Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education

Teacher education for Compulsory school teachers was upgraded to university level in 1971 and education of Pre-primary school teachers in 1998.

Courses leading to Pre-primary school teaching and Compulsory school teaching have tended to be concurrent programs. Courses leading to teaching in Upper secondary schools, vocational programs and art education are usually arranged in consecutive model.

Icelandic legislation requires a 180-credit bachelor’s degree and a 120-credit 5 master’s degree to be issued with a licence to teach in preschool, compulsory school and secondary school.

For Pre-primary teacher's certificate a minimum of 150 ECTS in education studies are required and min. 90 ECST in subject fields related to Pre-primary school curriculum.

For Compulsory teacher's certificate a minimum of 120 ECTS in education studies are required and min. 120 ECST in subject fields related to primary or secondary curriculum.

For Upper secondary teacher's certificate, a minimum of 60 ECTS in education studies are required and min. 180 ECST in a subject field related to primary or secondary curriculum.

Academic programmes and education for teachers in Arts or in Sport and Health Sciences are similarly organized and students graduate with a Master’s degree.

Vocational teachers’ educational requirements include 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies in addition to a final diploma in vocational field; such as qualification as Master craftsman in a trade.

Program for teachers in special education has been provided since 1974 and is currently offered as elective line of study at master’s level at the School of education at the University of Iceland.

Practical field work in initial teacher's education takes place in educational institutions at the respective level.

On this page
Institutions, Level and Models of Training

Four University institutions in Iceland currently provide formal courses towards teacher’s certificate in accordance with legal requirements for recruitment of teachers and head teachers in Pre-primary school, Compulsory school and Upper secondary school. The University of Iceland offers several lines of study towards teacher’s certificate:

a. 300 ECTS concurrent studies towards a Master’s degree in early childhood education according to Icelandic law Act on teacher education, no 87/2008. Minimum of 150 ECTS are in education studies and min. 90 ECST in subject fields related to Pre-primary school curriculum.

b. 300 ECTS concurrent studies towards a Master’s degree in Compulsory education. Minimum of 120 ECTS are in education studies and min. 120 ECST in subject fields related to primary or secondary curriculum according to Icelandic law Act on teacher education, no 87/2008.

c. A two-year theoretical and professional programme towards a M.Ed. degree, 120 ECTS. The programme is intended for working teachers and others working in the field of pedagogy who would like to increase their knowledge and skills.

d. 120 credit units in Pedagogy and Teacher Certification Studies in addition to a final diploma in vocational field; such as qualification as Master craftsman in a trade.

e. 60 credit units in Pedagogy and Teacher Certification Studies for those who have already finished a Masters or a Doctors degree in other studies.

The University of Akureyri offers three main avenues of study are available in the Faculty of Education: BEd, 180 credits; MEd, 120 credits; and MA, 120 credits. The first two programmes comprise vocational studies for teachers and the MEd part of the programme is also open to students with bachelor degrees of other types than BEd. The MA programme is a postgraduate course of study intended for those who wish to improve their specialist knowledge, vocational and research abilities in the field of education. Most of those who enrol for this programme are teachers in employment. The objectives and organisation of all these programmes of study comply with the notification by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture regarding criteria for higher education and degree examinations (No. 530/2011).
a. 180 ECTS concurrent course in primary and lower secondary school studies towards a B. Ed. degree with the possibility to continue Masters Study (120 ECST) to prepare students for teaching in the primary and lower secondary schools.

b. 180 ECTS concurrent course in Pre-primary school studies towards a B. Ed. degree with the possibility to continue Masters Study (120 ECST) to prepare students for teaching in Pre-primary schools and first grades of primary schools.

c. 60 ETCS Diploma Studies leading to Dipl. Ed. in Education. This program is intended for those who have completed a bachelor’s degree or an equivalent degree, and have a professional certificate in the areas of teaching, training, and care.

The Iceland Academy of the Arts [10] offers programmes, allowing graduates to apply for certification to teach at the primary and secondary school levels. The programmes are:

A two-year, 120 ECTS Master’s Programme in Arts Education culminating in an M.Art.Ed or MA Degree.

A one-year, 60 ECTS Diploma Programme.

An additional Master's Degree Programme for those who have completed the 60 ECTS towards a teaching certificates Degree awards for further study and work, students can apply for qualification (licence) as art teachers at elementary and secondary levels.

The Reykjavik University offers an MEd degree Sports and Health Education which is intended for those, who wish to specialize in health training in general and sport education at all school levels.

This is a two-year graduate programme, 120 ECTS. The programme is divided into 60 ECTS in pedagogy and 60 ECTS in sport science and health promotion. The target group are students who have completed undergraduate studies in sport science, physical therapy, health training, biology, education science, or other related disciplines.

**Admission Requirements**

Those who have completed matriculation examination from an upper secondary school have the right to apply to teacher training institutions. If there is limited number of places available for student teachers at the teacher education program the institution uses a selection procedure when admitting applicants to the program. The admission requirements are determined by each individual institution.

To be admitted into the teacher education certification programme (the consecutive model), applicants should have completed a relevant Bachelor degree program (180 ECTS).

To be admitted into the teacher education certification programme in vocational fields, applicants should have completed final exam in a vocational field. In the case of registered industries applicants should be enrolled in or have completed a program leading to diploma for Master craftsman in a trade.
Curriculum, Level of Specialisation and Learning Outcomes

The Law on the education and recruitment of teachers and head teachers in Pre-primary school, Compulsory school and Upper secondary school [8] stipulates the general educational requirements to become a Pre-primary, Compulsory and Upper secondary school teacher. The law requires for most teachers a Master’s degree (300 ECTS) in education or in respective field of study together with Teacher Certification Studies. For vocational teachers, educational requirements include 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies in addition to a final diploma in vocational field; such as qualification as Master craftsman in a trade.

Regulation on the content of teacher education, nr. 872/2009 [11], outlines further requirements for categories of teachers.

For Pre-primary teacher's certificate minimum of 150 ECTS in education studies are required and min. 90 ECST in subject fields related to Pre-primary school curriculum.

For Compulsory teacher's certificate a minimum of 120 ECTS in education studies are required and min. 120 ECST in subject fields related to primary or secondary curriculum.

For Upper secondary teacher’s certificate, a minimum of 60 ECTS in education studies are required and min. 180 ECST in a subject area related to secondary curriculum. At least 60 ECTS in the main subject should be at Masters level.

For vocational teachers, educational requirements include 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies in addition to a final diploma in a vocational field; such as qualification as Master craftsman in a trade.

There are no Compulsory core subjects of teacher education defined centrally. Each teacher education institution sets curriculum guidelines for study lines in initial teacher education and determines content areas, competences and learning outcomes. The way in which teacher education is organised, theoretical studies and teaching practice arranged, differs between institutions and the various lines of study as well.

All four universities currently providing teacher education programs, the University of Iceland [7], the University of Akureyri [9], Reykjavik University and Iceland Academy of the Arts [10] offer various modes of programs. Teacher education programs are normally organised in two study cycles in accordance with the Bologna scheme; first cycle at bachelor level, second cycle at Masters level. Courses leading to Pre-primary school teaching and Compulsory school teaching have tended to be organised as concurrent programs. Courses leading to teaching in Upper secondary schools, vocational programs and art education are usually arranged in consecutive model.

The University of Iceland [7] and the University of Akureyri [9] provide general teacher education intended for those who plan for a teaching carrier or related work at Pre-primary and Compulsory levels of the school system. The content and organisation of the programmes is based on Law on the education and recruitment of teachers and head teachers in Pre-primary school, Compulsory school and Upper secondary school [8] and further in legislation on education educational legislation, the national curriculum for Pre-
primary schools and Compulsory schools.

All four universities run internet based instruction and in the University of Iceland [7] and the University of Akureyri [9] student teachers have the option to finish teacher education in distance mode; either partially or completely.

Teacher Educators in each institution are responsible for formal assessment of student teachers’ performance and qualifications. The Ministry of education, science and culture [12] supervises teacher education programs.

The general teacher education programs are normally organised in two cycles. The first leads towards a B.Ed.-degree and allows student teachers to apply for masters’ studies leading to a M.Ed.-degree which is required for a teaching license.

The programmes on General teacher education for Compulsory school consist basically of educational theory and teaching skills, theoretical foundation for education, didactics, methodology and information technology. In the undergraduate programme student teachers specialize in two elective fields, 80 ECTS (i.e. 40 ECTS in each field). Elective fields are school subjects and cross curricular educational fields, like early childhood education. Student practice is vital part of the professional studies. The final thesis is 10 ECTS in students’ field of interest.

In the general, teacher education student who are going to be Pre-primary school teachers consists basically of educational theory, especially methodology of early childhood education. They specialize in pedagogics of subject fields, educational research and human communication. Student practice is vital part of the professional studies. The final thesis is 10 ECTS in students’ field of interest.

Student teachers in Pre-primary school education can choose special subjects in their study (60 ECTS) which can give them permission to teach in the first 3 classis in Compulsory schools. In the same way can Compulsory teachers have permission to teach in Pre-primary school if they specialize in early childhood education (60 ECTS).

The University of Iceland [7], the University of Akureyri [9], Reykjavik University and Iceland Academy of the Arts [10] provide the 2nd cycle masters programs in teacher education leading to M.Ed. degree 120 ECTS (Consecutive model). The programmes are intended for those who plan for a teaching at Upper secondary schools, and also those who aim at teaching at Pre-primary level and Compulsory level and have finished the first cycle of teacher education. There is considerable divergence between institutions in the master’s level teacher education programs. The emphasis in content and organisation can vary depending on previous studies of student teachers and their concentration on school level; i.e. Upper secondary, Compulsory or Pre-primary school level.

The masters programs are most often structured as a fulltime study, although part time studies are possible. Most courses are structured so that students can take them in distance education. They are based on on-site sessions and afternoon/evening teaching, as well as computer- and internet communication. Afternoon/evening lectures can be broadcast online but other courses are only campus-based.
Master's studies are to a large extent based on independent reading and projects demanding critical thinking and analytical skills. Student teachers are expected to be able to read materials in foreign languages (primarily English and the Scandinavian languages) and that they can use possibilities of the information technologies in terms of knowledge gathering and sharing. Demands are made for initiative, critical thinking, independent work methods and ability to work in a team. Assessment in master’s studies is guided by these demands. Additionally, the following are considered in assessment: students skills in treatment of references (presentation and use); knowledge sharing in written and spoken language; use of references in own argumentation; analytical presentation (rather than descriptive); rigorous work methods, for instance in framing and presentation of material. Many courses include seminars, group discussions and cooperative studies of varying kinds, which expect the active involvement of students.

Teacher education for vocational teachers is offered as an undergraduate diploma programme. The programme is organized as 60 ECTS and is intended for those who want to prepare for teaching in Compulsory and Upper secondary schools. The official length of the programme is full time university studies for one year. Studies are based on the previous education and experience of students. The level of qualification is the first cycle in accordance with the Bologna scheme (Diploma programme).

To get an admission to the programme the applicants have to fulfil legal regulation nr. 87/2008 regarding subject studies in a vocational subject (letter of certification in a trade, vocational/industrial training, technological studies, engineering studies or other equivalent

**Teachers Educators**

Minimum educational requirements for Teacher Educators at university institutions are the same as for academic teachers in general in Iceland. According to Higher Education Institution Act. They shall have at least completed a master’s degree or have equivalent knowledge and experience as reviewed by the evaluation committee. Furthermore, they shall have demonstrated sufficient achievement in their work to enjoy recognition in the respective field of study. As other university teachers Teacher Educators shall conduct and be responsible for teaching that leads to an accredited degree. They also have the duty to carry out independent scientific research. The same minimum qualifications apply to Teacher Educators working in programs preparing student teachers for Pre-primary schools, Compulsory schools and Upper secondary schools. Currently increasing number of university based Teacher Educators have Ph.D. degree.

There are no formal requirements for field based Teacher Educators or supervisors of student teachers in schools.

**Qualification, Evaluation and Certificates**

Each institution is responsible for the criteria for evaluation and award of qualifications in teacher education programs. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture accrredits teacher education diplomas of graduates who meet the qualification requirements that are specified in the Law on the education and recruitment of teachers and head teachers in Pre-
The Minister of education, Science and Culture grants a certificate for licence to use the title Pre-primary school teacher, Compulsory school teacher or Upper secondary school teacher. Only those that have been granted a licence by the Minister have the right to use the respective occupation titles and to work as such in public schools or in other corresponding schools.

**Alternative Training Pathways**

Previously there have been instances of alternative pathways to become teacher in Iceland. Those examples have mostly been related to shortcuts for experienced instructors to receive certificate in periods of changes in teacher education and transactions of requirements for teachers. There were also in the 1990s experiments with use of IT in distance education modes of teacher education because qualified teachers were in short supply and an urgent need for recruitment.

Currently no such alternative teacher education pathways are in effect. There are, though, considerations of developing alternative pathways to counteract the foreseen decrease in number of teachers within the next few years, which is a matter of grave concern.