relevant examination paper. Students who have had an accident or become ill during examinations are entitled to resit paper. An application for a resit paper should be in writing, as per regulations set by each school. Resit paper should be held within two weeks of the examination. Students who are unable to take a scheduled resit paper as a result of illness or accident are permitted to take it at a later date, in which case it should be scheduled in collaboration with the student.

#### 8.1.2 Grading

Grades in upper secondary schools should be given in whole numbers from 1 to 10. Essentially, they state the following:

The grade 10 states that	95-100% of objectives were fulfilled
9	- 85-94% of objectives were fulfilled
8	- 75-84% of objectives were fulfilled
7	- 65-74% of objectives were fulfilled

6		55-64% of objectives were fulfilled
5	-	45-54% of objectives were fulfilled
4	-	34-44% of objectives were fulfilled
3	-	25-34% of objectives were fulfilled
2	-	15-24% of objectives were fulfilled
1	-	0-14% of objectives were fulfilled

### 8.1.3 Allowances in examinations

Disabled students or those with specific learning disabilities not only need special assistance with their studies but also often require special arrangements when it comes to examinations or other types of assessment. Schools should make an effort to meet the needs of students in such cases.

Disabled students and students with long-term illnesses, students with reading and writing disabilities and/or other confirmed sensory disabilities, may apply for allowances from traditional assessments. This could mean being granted a longer time to complete the examination, being given customised examinations, the use of support materials, various assistance during examinations and/or oral examinations. Schools should keep an open mind about evaluating the study progress of such students, over and above methods normally employed in schools.

### 8.1.4 Publishing of grades

The handling and publishing of grades should be in accordance with the Act on the Protection of Privacy as Regards the Processing of Personal Data no. 77/2000 and the regulations of the Data Protection Authority. Schools may not publish the grades of individual students with their name, social security number or other identifiable information on them without the written consent of the student.

### 8.1.5 Filing of examination papers

Schools must keep all examination papers on file for one full year. The school principal is responsible for disposing of all written examination papers at the end of that period. The student who took the examination can ask to see his or her examination paper by submitting a request to that effect within one year of the publishing of the examination results. He or she can also receive a photocopy of his or her examination paper upon request.

Those that so wish can obtain copies of a school's examination paper after the examination in that particular subject has been held, as per the Information Act no. 50/1996.

## 8.2 Standards for graduation diplomas

Graduation diplomas must be printed on legal paper or other quality paper, with the school's name and logo on them.

The graduation diploma should incorporate the following basic information. Individual schools can add any information they deem necessary.

- The name and social security number of the student
- Academic programme, division into programme core, area of specialization and electives, or other division according to the curriculum of the programme in question



- The name of the degree/diploma and the length of study, in years
- Individual subjects
- Abbreviations and identification numbers for courses
- Grades in each successfully-completed course
- Total number of credits in the subject
- Total number of credits in the academic programme
- Attendance grade or record of attendance
- Exemption from course/courses
- Date on which the diploma was issued
- Signature of the principal and the stamp of the school

Where a student in a vocational study programme completes a matriculation examination by means of additional study, this should be specified and the additional study kept separate.

The graduating student may have his or her diploma issued in English, on request. The upper secondary school from which the student graduates shall be responsible for having the diploma translated.

The terminology on the graduation diploma shall be based on terminology used in the National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools.

Graduation diplomas in vocational study programmes should be accompanied with an English-language appendix summarising the main information on the diploma. In particular, the appendix is intended for use by foreign bodies receiving the diploma in connection with the student's application for a foreign work position or admission to a foreign school. The appendix, which was created by the Ministry of Education, is also published on the Ministry's website.

Should an upper secondary school for some reason require exemptions from the above, an application to that effect stating reasons should be made to the Ministry of Education.

A school is required to securely keep copies of graduation diplomas as per the Act on the National Archives of Iceland no. 66/1985.

## **9 ALLOWANCES AND EXEMPTIONS**

### **9.1 Allowances and exemptions in individual subjects**

Disabled students, students with long-term illnesses and those with specific reading disabilities (reading and writing disabilities) and/or other confirmed sensory disabilities, may apply to the school principal to be exempted from individual courses. This is presuming the school's assessment that the student in question is unable to grasp the course materials as a result of specific disabilities that have been confirmed by a specialist in the relevant field. Students who are granted such an exemption should take other courses in lieu.

Students may also apply to the principal for exemptions from a particular subject if their learning disabilities render them unable to grasp the course materials despite repeated attempts and assistance provided by the school. Such learning disabilities must be confirmed by a specialist in the relevant field. Students who are granted such exemptions should take other subjects in lieu.

Icelandic students who have spent long periods overseas can apply to study Icelandic according to a special curriculum. They should also have the option of taking a competence test in Icelandic, whenever possible.

Students whose native language is not Icelandic have the right to instruction in Icelandic, according to a special curriculum. The same applies to deaf students.

Students who resided outside the Nordic countries during compulsory school can apply to study a language other than one of the Nordic languages.

Students who have been granted an exemption from studying a Nordic language in compulsory school can also be granted such an exemption in upper secondary school. In such cases, they are required take another subject in lieu.

Before an exemption is granted, the principal should inform the student in question that the exemption might affect his or her study opportunities at the higher education level, or the opportunity for work in a specific field if the study programme is a vocational one.

Students' graduation diplomas should list any exemptions that are granted as per the above.

### **9.2 Allowances for exceptional athletes**

Exceptional athletes are those who have been selected to play on a national youth team or a national team in a given sport, or those that have been selected for participation in and/or preparation for a Nordic tournament, European championships, world championships, or the Olympics in their chosen sport.

When the intended participation of a student in such an athletics tournament has been confirmed, principals are advised to make special agreements with the athlete in question regarding allowances for attendance, completion of assignments, examinations, and related considerations. The relevant sports association/coach of a national team/national team committee shall present the school with a plan for the participation of the athlete at the beginning of the school year or semester.

Exceptional athletes should be accommodated in such a way as to allow their school absences as a result of games and/or training for the national team to be overlooked when calculating a grade for school attendance. Also, school absences as a result of

games and/or training for the national team should not exclude exceptional athletes from assessment at the end of the school year or semester. The student in question should be provided with an opportunity to complete examinations or final projects whenever possible.

## **10 PERSONAL DATA**

### **10.1 Handling of personal data**

Data containing students' personal information, which is kept by the school, should be handled in accordance with the Act on the Protection of Privacy as Regards the Processing of Personal Data no. 77/2000 and provisions in the Information Act no. 59/1996, as relevant. Staff in upper secondary schools are bound by confidentiality. It is illegal to give out personal information about students without their consent and the consent of their parents/custodians if the student is below the age of 18.

### **10.2 Responsibilities towards students and parents/custodians**

When students have reached the age of consent, only they or those they have granted power of attorney may be given information about matters that affect them personally.

Should the parents/custodians of a student below the age of 18 request information from an upper secondary school regarding their child's study progress, attendance, or other related information, they must be given that information by the school administration.

If a student below the age of consent violates regulations and is given a written reprimand or warning, the school administration is also obliged to inform the child's parents/custodians, in writing.

School administrators should systematically seek to develop relations with students' parents/custodians and should provide them with information about the school calendar, school regulations, the organisation and objectives of the school, and more.

## **11 HANDLING OF INDIVIDUAL CASES**

Matters of conflict should be resolved within the school, whenever possible. Home room teachers and student counsellors should be consulted when conflicts affecting students in their care are being resolved. Disputes affecting individual students that cannot be resolved by the parties in question should be referred to the school board. Students should receive a warning before disciplinary measures are taken, except when the violation is so serious that this is not possible, for example when a crime is committed. Warnings as a result of violation of school regulations must be in writing and must among other things:

1. State the reason for the warning and the disciplinary measures that will be taken should the student violate regulations again
2. Give the student an opportunity to counter the reprimand within a specific period of time

Upper secondary schools should record disputes arising within the school and any violations of school regulations. In handling individual cases, provisions in the Icelandic Administrative Act no. 37/1993, the Act on the Protection of Privacy as Regards the Processing of Personal Data, no. 77/2000 and the Information Act no. 50/1996 should be taken into account. Violations of school regulations should be dealt with swiftly, whenever possible.

### **11.1 Interaction between students and staff in upper secondary schools**

If disputes arise between students and teachers and/or staff of upper secondary schools, and the parties involved are unable to settle the dispute, the matter should be referred to the school principal. Should the involved parties not accept the principal's decision, the matter may be referred to the Ministry of Education.

If interactions between a student/students and a principal result in formal complaints or charges, and if the matter cannot be resolved within the school, it should be referred to the Ministry of Education for resolution.

If a student, or the student's custodians if he or she is below the age of 18, considers his or her rights to have been violated in such a way as to warrant a complaint, the individual or individuals in question should consult the relevant teacher, home room teacher or principal. If the matter still cannot be resolved, the principal should decide on an appropriate resolution.

Similarly, if a teacher or other staff member feels that his or her rights have been violated, that individual should complain to the principal.

### **11.2 Non-compliance with examination regulations**

Students who do not comply with examination regulations should be made to leave the examination room and may expect a dismissal from school, temporarily or permanently, depending on the nature of the violation. The same applies when the assessment is of a different type than a written or oral examination.

### **11.3 Disputes regarding assessment**

Should a dispute arise between a student and a teacher over the assessment of an examination paper, and if that dispute cannot be resolved within the school, the

principal should seek a censor to go over the examination paper in collaboration with the head of department. The censor's verdict shall be final.

Disputes arising from the results of journeyman's' examinations should be dealt with according to regulations.

#### **11.4 Infringement of attendance regulations**

Regulations regarding school attendance stipulate that students may be expelled from specific courses as a result of poor attendance. First, however, a written warning must be issued by the relevant teacher, the student's home room teacher or the relevant administrator. Expulsion is the responsibility of the principal, who should consult with the school board before an expulsion is made. Students who are expelled from specific courses or from school due to poor attendance may not take an examination in that subject/those subjects at the end of that semester.

#### **11.5 Disputes over student progress**

Disputes over student progress or applications for exemptions should be dealt with by the school board. The principal's decision is final in such cases. Should the student not accept the outcome, the matter may be referred to the Ministry of Education.

## 12 EVALUATION OF SCHOOL OPERATIONS

Evaluation of school operations is typically divided into internal and external evaluation. Internal evaluation refers to the institution's self-evaluation by staff and other parties involved in its operations. External evaluation refers to an evaluation of the operations of the institution by external parties.

The current Act on Upper Secondary Schools has a provision included for the first time on the evaluation of school operations. The primary emphasis is on the school's self-evaluation. The Ministry of Education should ensure that an external evaluation of the operations of individual schools or aspects of the schoolwork takes place, and that an assessment is made of the self-evaluation methods of the school.

### 12.1 Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is one way to disseminate knowledge and information about the school's work. A school's self-evaluation is linked to its objectives and is intended to highlight the school's strengths and weaknesses. Its primary aim is to make it easier for the school's staff to work towards the school's objectives, evaluate whether or not they were met, review them, and make improvements. This refers equally to the objectives and goals set by laws, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide, and objectives that the individual schools have set in their school curriculum guides. Simultaneously, self-evaluation creates a professional foundation for improvement. An extensive gathering of data on the school's work is conducted as part of the self-evaluation, providing information about the extent to which the schoolwork is meeting objectives. Self-evaluation is not conducted once and for all, but must rather be ongoing. It is linked to long-term objectives and is not an isolated operation. Among other things a school's self-evaluation report must contain an extensive description and analysis of the objectives and work of the school. It is also important for it to contain suggestions for improvement.

The Act on Upper Secondary Schools has clear provisions stating that schools should carry out self-evaluation in order to evaluate their own operations. The law allows schools to choose which methods they wish to use in their self-evaluation. The law also has provisions stating that the Ministry of Education should carry out an assessment of schools' self-evaluation methods every five years.

#### 12.1.1 Criteria for self-evaluation

Criteria that the Ministry of Education suggests as a basis for self-evaluation are:

1. *Formal.* Descriptions of self-evaluation methods must be incorporated into the self-evaluation report, the school curriculum guide, and possibly other written documentation from the school. These should state whether the method is a recognised self-evaluation method or a method that has been combined and adapted. The overall process must be described, including information about who managed the evaluation, who conducted it, and who was evaluated.
2. *Comprehensive.* The self-evaluation should incorporate all major aspects of the school work, i.e. objectives, administration, learning, teaching, study evaluation, students, staff, conditions and external relations. Schools are not expected to cover each aspect in equal measure every year.
3. *Reliable.* The self-evaluation must be based on reliable data and solid measurements. Data from the school's files, such as student progress and

attendance records, must be on hand. Schools cannot base evaluation solely on data, however. They must also evaluate their work in other ways, such as through surveys of different groups, including students, staff, parents, receiving schools, the general public, parties on the labour market and school alumni.

4. *Collaborative*. All staff must in one way or another be involved in the self-evaluation. During the planning and preparation stages, all staff must be informed of the scope and extent of the evaluation. There must also be a general agreement on how it should be carried out. There must be a clear division of tasks, and it must be clear who manages the operation and is responsible for it. At this stage, students' participation must be kept in mind, as well as the participation of parents and other parties with a vested interest.
5. *Improvement-oriented*. A self-evaluation report must incorporate a plan of action. It must also include a working plan for making those improvements in school operations that are necessary when the self-evaluation is over. Furthermore, plans as to how objectives for improvements will be met and definitions of what exactly the improvements incorporate must be specified.
6. *Achievement-oriented*. The school should work at evaluating whether its objectives have been met and what results its work has delivered based on the guidelines it has set for itself. This might include guidelines relating to study results, well-being, conduct, attendance and dropout rates.
7. *Institutionally- and individually-oriented*. The self-evaluation must be aimed at both the institution itself and the individuals in it. An example might be an evaluation of the school's performance in comparison with other schools, e.g. in national final examinations, or an evaluation of administrative practices and teaching.
8. *Descriptive*. The self-evaluation report must contain a short and concise description of the school's operations (text, images, graphs). The description must be linked to objectives.
9. *Analytical*. The self-evaluation report must incorporate an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, presented systematically for each aspect of the evaluation and summarised at the end.
10. *Open to scrutiny*. A decision must be made in advance who will have access to specific parts of the self-evaluation. The self-evaluation report must be open to public scrutiny. However, current legal provisions must be taken into account, including those that relate to the protection of personal data.

## 12.2 External evaluation

### 12.2.1 Assessment of self-evaluation methods

An assessment of self-evaluation methods used by schools is, among other things, based on self-evaluation reports by the schools in question, visits to the schools, and interviews with administrators and representatives of staff and students. In order to gain as clear a picture as possible of the self-evaluation process, evaluators must consider the documents on which the school based its self-evaluation, how the data was processed and which methods were used. Documentation might include information about how time was utilised, examination results, collaboration with parents, and pre-service and in-service education. Data collection may be partially in the form of surveys. Criteria for self-evaluation as discussed above is also used as a basis for the assessment of self-evaluation methods.



### 12.2.2 Reports on school operations

In its role as a supervisory body, the Ministry of Education can commission reports on school operations. Such reports can be on specific aspects of the school's work, such as teaching in a specific subject, or a comprehensive evaluation of the operations of individual schools.

The primary purpose of schools' external evaluations is that a comprehensive overview of the school's operations or individual aspects, as they are at any given time, may be gained. Various aspects of the schools' internal operations are examined, such as administration, teaching, developmental work, in-service education for staff, cooperation and interaction within the school, study results and the school's links with the community.

## 13 ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education incorporates both general and specific education for adults who for one reason or another cannot attend classes in a regular day school. It refers to specialised education at the compulsory and upper secondary school levels, various types of continuing education classes, and specific subjects that meet individual needs. Each institution provides information about its adult education programmes.

### 13.1 Upper secondary schools

Upper secondary schools may, with the approval of the Minister of Education, offer education in evening courses for adults, i.e. general as well as specific education for adults. Education that students complete successfully is considered equivalent to corresponding education in specific study programmes in upper secondary schools.

Students enrolled in evening courses for adults can determine their own study progress. They can take one or more subjects, or enrol in specific academic programmes offered in upper secondary schools, depending on their personal objectives. Those enrolled in evening courses for adults pay a tuition fee covering almost a third of the cost of teachers' wages.

### 13.2 Lifelong learning

One of the aims of the Ministry of Education is to boost diversity and availability in education. This refers not only to formal education in upper secondary schools as stipulated by the National Curriculum Guide, but also various types of informal education offered by other individuals or parties. The goal is to increase flexibility in learning and teaching, meet added social demands for specialised education that schools have difficulty responding to, and to meet the requirements of individuals for education that takes into account their background and competence.

The availability of lifelong learning courses has grown a great deal in the past few years. Lifelong learning centres, workshops, municipal education centres, professional associations and various other bodies offer diverse forms of education throughout the country. This type of education tends to focus on practical training, creativity and self-help, with the aim of preparing individuals for participation on the labour market or for studying in the formal education system. Comprehensive services are offered, including compulsory and secondary studies, hobby courses, study by examinations, vocational training, and Icelandic for foreigners. Vocational and educational counselling is widely available in connection with lifelong learning.

Several upper secondary schools provide students with the option of distance learning or distributed learning, individually-oriented studies that students can engage in irrespective of where they live or what time they have at their disposal, and whenever it suits them best. Teaching is conducted via computers and telecommunications and is in the form of discussion groups, projects, essays, telephone conferences, examinations, and more.

Work is currently underway to help bridge the gap between formal and informal education, so that those who have been enrolled in Lifelong learning will have easy access to the formal educational system and will receive a fair evaluation of their previous studies there.

## 14 APPENDIX I

Three- and four-year vocational study programmes. (Listed are study programmes defined in the National Curriculum Guide – General Section, as well as Programme Descriptions. Consequently it may not be exhaustive.)

### **Building and Construction Trades:**

Housebuilding (HÚ8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Housebuilding (HÚ9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Furniture upholstery (HB9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Cabinetmaking (HS8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Cabinetmaking (HS9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
House painting (MÁ9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Masonry (MR8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Masonry (MR9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Plumbing (PL9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Tapestry and floor laying (VD9) – technical study on a contractual basis

### **Vehicles and Transport Trades:**

Autobody Building (BS8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Car mechanics (BV8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Car spraypainting (BM8) – technical study in a vocational study programme

### **Health Sciences and Social Sciences:**

Study programme for pharmacological technicians (LT)  
Study programme for medical secretaries (LÆ)  
Study programme in massage therapy (NN)  
Study programme in assistant nursing (SJ)  
Advanced study programme in assistant nursing (SF)  
Dental technology (TS)  
Study programme for dental assistants (TT)

### **Design and Handicraft Trades:**

Gold and silversmithery (GS9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Dressmaking (KJ8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Tailoring (KL8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Shoe making (SÐ9)  
Saddle making (SÖ9) – technical study on a contractual basis

### **Food, Catering and Tourism Trades:**

Baking (BA9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Waiting (FR9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Meat processing (KÖ9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Cooking (MA9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Diet cooking (MT)  
Dairy processing (MJ)  
Workplace study in tourism (FE)  
Study programme in tour guiding (LE)

**Metal, Machinery and Production Trades:**

Tinsmithing (BL8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Turning (RS8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Steel construction (SM8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Industrial mechanics (VS8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Net making (NG9) – technical study on a contractual basis

**Electrical Trades:**

Electronic engineering (RE8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Electric distribution technics (RT9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Electro-mechanic technics (RV8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Electro-mechanic technics (RV9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Electrotechnics (RK8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Electrotechnics (RK9) – technical study on a contractual basis

**Fishing and Marine Trades:**

Marine captain programme, grade 2 (SK2)  
Marine captain programme, grade 3 (SK3)  
Marine engineer programme, grade 3 (VV3)  
Marine engineer programme, grade 4 (VV4)

**Beauty Trades:**

Hairdressing (HG9) – technical study on a contractual basis  
Beauty therapy (SN8) – technical study in a vocational study programme

**Information and Mass Media Trades:**

Library technology (BT)  
Bookbinding (BO8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Mass media technology (FM)  
Photography (LM8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Graphical design (PS8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Printing (PR8) – technical study in a vocational study programme  
Web technology (VT)

## 15 APPENDIX II

Two- to three-year vocational study programmes. (Listed are study programmes defined in the National Curriculum Guide – General Section, as well as Programme Descriptions. Consequently it may not be exhaustive.)

### **Health sciences and social sciences:**

Study programme for social and health care assistants (FL)

Study programme for health care secretaries (HM)

Dental assistant (TÆ)

### **Design and Handicraft Trades:**

Technical drawing (TÆ)

Study programme in sales display (ÚTS)

Study programme in handicrafts (LI)

### **Food, Catering and Tourism Trades:**

Butchering (SL)

### **Metal, Machinery and Production trades:**

Basic study in the metal trades (MG)

Metal welding (MÐ9) – technical study on a contractual basis

### **Fishing and Marine Trades:**

Marine captain programme, grade 1 (SK1)

Marine engineer programme, grade 2 (VV2)

### **Electrical Trades:**

Film projection technology (KS)

### **Pedagogy and leisure:**

Study programme in social and leisure activities (FT)

Study programme in athletics (ÍÞ)

Study programme for school assistants (SG)

Study programme for assistants in pre-primary schools (LL)

### **Information and Mass Media Trades:**

Basic study in information and mass media trades (GUF).

### **Finance and Retail Trades:**

Study programme in business administration (VI)

## 16 APPENDIX III

Other forms of vocational study. (Listed are study programmes defined in the National Curriculum Guide – General Section, as well as Programme Descriptions. Consequently it may not be exhaustive.)

### **Building and Construction Trades:**

Basic study in building and construction trades (GBM)

### **Vehicle and Transport Trades:**

Basic study in the automotive trade (GB)

### **Food, Catering and Tourism Trades:**

Basic study in the food and catering trades (GMV)

Study programme in home economics (HB)

One-year diploma in cooking (MS)

### **Electrical Trades:**

Basic study in the electrical trades (GR)

### **Fishing and Marine Trades:**

Study programme for the fishing industry (S30)

Engine attendant programme, grade 1 (VV1)

### **Pedagogy and leisure:**

Study programme for assistants in schools (SK)