

Policy on Public Universities

The policy of the Minister of Education, Science and Culture is to safeguard the activities of the public universities in Iceland by establishing a collaborative network, with the possibility of a merger. The objective is threefold: First, to promote university teaching, research and innovation to strengthen the future development of Icelandic society. Second, to optimise the financial administration of the universities to maximise the efficiency of financial resources. And third, to maintain strong and varied higher education nationwide.

In this respect, the authorities take into account reports such as: *Education, Research and Innovation Policy: A new direction for Iceland* (Christoffer Taxell, Richard Yelland, Iain Gillespie, Markku Linna, Arnold Verbeek, Reykjavik 2009).

1. OBJECTIVES

A strong collaborative network of public universities in Iceland shall be in place by 2012. All public universities, i.e. University of Iceland, University of Akureyri, Agricultural University of Iceland and Hólar University College, shall be a part of the network. The aim is that other universities and research institutions can participate in the network's activities, irrespective of their legal form.

University of Iceland, as the largest and the most prominent university in Iceland, will play a key role in the network. The network shall offer a variety of higher education in all the main academic and scientific fields. The structure of teaching and research shall take into account the close cooperation and the relevant strength of the universities involved, each of which will continue to operate under its own name.

Students will presumably have more educational opportunities by attending courses in more than one university.

There will be increased use of distance education, offering a variety of nationwide educational opportunities through collaboration with regional knowledge centres and lifelong learning centres.

2. MEASURES

- Make the necessary changes to the Act on Public Higher Education Institutions to enable all public universities, including the agricultural ones, to operate according to the same law. The role of the agricultural universities shall be especially defined.
- Ensure that the structure of teaching and research as well as the division of responsibilities between universities will be a part of their common administrative tasks.
- Establish a common, uniform quality system for all universities in the network.
- Operate a common web portal and application portal for public universities in Iceland.
- Use a common information system for all the universities in the network with a joint student register and a web tool for distance education.
- Organize a common administrative and support service, even though the personnel may be located in different places.
- Establish a joint centre for graduate studies, responsible for the structure and quality of graduate studies, with main emphasis on doctoral studies.
- All universities within the network shall use the same system for performance assessment and progress that encourages research and good teaching methods.
- Define the nature of cooperation with regional knowledge centres and lifelong learning centres.

3. ORGANISATION

The public universities in Iceland differ in terms of number of students, number of staff and accredited academic fields. A seven person task group will be appointed with representatives from the universities, taking into account their size and scope. University of Iceland shall nominate two representatives to the task group in addition to the chair; University of Akureyri two representatives; Agricultural University of Iceland one and Hólar University College one. The task group shall produce a project schedule, outlining how to ensure the closest possible collaboration between the universities, and administer its implementation.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will work closely with the task group, following the progress of the project. Alongside the task group activities, the Act on Public Higher Education Institutions will be revised in order to accommodate the necessary changes needed for implementing the public policy.

4. PROJECT SCHEDULE

July 2010	Appointment of a task group that will lead the project and coordinate its various tasks.
Oct. 2010	Project schedule presented. Its main components will be: • Coherent quality system and quality evaluation for all universities within the network • Structured teaching and research collaboration • Common web portal for students' applications and integrated information system • Coordinated administrative and support services • All universities adapt a comparable performance assessment system • Joint centre for graduate studies • Preparatory work for a sound distance education network
Nov. 2010	The financial administration of Hólar parish and Hólar University College shall be completely separated.
April 2011	A Bill on revised Act on Public Higher Education Institutions presented in Parliament (Althingi).
May 2011	The cooperation of universities and the regional knowledge centres and lifelong learning centres shall be fully defined.
Sept. 2012	The objective of establishing a collaborative network shall be fully implemented.

The national budget and the adjusted national budget will contain a provision for special funding to support the implementation of this policy.

Reykjavík, August 9, 2010

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture