

Motion for a parliamentary resolution on the Education Policy 2030

From the Minister of Education, Science and Culture

The Althing resolves to prioritise the education of the Icelandic population. Education, whether formal or informal, is the basis of the prosperity and progress of any nation. Having a first-rate education system is the foundation of maintaining a prominent position among the world's nations. Everyone should be afforded equal opportunity to study, because everyone can learn and everyone matters.

The purpose of a comprehensive education policy is to create a dynamic and flexible education system with institutions that serve as centres of education, culture, art and social interaction. The human resources present in every educational institution play a key role in the implementation of any education policy, given the eminent importance of the work of teachers and other activities in the field of pedagogy and education, which is due to the way in which they build competencies for all other work. The education and skill set of the individual is a key prerequisite for allowing Iceland to confront future challenges caused by rapid societal, environmental and technological changes, and turn them into new opportunities. Through this Iceland will become an inviting place to reside, study and work. Educational institutions and education providers, offering both formal and informal education, are meant to provide everyone with an opportunity to prepare for active participation in a democratic society, nourish critical and creative thinking, and enhance the ability to adapt to different social and cultural situations. The goals of the Education Policy 2030 are reflected in the guiding principle *everyone can learn*, which entails an emphasis on the active participation of all in a democratic society based on equality and human rights, health and welfare, and sustainability. The values of the education policy are *well-being, resilience, and success*.

The Education Policy 2030 has been drawn up with the help of a large number of people from within the school community, including through a series of meetings on the topic 'Education for all', held all over the country in the autumn of 2018. In addition, meetings on the same topic were held in the autumn of 2019 in the context of six regional music school conferences, as well as in cooperation with parents, children and young people, businesses, other stakeholders, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The policy takes into account international treaties, agreements and commitments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. One of its key goals is education for all, an emphasis being placed on ensuring equal access to quality education and developing everyone's opportunities for lifelong learning.

The policy consolidates the content of a large number of policies and reports compiled by the Ministry in the context of various cooperative projects. Examples of this include the National Curriculum Guides; teacher recruitment; the Teaching Council; the professional development of teachers and school leaders; education for all; the concerns of students whose native language is not Icelandic; the funding of higher education institutions; the regulatory environment of upper secondary education; various evaluation reports; and the development of standardised tests and educational materials. Education policy is a crucial part of the development of a national competency policy, a term which refers to the competencies that must be present in a society for it to be able to make optimal use of its human and other resources with the aim of ensuring its competitiveness and the quality of life of the population. Foresight, stability and transparency in the education system are the keys to ensuring that Icelandic educational institutions can fulfil their role.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will cooperate with stakeholders on the creation of a timed action plan based on the Education Policy presented herein, and will issue regular reports on its implementation.

I. MAIN OBJECTIVES

The Government's objective is to provide high-quality education with an emphasis on knowledge, well-being, resilience and success in an environment where everyone matters and everyone can learn.

A dynamic and flexible education system places the focus on giving everyone an opportunity to develop and increase their competence on their own terms, through active democratic participation, cooperation, communication and creative critical thinking.

The Government pledges to ensure:

- A. superior teaching and leadership in educational institutions;
- B. that everyone has equal access to education;
- C. that curriculum guides, learning environments and assessment promote the development of competencies for the future;
- D. shared responsibility for the provision and quality of education.

On the basis of the main objectives listed above, a set of main priorities has been defined for each objective as detailed in the attached presentation (1). The objectives will be reflected in other official plans issued by the Ministry, by means of which the actions will be coordinated. In parallel to that work, an investigation will be launched jointly with principal stakeholders to find ways to improve the education system even further for the future benefit of students and society, including through pilot projects. Building a dynamic education system is the task of society as a whole, and the best way forward is for central and local government to seek widespread consultation and cooperation with professionals working in the education system on how to implement the changes.

II. PRIORITIES 2020 TO 2030

A. Superior teaching and leadership in educational institutions

The importance of teachers, school leaders and other professionals in the education system

Teachers, school leaders and other professionals employed in the education system are one of the most important resources of any society and set the foundations for other professions. A campaign will be launched to increase awareness of the importance of all teaching professions in society with a view to raising the profile of and promoting respect for teaching as a vocation. The content of teacher education and professional development programmes must take account of the needs of society in the present and support official goals. Education professionals constantly work to expand the borders of knowledge, and interdisciplinary collaboration is an important source of learning that enhances common understanding of what and how children learn, how they develop, and how their strengths in learning and play can be allowed to flourish. The systematic implementation of the Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools is also necessary in order to make the best use of those human resources and provide staff with the best possible working conditions and work environment. The education system of the future will call for entrepreneurial and innovative attitudes, increased cooperation between experts from different disciplines and with diverse skills, and collaboration between institutions and education providers within and between systems. There is also a need to support and empower professionals within the education system to work in an inclusive school environment.

Teacher recruitment

Sufficient teacher recruitment is a prerequisite for sustaining a dynamic and flexible education system in Iceland. In the current situation, the average age of active teachers is rising and higher education institutions have not been able to graduate sufficiently high numbers of new teachers to meet recruitment needs, despite the rising number of applications for teacher training programmes over the last few years. On top of this, dropout from teacher training institutions is high and many leave the profession during the first three years of teaching. There are already signs that measures put in place by education authorities are lifting the number of applications for teacher training programmes, and at the current pace recruitment needs at these school levels should be met in coming years. Efforts have been put in to ensure proper recognition of the work carried out by teachers, strengthen their professional autonomy, and prioritise school development planning at all levels of the

1 Not included in the English translation.

education system. Strategies to remedy teacher shortages have also been developed in cooperation between central and local government and trade unions. A considerable emphasis is being placed on steps designed to reverse the current trend and ensure that the need for teachers can be met in the education system as a whole and in all subjects. New legislation providing for a single teaching licence for preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, and for the setting up and operation of the Teaching Council, will hopefully encourage more people to enrol in teacher training programmes and boost professional development, while also strengthening teachers' self-image and professional identity.

Targeted professional development and the learning community

Targeted professional development enhances the professional competence and job satisfaction of teachers and school leaders, with a positive impact on their work performance. Links must exist between the basic education, vocational training and professional development of teachers and school leaders so that they are in a position to systematically increase their knowledge and skill sets, follow new developments, work with others, and reflect on ways for professional development that are open to them. Teachers, other education professionals and school leaders throughout the country must also have access to and scope for professional development to enhance their competence and professional independence. The content and form of professional development, at all levels of the education system, in all types of school, by other education providers, and in the context of extracurricular activities, must be varied, professional in character and under continuous development to keep up with changes in society and the most recent research. It is important for schools and education providers to build a learning community and a culture of cooperation around their specific approaches and manner of professional development, with a view to supporting students' well-being and academic success and improving the work environment of all staff. This also facilitates each teacher's use of varied teaching practices that support and enhance students' motivation and competencies for the future. Beside individual professional development, time must be provided within the academic year to attend to a range of professional and school development activities that are interlinked with the development of the education system and ongoing work on the national education policy. Professional development should be a defined part of the work of teachers and school leaders. In particular, there is a need to define and specify in law the role of higher education institutions in the professional development of teachers and school leaders.

Positive social interaction and school atmosphere

Schools and other education providers, whether offering formal or informal education programmes, play an important role when it comes to promoting positive and peaceful social interaction, relations between different social groups, and social cohesion. There is also considerable potential for achieving those goals in the work of after-school centres, youth centres, and other types of organised sports and youth activities. Parents of children who are still minors will be asked to contribute to promoting positive social interaction and school atmosphere. It is important for school leaders, teachers and other education professionals working in schools and other educational settings, as well as in the context of sports, youth and other recreational activities, to be guided by considerations relating to the well-being, general development, academic success and welfare of all, and to promote kind and positive social interaction. Building a learning community capable of meeting diverse needs motivates people of all ages, facilitates targeted knowledge acquisition, and counteracts communication problems, school avoidance, early school leaving, undesirable behaviours, and aggressive or violent behaviour.

B. Equal access to education

Social awareness of the importance of education

A targeted campaign will be launched to raise awareness among the nation of the importance of lifelong learning. There is a need to increase respect for education in a broad sense of the word, including both formal and informal types of learning. It will be highlighted that the Icelandic education system is up to the task of responding to societal changes and future challenges, and that it promotes equal opportunity to study for all and active participation in a sustainable democratic society. Sustainability education, environmental awareness, the maintenance of a community spirit, and climate-related issues all have an important place in the education system. Thus, efforts will be made to forge a common understanding of *the importance of education* in all fields of life and at all

levels of the education system. Educational institutions also need to be attractive workplaces, and teaching needs to be seen as a worthwhile profession for people of either gender and any background. Education also sets the foundations for each person's future skills, including in regard to communication, tolerance, cultural literacy, and social awareness.

Equal opportunity to study for all

The role of the education system is both to provide individuals with the education needed for active participation in society, and to shape and maintain a society and a culture subject to constant changes in a way that guarantees to all equivalent opportunities to study on their own terms, irrespective of place of residence, age, sex, sexual orientation, education, background, financial situation, disability, or other status. Multicultural schooling, welcoming of diversity and difference in the student group, and grounded in the assets and strengths of children and young people, should be a hallmark of the education system. The culture and native language of each person are to be considered a resource benefiting everyone. The country's education system constitutes a coherent whole, and this entails that students are guaranteed a continuity in the services provided to them from preschool to higher education and in adult lifelong learning activities. In support of this, specialised schools around the country operate vigorous arts education programmes. Many types of professional development and continuing education activities also take place in academic centres, lifelong learning centres and education businesses operated by higher education institutions, and increasingly in the workplace. Each school level, each type of school, other education providers and after-school activities aim to use varied tasks and approaches to accommodate the diverse needs of different individuals, and to promote all aspects of their development, their welfare and their education. Special attention should be paid to the coordination of working methods and school services within the education system. At the preschool level learning takes place most effectively through the children's free play and spontaneity. It is important to make strategic use of play at all levels of the education system and, where appropriate, in adult education. Play is a powerful way to ensure freedom of growth and promote access to a wide choice of education paths. Inexhaustible opportunities also exist for the use of informal education, including that taking place in after-school centres, youth centres and organised sport and youth activities, to create a safe environment for play, the building of friendships, and the strengthening of social skills, literacy, creativity and personal development. The personal development and welfare of individuals are greatly affected by their lives and participation outside school, in recreational and youth activities, sports, arts, and in peer groups.

As part of an effort to reduce gender and age-based disparities, an emphasis is placed on more equal opportunities to study, especially at the upper-secondary and higher education levels, the aim being to turn vocational, trade and technical education, as well as jobs in the care and education sectors, into attractive options for young people regardless of their gender, background or financial situation. One of the things that will contribute to equity in education is a new support system for students, intended as a means to achieve more equal support and distribution of student financial aid, increase its cost-effectiveness, and improve students' financial situation. Particular attention will be paid to gender and equality issues, educational and vocational guidance, and distance and distributed learning.

Expectations for students

Equal access to education entails that education suited to students' needs will be made available, but also that realistic expectations will be set for students. It is important for schools and education providers to take into consideration the needs, abilities and competence of each individual student. Allowing room for each student's field of interest in schools and educational settings makes it possible to act on the basis of each individual's strengths and interests, and reduce negative interaction and aggressive or violent behaviour. Students need the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills, and to use and apply the knowledge acquired. Students must also be aware of the importance of being responsible and creative in their quest for knowledge and when considering and formulating arguments. The term 'learning skills' entails self-knowledge, including the ability to know one's own strengths and to set realistic goals. The capacity to learn must also be maintained among adult students who will need to seek new knowledge as a result of changes in the job market. Students will be under increased expectations to show resilience, succeed academically, and complete their studies on time, according to the needs and circumstances at each time. The education system must offer a certain

amount of flexibility to those who need it, and provide appropriate learning support for all students. The development of a sense of responsibility, social skills and community and environmental awareness among students will be an increased priority. There must be a requirement for both children and adults whose native language is not Icelandic to improve their proficiency in Icelandic, and at the same time they must be given opportunities to further advance their knowledge of their native languages and use their strengths to engage in learning on their own terms.

Reading skills and the Icelandic language

Reading skills are a key to a higher quality of life and reflect the ability of individuals to take in and interpret their surroundings, the natural environment and society in a critical way, and to participate in the shaping of those surroundings. Reading skills are the most potent tool to acquire knowledge available to students, and the ability to communicate verbally and in writing is a prerequisite for participation in a democratic society. Learning must involve a particular emphasis on the use and comprehension of language, reading comprehension, communication, writing and listening, so as to enable students to apply their knowledge and skills to analyse, understand, explain and solve problems. Language development as a foundation of learning results from the interaction of multiple factors, and is an undertaking for society as a whole. An effort needs to be made to ensure the active involvement of, for instance, homes, libraries, authors and media outlets in the task of strengthening the reading skills of the population and sparking enthusiasm among students. It is important to maintain and nurture interest in the language and culture of Iceland among all generations. Alongside efforts to preserve the language an essential goal is to strengthen reading skills in a wide sense.

Vocational, trade and technical education

Vocational, trade and technical education is a prerequisite for the sustainability of Icelandic industries, which makes it necessary to ensure a varied educational offer. High demand for workers with a vocational and technical education has led to a skill mismatch in the Icelandic labour market. At the same time, enrolment in technical and vocational programmes has not met expectations. It is important to offer vocational training that appeals to young people regardless of gender and prepares them for participation in society, while also breaking down work stereotypes. For this purpose the Minister of Education, Science and Culture in 2020 signed an understanding with the Federation of Icelandic Industries and the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland on targeted action to expand the pool of workers with a vocational and technical education. The priority is on increasing young people's familiarity with vocational and technical training programmes at the upper-secondary level, and on acquainting them systematically with the large number of programmes available and the job opportunities opened by those programmes. A further priority will be to increase equality of access to higher education for upper secondary school students.

Counselling on lifelong learning and work

A successful education presupposes that students make informed and considered decisions about their education based on their own fields of interest, strengths and values. Educational and vocational guidance supports both individuals' continuous professional development throughout their careers and their ability to chart their own educational and professional paths in light of economic and societal changes. High priority is placed on the access, continuity and synergies of the services provided as a way of ensuring that individuals find productive uses for their skills and a purpose with their education, thereby reducing early school leaving and supporting participation in the labour market. Targeted instruction and counselling increases students' well-being and strengthens their commitment to their education and their school. Educational and vocational guidance should be accessible to everyone, and should be provided by qualified specialists. There is an emphasis on maintaining the quality of the counselling through the use of comprehensive plans for educational and vocational guidance, quality indicators, and digital access to educational and vocational information. It is important to provide educational and vocational training at all levels of the education system as well as in adult education. Improved access to centrally stored educational and vocational information will make it possible to refine each individual's goals and choices, find suitable outlets for people's

potential and strengths, and widen their opportunities for active participation in society. The aim is to ensure continuity of the services provided across education systems and job markets, thus increasing the chances of a successful transition from education to working life, and from youth to adulthood. This will also create additional possibilities for entrepreneurial and innovative activities in the field of educational and vocational guidance. It is important to strengthen the publication of Icelandic informational material for educational and vocational training, considering that this promotes the individual's independent choice of education and occupation. Lifelong educational and vocational guidance must be visible and accessible irrespective of place of residence and other factors, and in that context online guidance and a centralised information portal become important components.

A competitive education system

Every nation's economy is dependent on having highly educated citizens who are capable of creative and critical thinking, have strong social skills, and good command of their native and other languages. Rapid societal changes make strong cooperation between the public administration, the education system and economic actors essential. The Icelandic National Qualifications Framework (ISQF) should be used as a point of reference in all work on developing education programmes and educative structures. International cooperation strengthens development and innovation in schooling. Schools and education providers should aim for the systematic development of a broad range of programmes adapted to the changing needs of society and businesses. Variety and flexibility must be looked upon as a resource and a strength in schools and educational settings. Schools and education providers must start to increasingly evaluate students' competence in order to ensure that they progress more efficiently and to enable them to build on previously acquired knowledge. It should be assumed that competence can be acquired in various ways that are not dependent on specific locations, times or methods, and that competence must be recognised. Care must be taken to develop the education system in a way that takes into account developments in other countries and ensures capacity building, value generation, and quality of life for the citizens. Strong research is a prerequisite for quality work at all school levels, and studies in the field of education are necessary for any academic and policy reform. It is important to make practical use of such studies and relate them to school improvement efforts. The international relations of schools and education providers have strengthened considerably in recent years, both in the field of research collaboration and as regards student and teacher exchanges, and it is important to make even better use of these opportunities to strengthen and develop the relations between educational institutions in Iceland and abroad. Cooperation between the education system and businesses is a prerequisite for making it possible for the former to offer a wide range of programmes relevant to the work that students will take on after they complete their education, and to the future needs of businesses. In this context, innovation and entrepreneurial training, including requirement analyses, requirement specifications, and the development and implementation of solutions, will be of the highest importance. It is also important to promote students' skills in various languages, since learning more languages increases understanding and mobility between countries, which in turn is an incentive for increased productivity, competitiveness and economic resilience among societies.

Lifelong learning and goal-oriented capacity-building

Lifelong learning must be a priority because of the effects that rapid and constant changes in the economy (the fourth industrial revolution) have on people's lives, labour markets and societies. For this reason, provision must be made for mobility in the labour market, professional development and continuing education. People must have adequate access to education irrespective of place of residence, age, gender, prior education, background and financial situation. This can be achieved through the increased cooperation of schools and education providers throughout the country, better continuity of education, the development of distance or distributed education, and cooperation on the publication of online educational materials in Icelandic that support this. Alongside their occupation, adults must have access to a flexible education offer suited to their needs and adapted to their fields of interest and the future challenges of business. Accessible bridges must be built between the formal education system and other education providers. Adults' access to education that strengthens basic

competencies should be a particular priority. The provision and funding of adult education must be mapped more thoroughly in consultation with stakeholders, including vocational training funds managed by the social partners. It is important to expand efforts to evaluate the education of immigrants and refugees to ensure that already acquired knowledge can be put to the best use possible for their benefit and that of society. Priority must also be placed on validation of competence that confirms the individual's competence, and on informal education, regardless how or where it was obtained. There is a need to provide the staff of educational institutions and education providers with more information about multiculturalism, so as to increase their competence in responding to the variety of needs in a diverse student population. Part of this is to ensure that people with disabilities have access to higher education and adult education without discrimination.

Creativity, critical thinking and the practical application of knowledge

Creativity, a fundamental element of the National Curriculum Guides currently in force, furthers students' personal development and stimulates their initiative and innovative thinking. Creativity is an important basis for students' ability to imagine a future and create a place for themselves in it. Those skills must be cultivated systematically from a young age. It is important to provide a learning environment that encourages creativity and critical thinking with a view to sustaining students' motivation, interest and autonomy and supporting a variety of teaching practices and knowledge-seeking processes. Through artistic creation people develop an independent value system. Participation and practice in critical discussion about the role of artistic creation makes people better equipped to engage in societal discourse. Practical school subjects also play a significant role, considering that they provide opportunities to develop mental and physical skills through solution-based tasks and innovative thinking. Artistic creation in education and an increased emphasis on practical subjects supports the practical application of knowledge and has the potential to positively influence students' future environment and enable them to shape the challenges facing Icelandic culture in the present. At the compulsory school level, artistic and practical subjects allow each individual to develop independent value systems and engage in critical discussion. Through creative work and the search for solutions, opportunities arise to influence one's surroundings and participate in shaping culture.

By providing training in how to think and work creatively, we can build a diverse and robust society where industries grounded in intellectual property and forward-looking solutions are an important driving force for sustainability in all areas. Solid understanding of the nature of creative processes encourages initiative, reflection and critical thinking, and is therefore no less important than the outcome of the activity as such. A prerequisite for being able to activate and sustain students' creativity is that they have been provided with a learning environment that encourages initiative, independence and creative thinking in a wide range of areas. Digital workshops and various types of pilot and collaborative projects support innovative thinking at all levels of the education system and in activities managed by education providers.

Digital citizenship and democracy

Democracy is one of the main pillars of the National Curriculum Guides for each school level, as well as of the goals and criteria defined for after-school centres. Furthermore, youth participation is the foundation of all activities in youth centres. There is an emphasis on equality, variety, shared responsibility, solidarity, recognition of different opinions, and respect for diversity and other cultures. Knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote responsible behaviour, and the use of technology in a digital environment, are aspects of growing importance. Students need systematic coaching in information, media and technology literacy throughout their schooling and in adult lifelong learning activities, not least in order to safeguard human rights and ensure that everyone remains active in a democratic society. It is important, in the context of school work and sports and youth activities, to strengthen democratic awareness and to promote critical thinking, tolerance and respect for the other. In connection with their use of online information and communication technologies, it is necessary for students to be aware of the main rules governing safe online interaction and copyright. They should also be given opportunities to add to their knowledge about data protection; respect ethical principles in relation to the treatment and analysis of data and information sources; and demonstrate extended skills in overcoming information chaos, communicating responsibly and using technology. Special

attention should be paid to students' use of social media, and they must be taught appropriate behaviour in a world where standards are still in a flux. There is a need to increase everyone's knowledge of what digital citizenship entails, including by drawing up and publishing official guidelines for digital behaviour.

C. Curriculum guides, learning environments and assessment should promote the development of competencies for the future

The provisions of the National Curriculum Guides should support the priorities set in the education policy

The National Curriculum Guides for preschools, compulsory schools, upper secondary schools and music schools contain provisions on the objectives and organisation of educational activities, as well as on the detailed application of laws and related regulations. The National Curriculum Guides are of concern for students, parents and the staff of schools and school services and contain common objectives for learning and teaching at each school level, as well as in music schools. The National Curriculum Guides serve both as governing tools to implement the provisions of law and the instructions of education authorities regarding school policy, and as a collection of common objectives for schooling in Iceland. They are intended to harmonise learning and teaching to the extent considered necessary, and to safeguard the right of all students to a certain minimum level of education and an equal opportunity to study. It is important for the National Curriculum Guides for preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools to reflect the priorities that will apply in education until 2030 and to promote the development of competencies for the future, and they will be put under careful scrutiny with this in mind. It must also be ensured that they support international obligations undertaken by Iceland. Priority will be placed on making available to students a wide range of educational materials adapted to digital developments and the diversity of the student population and consistent with the priorities of the National Curriculum Guides.

Well-being and the learning environment

It is important for learning, and the learning environment, to be perceived as relevant by all students from the time they start school, regardless of gender, age, background, strengths or needs, and it must promote the development of competencies for the future. From the start, students should be given opportunities to influence their learning environments and to participate in the creation of a positive school atmosphere and social rules that emphasise their responsibilities and duties. Learning environments outside the school room will be an increased priority, including in the context of environmental studies and vocational training. Special emphasis will be placed on physical and mental health promotion and preventive work by teaching and developing behavioural, social and emotional skills, so as to reinforce desirable behaviours and promote resilience in students. This simultaneously lays the foundations for preventing the establishment of unhealthy interaction patterns and violent behaviour. Students should receive this training at all school levels, in all types of school, from other education providers and in the context of after-school activities, and this needs to be supported by smooth and efficient cooperation between homes and schools. There is also a need to look into physical and mental health promotion and preventive work among adults. It is important to carefully monitor the well-being of all students and take appropriate action quickly, in close cooperation with homes, schools and other experts, in response to any signs of distress among students or of violent behaviour of any kind. Children and adolescents who are in good mental health experience psychological well-being that makes it easier for them to apply their talents, participate actively, and use constructive approaches to cope with inevitable stressful events and hardships in their lives. It is important for students to feel that principles of equality are being upheld, and that they are not in an environment where they risk psychological, physical, gender-based or sexual violence, harassment or bullying. In that context the importance of sex education and sexual health needs to be reaffirmed.

Student's influence on their own learning, and student democracy

The implementation at the level of schooling of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes it possible to systematically harness children's increased participation in all aspects of decision-making and student democracy. It is a priority to ensure that students know how to take responsibility for their own learning, that they form sound working habits and develop a growth mentality, and that they understand how to set their

own goals. Parents of children who are still minors are also responsible for their children's learning and behaviour. Students acquire a more acute sense of responsibility when they have the opportunity to choose their own tasks and make decisions about their learning in a way that renders it meaningful to them, and makes it clear to them that they can influence their own learning environment. They can do this to the extent that their age and maturity allows. Responsibility only grows if students become used to making decisions and following them up, whether they are decisions that they make on their own or decisions made with others. Students must have the possibility to influence their learning environment in order to increase their motivation and independence, as well as to make them more responsible for their own learning and welfare. Priority will be placed on ensuring that, in all activities managed by schools or education providers, students of all ages are afforded the right and the possibility to express their views and that their opinions are given due weight in accordance with their age and level of maturity. People of all ages should be encouraged to participate actively in society, discuss and explore sensitive topics, and take part in debating and deciding important issues. Active student democracy among students of all ages must be a further priority. The active democratic engagement by students at all school levels, and their participation in local youth councils and various organisations, can kindle their interest in the country's democratic processes.

Early support

Early support and prevention entails that action is taken either at an early stage in a child's life or as soon as a situation arises where it becomes clear that a student is in need of support of some kind. The support can be directed at the student or at the student's environment. Particular attention must be paid to adapting the support provided to the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups. How important the first few years of life are for all subsequent development has been clear for a long time, and research in developmental psychology over the last few decades has also demonstrated the significant role of environmental factors in the development of children. The strengthening of preschool education, including an emphasis on early support, will therefore be a particular priority. There is also a need for appropriate support, intervention and preventive strategies at all levels of the education system. That work will require interdisciplinary support and increased cooperation between systems, building on the most recent research.

Assessment

The primary purpose of assessment is to provide indicative information about the learning progress, motivate students, evaluate the need for additional support, and monitor how well students manage to meet goals, both those that they have set themselves and those of the National Curriculum Guide. Assessment is a regular feature of the work in the school and is useful to students, parents, teachers and school leaders as a tool to stimulate further progress. It is important to ensure that high quality assessment is provided at all school levels, and that it promotes the development of competencies for the future. The assessment should evaluate students' competencies in a transparent and guiding manner, while taking into account the different competencies of each individual. Special attention must be paid to the equal rights of students with disabilities and to those of students with learning or social difficulties. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that assessment is presented in a way that provides, at regular intervals, precise and standardised information about the student's learning progress. There is also a need to consider varied types of assessment of students' learning and welfare, such as formative assessment or the active involvement of students in the assessment of their own learning. It is further important, as part of the assessment, to monitor social and academic progress in terms of the values of the education policy and the competences to which it relates. Given the importance of assessment as a tool to strengthen the education system, every effort should be made to provide clear and rapid feedback to students, teachers and parents. It is important to establish a common understanding of the goals and priorities of assessment, and ensure that these priorities are aligned with those of the National Curriculum Guide. This establishes a better foundation for the standardisation of learning and teaching, and of the assessment of learning progress.

D. Shared responsibility for the provision and quality of schooling

Responsibility

It is important to promote shared responsibility for maintaining an integrated education system extending from preschool to lifelong learning. Central and local education authorities, school services,

school leaders, education providers, teachers, and other professionals in the education system are jointly responsible for ensuring that work in schools and other educational settings is subject to continual revision, and that a commitment to reform characterises the work of those sharing this responsibility. The provision and quality of schooling and other educational activities are dependent on clearly defined roles and responsibilities where the interests of the students take priority. Central and local authorities and other entities authorised to operate schools or manage other educational activities must ensure that students receive education and teaching suited to their needs in conformity with the provisions of law, the National Curriculum Guides, the priorities of the applicable education policy, and international agreements entered into by Iceland. It is important to ensure clear and focused management and professional leadership as well as efficient cooperation between all actors in the education system. The provisions of legislation in the field of education and the policy laid down in the National Curriculum Guides are implemented on a professional basis by teachers in preschools, compulsory schools, upper-secondary schools and music schools as part of their teaching and other work in schools and educational settings. Parents of children who are still minors are responsible for their children's upbringing and education, and the students take responsibility for their own learning in accordance with their age and level of maturity. It is therefore necessary to foster active cooperation between homes and schools based on mutual respect, trust and the exchange of information, with a view to promoting successful schooling.

Expectations for parents

High priority is placed on well-functioning cooperation between homes and schools, where mutual respect and trust is exercised to ensure that all students are able to make full use of their talents. There is a lot to be gained from promoting academic achievement and fostering students' welfare, resilience and well-being. Well-being and good social relations are a crucial prerequisite for children's education and successful schooling. Parents are important partners who are in possession of inestimable knowledge which must be put to use for the benefit of their children. They are responsible for the upbringing and moral development of their children, and for ensuring that they arrive in school well-prepared for the school day, both mentally and physically. Schools and homes share the responsibility for the overall education and development of the students, and for their active participation in a democratic society. Under Icelandic law, school leaders are responsible for the follow-up of this cooperation, and for ensuring that each school has a parents' association and that parents are represented on school and parent councils. It is important that each school provide a clear explanation of the cooperation between homes and the school in a modern society, both at each school level and in all organised activities with children and young people who are still minors. There is a need to explain the aspects to which the cooperation extends, including the roles, responsibilities and duties of all those involved in the education and development of the students, with the aid of guidelines and criteria.

Coordination between service providers

Cooperation, consultation and integration within and between systems should become the defining feature of the implementation of the education policy so as to enable the systems to fulfil their complex service roles in a concerted way, thereby ensuring that individuals do well in life. One aspect of this integration is the division into levels of the welfare services provided by the different systems. In connection with all support and intervention it is of importance that society's support systems serve students in a unified way and provide continuous intervention where needed through the services of different responsible parties and various professional groups. An emphasis will be placed on the shared responsibility and cooperation of the education, health and social services systems at all levels of the education system. It is important to formulate harmonised criteria for the services to be provided to students and schools throughout the country, including by defining coordinated service areas for all issues concerning children. The focus will be on integrated school services covering preschools, compulsory schools, upper secondary schools, schools providing arts education, higher education institutions and adult education, with an emphasis on multilevel learning support and support for parents and school staff.

Reform-oriented internal and external reviews

Clear responsibilities as regards the provision and quality of school and education activities are important. External and internal reviews of schools and educational settings are an important motivator for reform and development in educational institutions. A prerequisite is that reviews are well conducted, that they are based on clear and well-supported criteria with regard to all aspects, and that they involve the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of data that are descriptive of the activities. Such reviews must be strengthened and developed in respect of such factors as the official education policy and other measures of performance. Schools and education providers are responsible for their own internal reviews, external reviews of schools being conducted by the Ministry and local authorities.

It is important to place external reviews on a solid footing for the education system as a whole in cooperation between central and local government and other education providers, and to ensure that reviews are conducted at regular intervals. External reviews must also be followed up with targeted support for reform. The results of external reviews should furthermore be used to support the results of schools' internal reviews. Moreover, the Ministry is responsible for ensuring that local authorities meet their legal obligations in relation to schools, as appropriate. The Ministry also has an obligation to monitor the situation, development and funding of the education system. For this purpose, the Ministry gathers various types of information about schools and educational settings, including through participation in international surveys of academic achievement. It is of the essence to always make use of the results of external and internal reviews for the purpose of reform in schools and other educational settings. Student self-assessment should be promoted at all school levels, in the work of education providers and in after-school activities.

Education statistics

A prerequisite for improving and coordinating services and the provision of information about the education system is that all important data are gathered centrally and made accessible in a systematic way. External and internal reviews must be used for the purpose of reform in schools and educational settings, building on scientific results, well-defined observations, and statistical data analysis. Key figures must be defined and published regularly, and should cover such aspects as academic achievement, well-being, early school leaving, the proportion of students enrolled in vocational, trade and technical programmes, access to learning and vocational training in all regions, and the cost of operating the education system. Targeted effort is needed to strengthen all statistical services and make statistical data available in coordinated ways, so as to make the best use possible of the information for the benefit of society.

Efficient use of funds

Efficient budget appropriations and clear goals as regards the quality of the education and services provided support the development of an education system with the potential to best meet society's needs in the present. For the Icelandic education system to be able to guarantee equal opportunity to study and for active participation, it must be well funded and research-based. Rules and criteria relating to the funding of preschools, compulsory schools and music schools will be revised in cooperation between central and local government, with a view to reducing response-based support in favour of support and prevention designed to increase the system's ability to operate on the basis of equity and cost-effectiveness. There is also a need for transparency in the way funds are allocated in an inclusive education system. The government further intends to continue its ongoing work on the revision and implementation of budget appropriation models.