

14 March 2011

# Screening report

## Iceland

### Chapter 26 – Education and culture

**Date of screening meetings:**

Explanatory meeting: 26 November 2010

Bilateral meeting: 14 January 2011

## I. CHAPTER CONTENT

The areas of education and training, youth, sport and culture are primarily the competence of the Member States. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFUE) provides that the Union shall encourage cooperation between Member States and support and supplement their actions, while fully respecting their responsibility for the content of teaching, organisation of education and vocational training systems, and their national and regional cultural diversity. The TFUE also provides that the Union shall contribute to promoting European sporting issues.

The *acquis* on education and culture consists mainly of a cooperation framework through programmes and the open method of coordination (OMC), which aims at convergence of national policies and attainment of shared objectives. In the field of education, training and youth, Member States need to have the legal, administrative and financial framework, as well as the necessary implementing capacity in place, to ensure sound management, including financial management, of decentralised EU programmes. The *acquis* also contains a Directive on education of the children of migrant workers<sup>1</sup> and the judgments of the European Court of Justice on cases related to non-discrimination between nationals of an EU Member State and other EU nationals. The objectives of education and training systems endorsed in 2001, as well as the Copenhagen process for vocational training and the Bologna process for higher education, are providing directions for the improvement of the quality of education and training systems. The work programme 'Education and Training 2010', and the strategic framework 'Education and Training 2020', integrate all actions at European level, towards improving and developing the quality of education and training systems. Common objectives for the EU youth policies have been set out in the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018), which is based on a reinforced open method of coordination. In the field of sport, the 2011 Commission Communication "Developing the European Dimension in Sport" proposes concrete actions to support and coordinate policy measures, with a view to the possible adoption of a first multi-annual EU work plan for sport by the Council.

As regards cultural policy, Member States need to uphold the principles enshrined in Article 167 of the TFUE and, in particular, ensure that their international commitments allow for the development and implementation of policies and instruments aimed at preserving and promoting cultural diversity. In accordance with these principles, the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is a major element of the *acquis* in the field of culture. The Commission Communication on a European Agenda for culture in a globalising world introduced a structured dialogue with the cultural sector and an open method of coordination, in order to implement three common sets of objectives: cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; culture as a catalyst for creativity; and culture as a key component in international relations.

The European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement partly covers the provisions of the *acquis* in the field of education and culture, namely concerning the coordination of policies (Articles 1(2) and 78) and the education of children of EU migrant workers (Annex V).

## II. COUNTRY ALIGNMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY

This part summarises the information provided by Iceland and the discussion at the screening meeting.

Iceland stated that it can accept the *acquis* regarding this chapter and added that it was already applying most provisions of the *acquis* as a consequence of its EEA commitments.

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<sup>1</sup> Directive 77/486/EEC, OJ L 199, 06/08/1977, p. 32.

Overall, Iceland does not expect any difficulties to implement the *acquis* by the time of accession.

## **II.a. Education, training, youth and sport**

### Cooperation in the field of policies

#### *Education and training*

Iceland has been participating in the peer-learning activities and reporting system of the EU open method of coordination (OMC) on education since 2002 and develops its policies in this field in line with European standards.

Regarding the Europe 2020 headline target related indicators, the share of early leavers from education and training is higher in Iceland than on average in the EU (21.4% in 2009, compared to an EU average of 14.4%). However, the share of 30-34 year old people with tertiary education attainment is also higher than the EU average (41.8% in 2009, already above the EU 2020 target level). Iceland stated that early school leaving was, up to now, mainly due to the high level of labour force demand and to the possibility for students to leave the education system and continue their education at a later stage through adult-learning opportunities.

The Iceland 2020 strategy sets education-related objectives aiming inter alia at reducing the share of the labour force with limited or no education to 10% or less by 2020 (from 30% in 2010).

As regards other common European Education and Training benchmark indicators, according to the latest available data, 96.2 % of 4 year-olds participate in early school education and 25.1% of adults participate in lifelong learning (above the EU average targets of respectively 95 % and 15 % for 2020). The share of low achievers among 15 year-olds in reading, maths and science are 16.8 %, 17% and 17.9 % respectively (while the EU average target for 2020 is 15 %). Public investment on education amounted to 7.4 % of GDP in 2007.

Iceland has a comprehensive education system where general education and vocational education and training (VET) are on equal footing. Private education institutions receive public funding. The education system entails pre-school, compulsory (primary and lower secondary), upper secondary and higher education. Lifelong learning centres have been established in the capital as well as in the regions.

Education is steered centrally by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. It is composed of about 80 staff members. The education system is largely decentralised with pre-schools and compulsory schools run by the municipalities. The ministry is in charge of providing curriculum guides for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools, issuing regulations and planning educational reforms. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for labour-market measures with emphasis on work-related solutions that include vocational training.

Iceland stated that the social partners and decision-makers co-operate closely. Three *Education and Training 2010* conferences have been organised with the support of the European Commission. The cooperation between the relevant ministries on the policy making process is ad hoc and informal. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture collaborates with the Prime Minister's Office on the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) policy.

Iceland's legislation underpins the Lifelong Learning Strategy and concerns all school stages as well as teacher education and adult education. The education policy follows the line of the EU work-programme "Education and Training 2010": the curriculum reform and the new regulations are based on decentralization, key competences, learning outcomes, National Qualification Framework (NQF) aligned to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and quality assurance. The Icelandic legislation reinforces the quality of teachers' education, enhances the relationship between education and the social partners and foresees the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the 2004 Common European Principles. The Education and Training Service Centre has developed special curricula for non-formal education which are applied by the lifelong learning centres. Iceland stressed that it encourages, at all levels, links between education and research, entrepreneurship, innovation and democracy. With the Law on Adult Education of 2010 a formal adult education system has been established. Current discussions on higher education reform may lead to increasing cooperation among public universities or even merging public universities.

### *Youth and Sport*

In the field of youth, Iceland stated that it is committed towards the Treaty objectives and the participation in the relevant EU cooperation frameworks. Iceland participated in some activities of the last cycle of the previous open method of coordination (OMC) in the field of youth and has expressed the wish to participate in the renewed OMC, launched together with the new EU youth strategy in November 2009. Iceland's policies are in line with the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018.

Iceland has no central coordinating body in the youth field. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture organises and funds through the independently-managed Youth Fund some leisure activities for youth at national level. The line ministries form ad-hoc groups as necessary. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for issues related to youth employment and social inclusion. The youth policy is made by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the National Youth Council and other relevant stakeholders.

The Youth Act (2007) emphasises the importance of youth and its role in democracy. It stipulates that municipalities should set up youth councils advising municipal authorities on youth issues. Municipal governments define the role and selection rules of youth councils. Funds can be allocated for youth activities at municipal level.

The youth (16-24) unemployment rate was 16% in 2009. Young people can benefit from the Innovation Fund funded equally by the government and the companies involved.

In the area of sport, the Sports Act (1998) stipulates that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for sports activities if the State becomes involved. The main responsibility for sport activities remains with the municipalities. The ministry collects information on sports' practice and facilities and supports research in the field. The ministry is working with governmental bodies and sports federations on anti-doping measures. It is responsible for international co-operation with the Council of Europe and the European Union. The National Olympic and Sports Association of Iceland composed of all national sport federations, the Icelandic Youth Association and the Icelandic Federation of the Handicapped raise and spend funds in their respective areas of responsibility, inter alia by operating betting pools and lotto games. The Sports Fund, the Outstanding Athletes Fund and the Chess Grandmasters' Salary Fund are under the auspices of the ministry and receive a direct contribution from the national budget. Relevant laws establish their role and interaction with the ministry.

### Access to education for EU citizens

The right to receive general education is guaranteed by article 76 of the Constitution of Iceland which stipulates that the law shall guarantee for everyone suitable general education and tuition. The Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, incorporated into Icelandic law by Act 62/1994, guarantees the right to education. Compulsory education in Iceland is free of charge; various professional services are also provided, including school counselling, psychological assistance and special education services. The right to education in compulsory schools for children who had not been properly registered or allocated a personal identification number is guaranteed as soon as they are residing in Iceland.

Directive 77/486/EEC on the education of children of migrant workers has been transposed into the Act on Primary School 91/2008. This Act provides that the schools should have reception plans taking into account the needs of pupils whose mother tongue is not Icelandic. The plans vary from one school to another. Measures can include extra Icelandic courses every week, specific classes for several weeks before integration into the regular classrooms, or placement in a specific receiving department for immigrants for up to a year or longer.

Regarding the non discrimination principle Iceland underlined that no specific admission rules apply for foreign students. Iceland stated that it has drafted a new regulation concerning the access of EEA citizens to loans from the Icelandic Student Loan.

### European Union programmes

Iceland has been participating in centralised and decentralised programmes on education and training since 1990.

Iceland has a fully operational national agency for the Life-long Learning Programme (LLP), supervised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Even though the agency is located in a university, Iceland stated that no positive discrimination has been observed in favour of this university. The ministry is however reflecting on a solution to dissipate any possible doubt. The agency is expanding its relationships with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Union.

All universities and approximately 85% of all primary and upper secondary schools have participated in EU education projects facilitated by the national agency. Mobility has historically been a prevailing theme in Icelandic higher education but the LLP programme has nevertheless added a new dimension to student, teacher and staff exchanges at European level. The programme has also brought international mobility and a European dimension to other education levels, especially in the last few years with the growing emphasis on the Comenius programme. Iceland intends to enhance synergies while managing the Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci programmes.

Iceland has been participating in the EU programmes on youth since 1994. The National Agency in charge of the Youth in Action programme is managed by non-governmental actors and supervised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. About 8000 young people have taken part in the programme's activities. Iceland stated that its impact is evaluated positively by the beneficiaries.

Iceland is planning to streamline and better harmonise the activities of the two National Agencies on LLP and Youth in Action.

Iceland participates in Erasmus Mundus.

Iceland participates as an observer in the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT). As of 2011 Iceland has a member and an alternative member from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture on the committee, and is considering whether to nominate observers from the trade unions and from the employers' organisation.

Iceland participates as an observer in the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) activities. On average and annually, ten Icelanders take part in the CEDEFOP study visits to other countries. Two study visits are planned to be hosted in Iceland in 2011.

Iceland is neither contributing to nor benefiting from the European Training Foundation's (ETF) activities but experts in the Ministry are aware of ETF's work.

## **II.b. Culture**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for developing policies as well as administering the artistic, cultural and cultural heritage affairs. To ensure a fertile environment for and development of activities instigated by others, the Ministry's cultural agreements with local authorities support cultural activities throughout Iceland. Most of those activities are managed by individuals and non-governmental organisations independently from any official intervention in terms of content and structure.

The creative industry represents the third biggest share of Iceland's GDP. The public expenditure in the cultural sector (2.4% of GDP) covers *inter alia* the operating costs of arts institutions, direct grants to independent arts organisations, salaries of artists, funds supporting the artistic and cultural affairs (e.g. Literature Fund, and Music Fund) and the promotion of Icelandic arts and artists abroad. State-owned and -run institutions include the National Theatre, the National Gallery and the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service. The Ministry also deals with cultural history museums and cultural heritage by funding operating costs of cultural institutions, financing institutions promoting cultural heritage, funding projects, issuing research licences and monitoring research. Some activities are funded by the Icelandic Development Agency. Private support by financial institutions has decreased since the crisis.

Public institutions play a substantial role in the preservation of cultural heritage. The main museums or galleries are run or funded by the state and/or local authorities. The Ministry emphasises the autonomy of cultural state-run institutions with which performance-based agreements have been concluded. To ensure professionalism in the field of cultural heritage, the state provides project grants of various types, including archaeological research, building preservation and exhibitions.

### Cooperation in the field of policies

The first cultural policy design of Iceland is under preparation by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. It is based on a broad consultation with stakeholders in the arts and cultural heritage fields. State support to arts and culture is meant to ensure access to Icelandic citizens to arts and culture regardless of their social status and to ensure a favourable working environment for artists.

Iceland subscribes to the EU Cultural Agenda's provisions. Iceland has formally asked for the participation of EEA States in the OMC on culture.

Iceland adopted the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Cultural Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2007.

Iceland took measures to strengthen the artists' salary fund, to increase international cultural co-operation, and more specifically to stimulate the mobility of artists. The Ministry is active at enhancing cultural research which aims at developing evidence-based policies. Iceland intends to maintain its support to the cultural sector at the same level as before the financial crisis.

### Community Programmes

#### *Culture Programme*

The Cultural Contact Point in Iceland promotes the EU Culture Programme 2007-2013. It sends practical information to cultural institutions, artists' unions and other stakeholders and has regular information and promotion meetings on the programme, sometimes in co-operation with the National Agencies for other EU programmes.

Iceland has been participating in the EU cultural programmes since 1994 and the experience is very positive. Exchanges with EU stakeholders are highly appreciated. Icelandic artists and institutions have been co-organisers and participants in many projects. Iceland is willing to participate in the European Heritage Label programme.

#### *Europe for Citizens*

Iceland is currently not participating in the Europe for Citizens programme. This is due to the EFTA rules that prevented its unilateral decision on this matter. However, Iceland expressed the wish to participate in the programme by the time of accession at the latest.

### **III. ASSESSMENT OF THE DEGREE OF ALIGNMENT AND IMPLEMENTING CAPACITY**

Overall, Iceland has already taken over and implements most of the *acquis* in the field of education, training, youth, culture and sport. During the pre-accession period Iceland will need to keep applying the provisions of the *acquis*.

#### **III.a. Education, training, youth and sport**

Iceland participates in the activities of the open method of coordination on education and training. No particular difficulties are expected for Iceland's full participation and implementation regarding the common objectives and priorities set out at EU level by the time of accession. Iceland's youth policy is largely in line with the EU Youth Strategy. Iceland is encouraged to enhance its youth policy coordination on the national level. No particular difficulties are expected regarding Iceland's full implementation of the EU *acquis* on sport by the time of accession.

#### Access to education for EU citizens

Iceland has transposed the EU Directive on the education of children of migrant workers. Its legislation is in line also with the non-discrimination principle. No particular difficulties are expected for the implementation of the *acquis* in this area.

#### European Union programmes

Iceland already participates in all EU programmes. As regards the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action programmes, Iceland's participation and the management of its two national agencies are overall satisfactory. It is encouraged to take into account the Commission's

recommendations concerning the management of the programmes by the National Agencies and supervision by the National Authorities. Iceland may enhance its involvement in Erasmus Mundus by encouraging its institutions to apply as project coordinator.

### **III.b. Culture**

Iceland is committed towards the objectives set up by the Treaty and the EU's Cultural Agenda and is willing to promote culture and development of cultural policies with the provisions of Article 167 TFUE. Iceland has requested to participate in the EU policy cooperation framework in the field of culture. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is applicable in Iceland.

Iceland actively participates in the Culture Programme 2007-2013. No difficulties are expected concerning its participation in Europe for Citizens programme, as this programme is centrally managed and no requirement to establish national structures such as a National Agency and a National Authority exists.