

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

**National report on the LLP
implementation in Iceland
2007-2009**

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Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland
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1 Context and methodology

Article 15.5.a. of the LLP Decision calls for the submission by the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of "an interim evaluation report on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme, including an analysis of the results achieved, by 31 March 2011". Article 15.5.4 of the Decision also contains the legal requirement towards the Member States "to submit to the Commission, by 30 June 2010..., report on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme".

The major objectives of the interim evaluation and of the National Reports to be submitted to the Commission are

- to analyse results of the LLP achieved hitherto and to identify lessons learned and good practices;
- to give recommendations for improving the execution of the current programme in the remaining stage of its implementation and
- to give input for the preparation of the future programme in the field of lifelong learning.

According to Commission guidelines¹, the National Reports shall focus on the quantitative and qualitative aspects / results of the implementation of the LLP at all levels. They should consider the following evaluation criteria:

Relevance: Appropriateness of the explicit objectives of the LLP, with regard to the needs it aims to satisfy or the problems it is meant to solve. Checking whether the objectives still correspond to evolving needs and / or whether there is a need to question the relevance of a particular initial objective.

Effectiveness: The extent to which expected effects have been obtained and objectives have been achieved.

Efficiency: The extent to which effects have been obtained at a reasonable cost.

The National Reports, should give the National Authorities' view on the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme - including strengths, weaknesses, lessons learned and best practices, as well as the analysis of national results achieved in the period 2007-2009. They should focus on both quantitative and qualitative outputs of the LLP execution and compare the results with objectives and priorities as defined in the LLP Decision.

The Icelandic national report methodology was developed in cooperation between the Icelandic national authorities and the independent evaluator, appointed by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to implement the project. The independent evaluator was responsible for collating, analysing and interpreting data as well as drafting

¹ EC document LLP-047-2009 – Annex

this report. However as the national authority is responsible for the report, the ministry reviewed the final report before its issue.

The methodology adopted can be described as a mixture of interviews and analysis of collected statistical data. Interviews were conducted with representatives of all major stakeholders in the LLP implementation in Iceland. Interviews were regarded superior to questionnaires in this instance, as they generally give better opportunity for respondents to put forward their views on the issues in question. Thus a deeper understanding of the programme implementation, its strengths and weaknesses, was possible in contrast to the more general nature of responses often obtained via questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with representatives of:

- Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
- National Agency
- LLP Board
- Universities, colleges and schools (Erasmus, Comenius)
- Vocational training & Adult (Leonardo, Grundtvig)
- Project participants (randomly selected)
- Mobility participants (randomly selected)

This approach is to a large extent made feasible by the small but geographically compact population of Iceland, centred in the Reykjavík metropolitan area. In addition, all relevant statistical data on the LLP implementation 2007-2009 in Iceland was gathered and analysed.

The report is drafted in accordance with the EC document *Guidelines for the National Reports on the LLP Implementation 2007-2009*. However, to avoid repetition in this concise report, a special executive summary chapter was excluded, as the main conclusions of the report and recommendations are listed in Executive Summary format (bullet-points) in chapter 3 (pp. 28-32).

2 The LLP Programme in Iceland

On the basis of its EEA membership, Iceland has from the outset been an active participant in the EUs **Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** and its predecessors. Icelandic participation since 1995 can only be characterised as one of steady growth, initially in Erasmus student exchanges as well as Leonardo projects and mobility. More recently, added activity at other school levels has been witnessed, most notably through the Comenius initiative. During the 2007-2009 LLP period, the development in Iceland can be best described as the twin pillars of Leonardo project and mobility participation and Erasmus student exchanges remaining vibrant, while a noted increase in activity has largely been apparent within Comenius, and to a lesser extent Erasmus teacher/staff- and Leonardo mobility.

The Icelandic educational system has, to a large extent, been decentralised both with regard to responsibilities and decision-making. Local municipalities are responsible for the operation of pre-schools and primary and lower secondary schools. On the other hand, the state runs the upper secondary schools and institutions at the higher education level. A fundamental principle of the Icelandic educational system is that everyone should have equal opportunities to acquire an education, irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, religion, possible handicap, and cultural or social background. Education in Iceland has traditionally been organised within the public sector, and there are very few private institutions in the school system. Almost all private schools receive public funding.

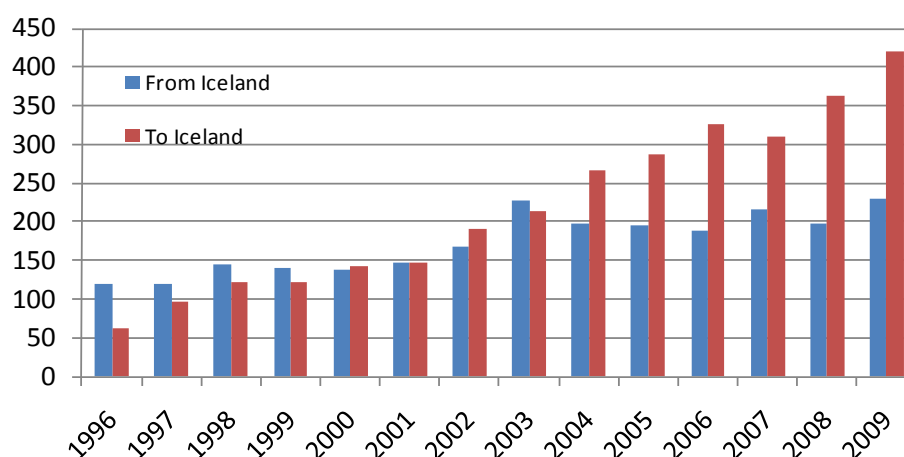
The Ministry issues the National Curriculum Guidelines for compulsory and upper secondary education. These National Curriculum Guidelines are intended both to provide the detailed objectives necessary to implement the law and offer direction as to how they should be carried out in practice. The Ministry, furthermore, issues National Curriculum Guidelines for pre-schools that specify the aims that pre-schools are to follow and describe the basic means and attitudes that apply in the education of young children. By law, each higher education institution is directly responsible to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In the state-run institutions the Minister appoints two representatives to the Senate of each institution. Other members of the Senate come from the institution, and include representatives of both teachers and students.

Vocational education in Iceland is offered in comprehensive schools, industrial-vocational schools and specialised vocational schools. The length of the courses these schools offer varies but the most prevalent are four-year courses. Many forms of vocational training give the students a legal certification for certain types of employment. This applies, for example, to studies in the skilled trades. Students in vocational programmes have the possibility of doing additional studies in preparation for study at the higher education level and complete the matriculation examination.

Among Icelandic higher education institutions (HEIs), the increase in internationalisation, somewhat kick-started during the Socrates phase, has continued during the LLP period. This process in Iceland was from the outset supported by existing structures within the Socrates

framework, as well as other international existing exchange and communication programmes. European cooperation, through the Bologna process has had a definite impact on Icelandic higher education structures with legal changes for instance regarding learning outcomes and diploma supplements with all degrees. The participation in **Erasmus** had already prepared the Icelandic HEIs, calling for constantly more internationalisation. The involvement in LLP and its sub-programmes has benefited Iceland as constantly more students seek to enjoy a part of their studies in Iceland, so much so that since 2003/04 more incoming students than outgoing take part in Erasmus in Iceland. The most active Icelandic HEIs currently have to select partner institutions abroad to maintain balance in student flows. The same trend has continued since that period with continuously rising supply of incoming students, while the local Icelandic demand for exchanges has stagnated somewhat. This has led to a steadily growing imbalance of Icelandic incoming vs. outgoing student flows, resulting in the NA having to put special emphasis during the LLP 2007-2009 period on encouraging outgoing student flows.

1: Erasmus student mobility 1995-2009



As demonstrated above (Graph 1) the growth in Icelandic participation in Erasmus student mobility from 1995 must be regarded as impressive, with numbers of outgoing students doubling during the period. This is however overshadowed by the tremendous growth in incoming European students especially from 2003/2004 onwards, with strong growth continuing during the present LLP period.

During LLP, the new dimensions introduced during Socrates II particularly for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools within **Comenius** have continued to gain strength in Iceland with steadily increasing participation. This new initiative has been welcomed by Icelandic

participants, and seems to be a big success among target groups, as these school levels had generally not enjoyed many opportunities for professional international cooperation before the introduction of EUs Comenius initiative. The introduction of assistant teachers in primary and secondary schools has for instance been very successful in Iceland and given added value to receiving institutions, for instance in language teaching.

The dramatic events in Iceland in late 2008, with its banking crisis and its economic consequences have unfortunately, to some extent, for instance with rising unemployment, made the **Leonardo** programme more relevant in Iceland than in the years preceding the collapse. The 2004-2008 period in Iceland can best be described as boom years, with abundant work opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labour, with unemployment nearly non-existent, especially evident in the thousands of imported foreign labourers to Iceland during the period. Following the events in Iceland in the fall 2008, this situation was dramatically changed almost overnight. Currently Icelanders are experiencing unemployment levels (7,6% in Q1 2010²) never experienced before in its post-world war 2 history, although fortunately still not at EU average levels (EU average above 10%³). This has particularly hit the unskilled labour force in Iceland hard, as the boom years entailed tremendous activity among building contractors and other large labour intensive construction projects. This has to some extent created a new demand among Leonardo target groups in the vocational training sector, groups that were previously not aware of the possibilities the programme has to offer. Also the events described above, with the influx of foreign workers many of whom have settled in Iceland with their families has created a situation previously unknown in Iceland, with small communities of inhabitants of foreign descent, making at least some of the Community horizontal policies more relevant in Iceland than ever before.

The Leonardo programme has provided various opportunities to motivated individuals and groups of individuals to pursue, promote and disseminate new ideas and practises into the Icelandic vocational system, while at the same time not transforming it in any fundamental aspects. As Icelandic participation in the programme indicates, both in larger projects and mobility, Leonardo has from its introduction in Iceland been well received among Icelandic target groups.

² Statistics Iceland (www.statice.is)

³ Bloomberg, Eurozone unemployment 10,1% at 04/2010.

2.1 Relevance

The Icelandic education and training system has from its inception relied on international cooperation at some level, primarily in higher education. With its first university established only in the early 20th century (1911) all of Iceland's students had to obtain its higher education abroad, and this heritage has remained strong to this day with a large proportion of Icelandic students completing their university studies abroad, mainly in Scandinavia, Europe and N-America. It is within this context that Iceland started its participation in the EU education and training programmes in the 1990s.

The participation in European cooperation in education and training has had strong impact both on the structure and content of the Icelandic system. Like in other participating countries, the structure has been to a large extent shaped by the ongoing debate and development in Europe, such as the Bologna process, while the content similarly has been shaped by the same forces, i.e. the current emphasis on lifelong learning. Icelandic educational and training legislation at all levels has been reviewed within the last few years and the prevailing policy theme is that of lifelong learning, to a large extent echoing the European developments which Iceland has been actively participating in on the basis of its EFTA membership and EEA agreement with the EU. The legislation and curricula revision is based on national development of the eight key competences. The key competences are a fundamental part of the Comprehensive National Lifelong Learning Strategy and a foundation for formal, informal and non-formal lifelong learning. As mentioned above, mobility has historically been a prevailing theme in Icelandic higher education, the LLP programme has nevertheless added a new dimension of student, teacher and staff exchanges at a European level. The programme has also brought international mobility and a European dimension into the education levels below higher education in Iceland, especially in the last few years with the growing emphasis on the Comenius sub-programme.

Icelandic national authorities acknowledge the impact of its participation in European cooperation in the field of education and training on national policy and structure, and have thus welcomed it. The LLP objectives have therefore been, and still remain very relevant for Iceland and have affected the recent review of national legislation in the field. It should however be noted that the Icelandic political tradition is to embed government policy in legislation rather than in explicit policy documents as is the tradition in many European countries. This can sometimes make it more difficult to easily acknowledge prevailing government policy at each time, especially in distinctive sectors such as education and training.

The last decade has been a period of strong growth within the Icelandic education system, especially in higher education. New higher education institutions have been established bringing both added dialogue and competition in undergraduate teaching and an explosion in postgraduate education offered in Iceland. This trend is confirmed in the dramatic increase in student numbers in Icelandic HEIs, growing by 63% between 2001 and 2010, see Table 2. In

addition, internationalization has been a strong focus of the Icelandic HEIs during the same period, a development strongly supported by the LLP programme. For instance the number of foreign students at the University of Iceland for the first time exceeded 1.000 recently, a student group to a large extent excluded from the number of registered full-time students below.

2: Number of Icelandic students 2001/02-2009/10

	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	% 2001-10
Háskóli Íslands	7.254	8.135	8.996	8.932	9.275	9.274	9.586	11.847	12.785	76,25%
Háskólinn á Akureyri	911	1.042	1.411	1.512	1.523	1.453	1.305	1.352	1.496	64,22%
Háskólinn á Bifröst	254	317	380	424	685	664	744	727	627	146,85%
Háskólinn í Reykjavík	984	1.171	1.282	1.361	2.557	2.777	2.907	2.974	2.890	193,70%
Kennaraháskóli Íslands	1.654	2.183	2.174	2.302	2.044	1.911	2.241	.	.	
Landbúnaðarhásk. Hvanneyri	100	122	131	166	248	243	286	294	338	238,00%
Listaháskóli Íslands	247	309	350	371	401	412	380	429	425	72,06%
Universities	11.404	13.279	14.724	15.068	16.733	16.734	17.449	17.623	18.561	62,76%
Secondary	20.494	21.746	23.120	24.220	25.093	26.958	28.340	29.271	29.698	44,91%
Primary	44.103	44.695	44.809	44.511	44.336	43.875	43.841	43.511	42.929	-2,66%
Pre-Primary	15.578	16.282	16.685	16.755	16.864	17.216	17.561	18.278	18.699	20,03%
Total students	91.579	96.002	99.338	100.554	103.026	104.783	107.191	108.683	109.887	19,99%
Total IS population	283.361	286.575	288.471	290.570	293.577	299.891	307.672	315.459	319.368	12,71%

This period of Icelandic HEI expansion however seems to be at an end for now with increasing calls for cooperation and/or consolidation within the system. The rationale of maintaining almost 10 individual HEIs in Iceland has come under growing scrutiny following the financial crisis of 2008 which has of course caused great strain on Icelandic public finances. Iceland has explicitly sought gender equality as public policy for some decades now, and has in recent years generally been considered somewhat correlating with other Nordic countries in this respect. The strong showing of Icelandic females has been especially evident among higher education students, with almost two-thirds of all students in the University of Iceland currently being female.

The secondary school level in Iceland similarly has enjoyed a period of strong growth with an increase in student numbers of 45% in the last decade. Increased focus on adult education and lifelong learning are undoubtedly one of the underlying explanations for this development in Iceland as many comprehensive and vocational schools have focused on servicing this growing need among the population. Interesting developments have taken place in the secondary school level during this period, for instance in the field of distance learning which many schools, and HEIs in fact also, have developed successfully.

One of the prevailing issues in Iceland harmonizing with LLP objectives has been the high drop-out rate of students from secondary education. The secondary school drop-out level has historically been high in Iceland by Nordic comparison, or approx. 30%. Among the initiatives supported by Icelandic authorities to counter this trend has been the increased emphasis on adult education, which in addition to distance learning, has undoubtedly been a large contributing factor to the growing student number in secondary education witnessed above. This has created increased opportunities for student drop-outs to complete their secondary education at later stages in life or utilizing IT solutions, often preferred for students in rural areas, or students who complete their studies along with their employment for instance. Without judging the impact of particular measures adopted, the overall situation

with drop-out in Iceland has improved in the last decade, with the overall level decreasing of approx. 5%. Between 2000 and 2008 the drop-out ratio in Iceland dropped from 29,8% to 24,4% while the EU average during the same time decreased from 17,6% to 14,9%.⁴ Again, the changed economic situation in Iceland from 2008 should give cause for optimism regarding the high drop-out rate, as experience in Finland has demonstrated for instance that economic difficulties in the 1990s caused a considerable fall in overall drop-out rates there.⁵ The previous Icelandic government in fact addressed this issue in its general mission statement in February 2008, as it listed among its priorities that no more than 10% of the Icelandic workforce in 2020 should be without formal secondary level education.⁶ This focus corresponds exactly with the EU education and training benchmark for 2020 of share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%.⁷

The lower school levels have remained more stable in student numbers, with the primary school level in fact showing an actual drop in student numbers during the period. This must to some extent be explained with demographic factors, that is differing size of age groups between years. Also the overall population growth during the period of almost 13% must be viewed in light of the economic growth in Iceland during most of the period, with a historical high in foreign nationals/workers moving to Iceland. This has again made the EU horizontal policies more relevant in Iceland than before, following the recent economic difficulties.

According to Icelandic LLP participants, the programme has been very important in enhancing a European dimension among its Icelandic participants via its emphasis on mobility and cross-border cooperation in projects. The importance of actually visiting colleagues and/or counterparts in other European countries, obtaining a hands on feel of the ideas, methods, facilities and infrastructure for instance was strongly emphasised by Icelandic participants. A better way of promoting understanding between European education communities and cohesion among different regions participating in the programme is difficult to contemplate. The same view was shared by Icelandic NA personnel. The Icelandic NA also added in this respect that any push on Community level to increase virtual mobility at the expense of "actual" mobility should be resisted, although virtual mobility could of course be very beneficial as well.

Like in previous stages of the programme, Iceland has been an active participant and a valued partner in EU education and training projects. As before Icelandic partners are well diverse among most participating countries, while strong emphasis still remains among outgoing students to visit the historically more connected areas such as Scandinavia and N-Europe. However there is a strong tendency to seek partners from more eastern and southern participating countries, and one Icelandic secondary school active within Comenius actually had an explicit policy of trying to send student groups to more distant participating regions to bring students out of their comfort-zone. The programme therefore has from the start of

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint10/sec1598_en.pdf

⁵ <http://www.norden.org/no/publikasjoner/publikasjoner/2010-517>

⁶ <http://www.forsætisraduneyti.is/frettir/nr/2866>

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm

Icelandic participation promoted cooperation between Iceland and other participating countries.

The EU programmes have from the start of Icelandic participation been a cornerstone of the Icelandic international education structure, complementing both the other existing programmes, most notably Nordic and N-American, as well as the structure of government student loan financing within the Icelandic Student Loan Fund.⁸ The added EU emphasis on the programme from its inception, both in the form of increased financing and new and innovative initiatives at all school levels have added a new and exciting dimension to the Icelandic education and training community. This has been especially observed in the last few years with the added emphasis on education levels below higher education, levels that have not enjoyed much international cooperation before. This can be said of both vocational and adult education, as well as pre-primary and primary levels.

In the view of both national authorities and the Iceland NA, the LLP programme has therefore added value to other international programmes available in Iceland. There is however no national programme in Iceland comparable to LLP or Nordplus for instance.

Upon the recommendation of the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council (*Vísinda- og tækniráð*), the Icelandic Minister of Education, Science and Culture appointed a working group in January 2010, with representatives from the local research and higher education communities as well as high level public officials⁹. The group was to assess the participation of Iceland in international research and education programmes, with special emphasis on:

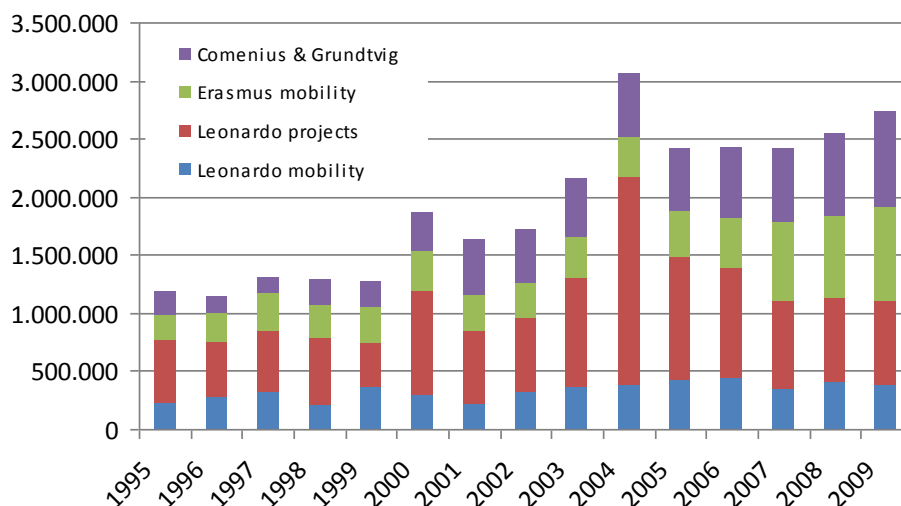
- Assessing the scope, commitments and opportunities in international education, research and development
- Reviewing the support services available to Icelandic applicants to international funds in the fields of education and research
- Proposing ways of possible cooperation between support structures of other programmes Iceland participates in
- Focusing especially on programmes that require joint financing and access fees

The group delivered a report on its findings in March 2010. To a large extent the report is focused on European cooperation, as European programmes are by far the most important for Iceland (both by number of participants and level of funding) under the auspices of the EEA agreement. Other programmes in the field, predominantly Nordic and North American, were however also within the scope of the report.

⁸ http://lin.is/um_lin/English.html

⁹ Tækifæri til sóknar: Skýrsla starfshóps um þátttöku Íslands í alþjóðlegum samstarfsáætlunum, March 2010.

3: LLP grants to Iceland 1995-2009 (€)



The main conclusions of the group were twofold. Firstly, the support services for Icelandic applicants in international education, research and development programmes is not of a consistent level and to some extent pragmatic, in some instances not grounded on an explicit evaluation of Icelandic interests and to some extent lacking proportionality between programme scope and the level of support services available. Currently Iceland takes part in over 40 programmes (although many are very small or limited in scope), serviced by over 20 different local actors/offices. Similarly the group noted its concern regarding the perceived lack of renewal among Icelandic applicants, especially within the larger research and development programmes. Secondly, the group concludes that a discussion on a general strategy for Iceland in international cooperation in the fields in question has been lacking to some extent, and clear priorities not listed. The group emphasizes that the trend in Europe seems to be moving towards a more national focus, especially in the larger projects requiring substantial funding. This makes a clearer focus than previously and rational evaluation of Icelandic interests and priorities in the field even more pressing. On the basis of its conclusions the group makes two recommendations:

1. The establishment of a single support centre/office in Iceland for European programmes, encompassing the bulk of European programmes in the fields of education, research and development that Iceland currently participates in on the basis of the EEA agreement, as well as other international programmes (Nordic and others) as well as servicing the forthcoming transition funding expected due to Iceland's recent application to the EU. The main objective of the new office would be to increase Icelandic participation in international competitive funds, ensure the

quality of applications and thereby increasing the level of international funding available to Icelandic projects and/or participants. To increase renewal within the target groups in Iceland, the office would put added emphasis on introducing the various possibilities available to prospective Icelandic participants, some of which may not generally be well known currently to the Icelandic education and research community at large.

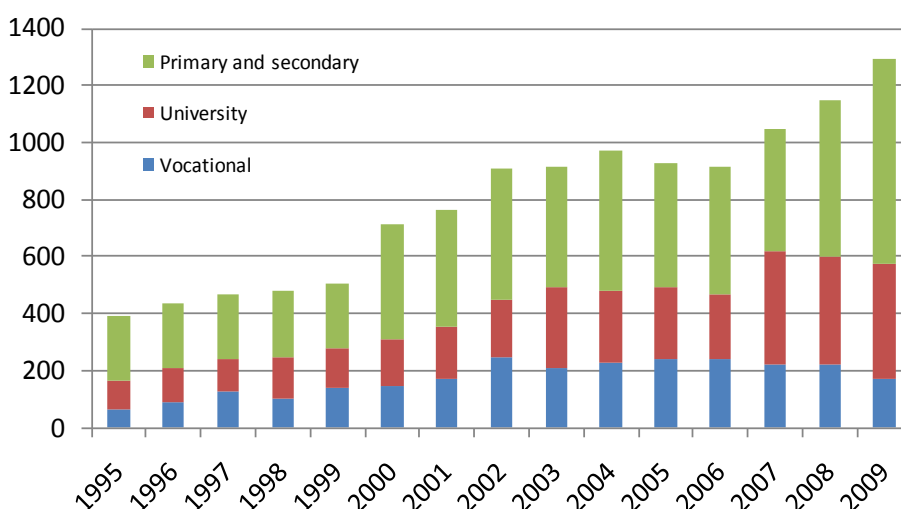
2. Increased co-ordination of Icelandic strategy. The group further recommends that an independent Board of the proposed office, comprised of representatives from the most relevant stakeholders, have the task of deciding Icelandic participation in new programmes or structures in the field and be equipped with sufficient funds to do so. Increasingly limited local funds must be prioritised further in order to maximize the added value of Icelandic participation in such programmes and/or projects.

Following the delivery of the draft at a meeting of the Icelandic Science and Technology Policy Council (March 19, 2010) the Council issued a declaration supporting the conclusions of the report and stating its support in pursuing them. The Council proposed that the Minister of Education, Science and Culture and Minister of Industry form a joint working group with the Council to further develop the recommendations from the report in close cooperation with the most relevant Icelandic stakeholders.

2.2 Effectiveness

As demonstrated above there has been a strong growth in programme activity in Iceland during the last decade although the LLP years (2007-2009) are better described as a period of moderate growth, at least in terms in financing available to Icelandic participants. The development of finances available to Iceland, especially from 2004, is a shift of finances away from Leonardo projects into especially Comenius mobility measures and to a lesser extent Erasmus mobility. Any analysis of this sort must however discern that due to the limited number of Leonardo projects Iceland has taken part in annually, each single project weighs proportionally very heavily in Icelandic LLP financial analysis. This shift of utilization of Icelandic LLP finances away from finance intensive projects, to mobility measures has entailed a considerable growth in total number of Icelandic participants, as demonstrated below.

4: Number of Icelandic LLP grant beneficiaries 1995-2009

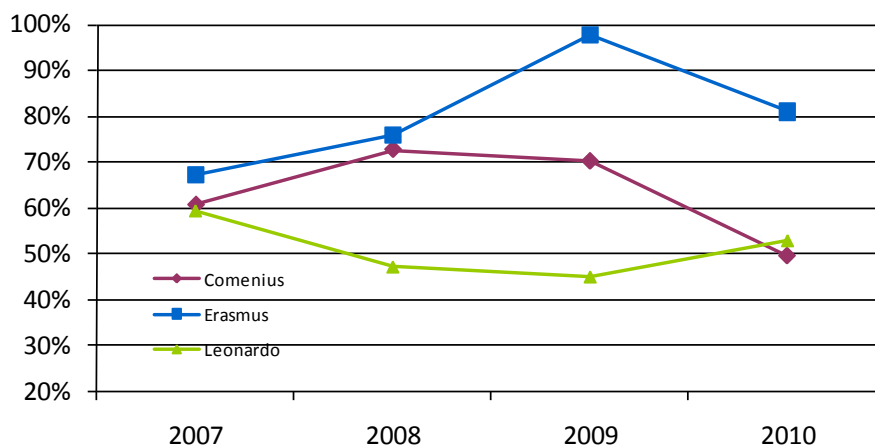


As demonstrated in Graph 4, although the EU financing has remained considerably consistent during the 2006-2009 period, the number of Icelandic participants has risen by almost 50% during the same period, from approx. 850 participants in 2006 to 1250 in 2009. The development described above from Leonardo to Comenius can similarly be seen above with a strong increase in participation from the primary and secondary levels, however seemingly somewhat at the expense of the vocational sector. Erasmus mobility however remains considerably constant during the LLP period, although a strong increase in participation between Socrates II and the current LLP period can be seen (2006 vs. 2007 in

Graph 4). This is probably a mixture of increased funding (see Graph 3) in addition to new initiatives introduced with LLP, such as increased focus on teacher and staff mobility.

There has been a noticeable growth in Iceland in the number of LLP applications as well as funds requested, especially in the last two years. The Icelandic financial crisis, with ensuing restrictions in government funding, may be an explanatory factor. Another factor could be the ongoing successful penetration of target groups, especially in Comenius where there has been a very strong growth in applications.

5: LLP funds application success rate (%) 2007-2010



It is difficult to estimate the "correct" level of national successful applications within LLP. A considerable oversubscription could be desirable to maintain the standard of quality among successful applicants. Historically the success rate has been approximately 60-90% in Iceland within the most popular sub-programmes (Leonardo, Erasmus and Comenius). According to NA management that level has been acceptable, and sufficient to maintain the overall quality level in Icelandic applications, while the success rate between LLP funds applied for and then received is also important (see Graph 5). According to NA management, a level of down to approx. 50% can be tolerable but anything below that starts to hurt the programme as too many quality applicants are denied. As demonstrated above, this level has become relevant in Comenius, while the ratio between funds applied and received remains at similar levels for both Erasmus and Leonardo during the period.

The oversubscription has thus grown fast especially in Comenius and Erasmus, and Grundtvig applications are also growing fast. The Icelandic NA has had to turn down a much larger share of Comenius applications in the 2010 applications than ever before. According to NA management the new LLP initiative of Erasmus staff training has been particularly successful in Iceland as well. Icelandic HEIs receive so many applications for staff training visits that many of them have organised staff training weeks in order to be able to meet this

new and positive option in Erasmus. However, NA staff has experienced growing concern among higher education teachers and staff that the Erasmus grants have become too low, following the Icelandic currency collapse. Following the surge in teacher and staff Erasmus mobility applications in Iceland, the NA has received permission to transfer funds from student mobility to better supply the strong demand. Icelandic participation in Erasmus student placements has however been limited.

In Leonardo there has been a sharp increase in demand for mobility, in particular for IVT following the financial crisis. The introduction of partnerships in Leonardo can be considered a success as there is 100% oversubscription despite the fact that the NA has decided to use as close to the maximum amount allowed.

According to national authorities the transition from the former Socrates and Leonardo into the combined LLP programme has been smooth in Iceland. Both the Socrates and Leonardo NAs had been servicing their respective programmes from the start of Icelandic participation and therefore have benefitted from the experience obtained within the programme from the outset. Both offices are thus staffed with very experienced and skilled staff, many of whom have been involved with the programme for over a decade. This has without a doubt benefitted the implementation of the LLP programme in Iceland.

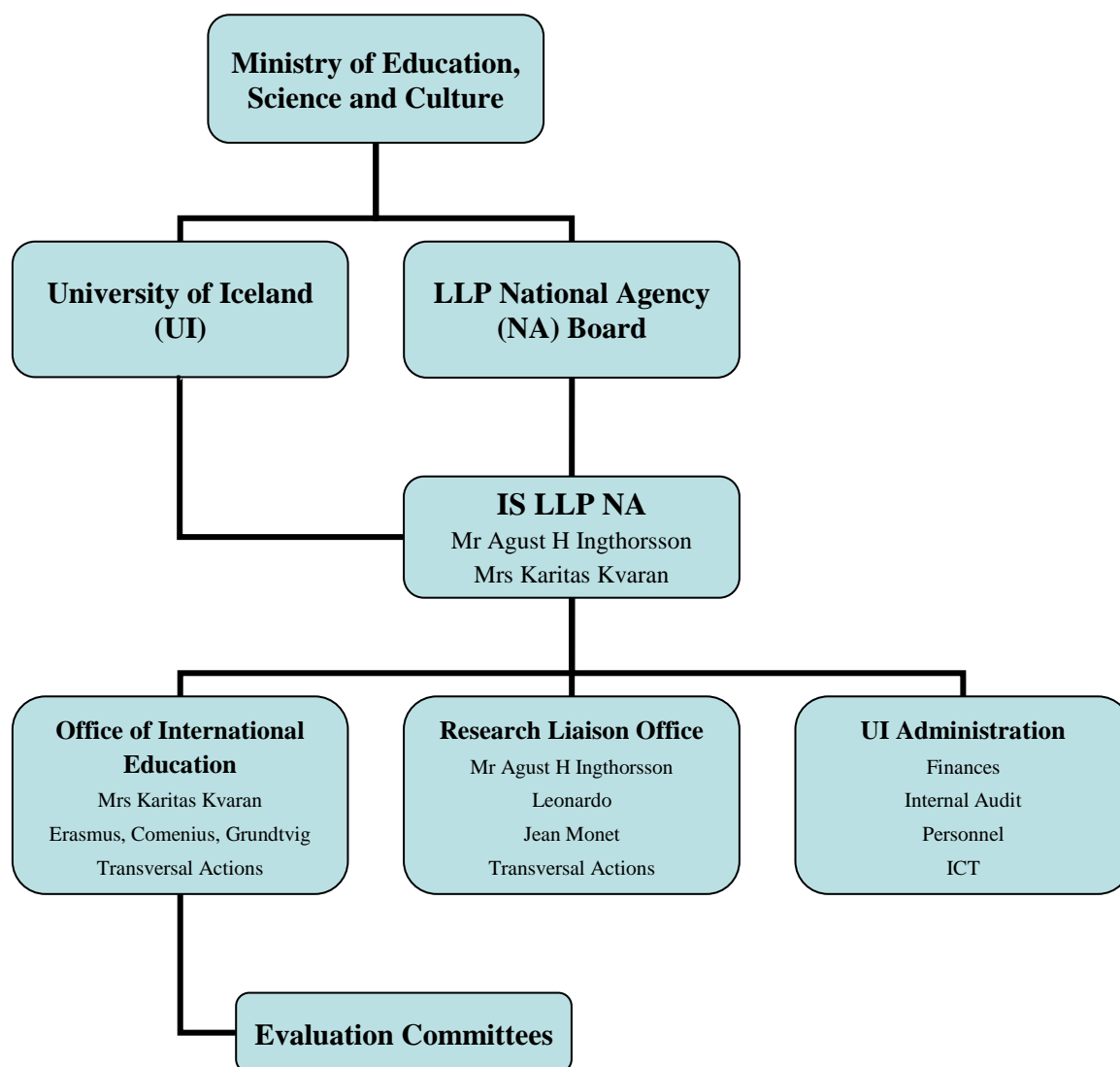
The former Socrates and Leonardo NAs that both were hosted by the University of Iceland (UI) but in two separate offices are now run as one virtual office. The offices remain physically situated in different buildings within easy walking distance on the UI campus and managed by two different University institutes:

- **The Office of International Education** (Head of Office Mrs. Karitas Kvaran): Hosting Erasmus, Comenius, Grundtvig and transversal actions.
- **The Research Liaison Office** (Head of Office Mr. Agust H. Ingthorsson): Hosting Leonardo, Jean Monet and transversal actions.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the implementation of the LLP programme in Iceland and renewed the existing contract with the University of Iceland regarding the offices above remaining the national implementing actors of the programme until the end of 2013.

Overseeing the National Agency is an independent National Committee (LLP NA Board) appointed by The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture which acts as a board of the NA which in turn is responsible for the implementation of the programme. The National Committee consists of representatives appointed by the labour- and employer organisations, higher education institutions, primary and secondary schools and the Ministry of Education Science and Culture. Meetings of the Committee are attended by the managers of the NA. The Committee is responsible for developing and/or updating national strategies and priorities for the programme.

6: Icelandic National Agency Organizational Structure¹⁰



As the LLP NA remains within the same host organisation, the University of Iceland, the transformation into LLP was maybe not as great as in some other partner NAs in Europe. The Icelandic NA enjoys access to the same central administration of the host organisation as before, and the same finance and accounting departments are serving the NA as an

¹⁰ Icelandic NA management.

example. The same human resources department within UI is responsible for NA staff salaries, communications with relevant trade unions and other work related issues.

The Icelandic LLP evaluation committees review applications for each sub-programme and make recommendations on allocation of LLP funds for decentralised actions. Those recommendations are presented to the NA Board for discussion. The final approval of applications is in the hands of the relevant NA Head of Office.

According to the Icelandic NA, the integration of the formerly two NAs into one has been beneficial. Most notably:

- The national organizational structure for the programme has been simplified, with only a single NA Board instead of two
- A single LLP homepage¹¹
- A single design for all Icelandic NA dissemination material

Prior to the LLP there was considerable cooperation and contact between the two NAs, with regular information meetings. In addition, there has been a formal venue with regular meetings between Icelandic EU implementing actors for numerous years. Similarly, cooperation in introducing the EU education and training programmes and in dissemination activities has been strong for many years. With the LLP, this cooperation has intensified with more regular meetings, and pooling of resources in particular in the field of IT and other supporting areas. According to NA management the Icelandic programme officers are now more familiar with each LLP sub-programme and can supplement each other if needed to a certain extent.

According to NA management, close cooperation has been needed on many project tasks like information campaigns, website, production of dissemination material and events that are aiming at the same target audiences between sub-programmes. Similarly the preparation of the NA annual work plan, the annual report, overall financial management, LLP-link question/problems for instance requires close cooperation between NA staff. The most efficient use of limited financial resources demands constant close cooperation and discussions between NA staff. Common work procedures and processes have been developed within the NA, currently under revision, but form an integral part of the NA quality control system according to NA management.

By focusing on the close cooperation between NA staff and individual managers of different sub-programmes NA staff seeks to foster the synergies between the different parts of the LLP. The relatively small size of the Icelandic LLP, coupled with the considerable experience of current NA staff should make the task more manageable. According to NA management special emphasis has been put on bringing the staff of the two offices closer

¹¹ http://lme.is/page/lme_forsida

together, both by day-to-day regular working meetings as well as special events aimed at strengthening the group as a single unit. This has proved successful and the LLP transition been smooth according to NA management.

Neither national authorities nor NA management see any particular disadvantages following the integration of the LLP in Iceland. For the national authorities, the implementation has remained in the hands of actors who have performed their task successfully in recent years while the integration has made the management simpler for the Ministry with the single organization structure for the whole programme. Disadvantages mentioned by NA staff are mostly related to the increased level of reporting to Brussels with annual work plans and reports– as all programmes are now reported in one joint report that is quite time consuming to deliver.

Icelandic participants are generally very pleased with the services of the Icelandic NA. They especially mention the support and service oriented attitude of the staff. One benefit of the size, or lack of it, is the personal contact often obtained between the most active participants and NA staff. This has been particularly helpful to Icelandic participants. Generally the division of the LLP sub-programmes between two locations on the UI campus is not criticized by participants, as most of the NA contact is in fact via the internet, email or phone.

However the location of the Icelandic NA within the University of Iceland has been criticised somewhat, particularly by some Icelandic HEIs. With the growing size of other Icelandic HEIs and ensuing competition between them, and the growing importance of EU funds available to Icelandic participants in the LLP programme, the setup of the Icelandic NA within a participating institution has come under growing scrutiny. The criticism has mainly been focused on the general principle of having the NA located within a single participating HEI. Also other HEIs have raised their concern that this in fact gives the UI an unfair advantage in utilizing opportunities for cooperation that may be presented to the Icelandic NA. As demonstrated above the setup has both historical and practical reasons, with the University of Iceland as the one dominating HEI in Iceland until the late 1990s and still the only multi-departmental institution in the country. As the Office of International Education (OIE) is expected to service all Icelandic HEIs it was placed within the only international office in Iceland equipped to deal with the task at that time, within UI. The criticism is however just as relevant towards the Research Liaison Office.

In the last few years the OIE has responded to concerns, both by separating clearly the work responsibilities between those dealing with LLP NA issues and those focusing on UI issues as well as separating these two groups more clearly within the office space. It is important to note that no evidence of any NA misconduct or partiality towards either UI, or any other LLP participant for that matter, has ever been presented to relevant national authorities.

With the LLP launch, the NAs became less involved in the evaluation process of the centralised actions and thus have, according to the Icelandic NA, less overview over the programme implementation and the projects that are supported. The NA therefore has

difficulty judging how the centralised and decentralised actions complement each other in Iceland under the current LLP setup. The NA would like to see better flow of information regarding the centralised actions from Brussels, and is disappointed in the lack of NA involvement as it receives no information on Icelandic participation within the centralised actions of the programme.

Both Icelandic national authorities as well as NA management believe national LLP target groups are being penetrated successfully. Of course, the limited population size, supported by the very high level of IT utilization both generally and within the Icelandic educational system in particular, make the penetration of both larger and smaller target groups in Iceland relatively easy. For instance, NA staff can reach all secondary level school masters, or university professors, by a single email.

Different LLP sub-programmes have different level of presence within their target groups, which should not be surprising considering the varying time span individual sub-programmes have been operated. According to NA staff each sub-programme advertises itself best through the participants themselves. Generally, the programme has a strong standing at the higher education level, particularly within student mobility, and is gaining recognition fast with its increased emphasis on both teacher and staff mobility in the last few years. Almost every single secondary school in Iceland has currently participated in Comenius and over 60% of Icelandic primary schools. Pre-primary schools are also quickly embracing the Comenius initiative in Iceland.

All the main national adult education actors have taken part in Grundtvig. Even in sectors where the LLP has historically had difficulty reaching target groups, such as in traditional vocational education (Leonardo), there has been strong growth in participation for example in the IVP section (2008-2010) to take part of the studies abroad. Per capita the LLP participation in Iceland is very strong, and undoubtedly among the strongest in participating countries, according to NA management.

The LLP implementation has proven very beneficial for Iceland as it has concentrated focus on specific issues, such as the LLP long-term strategic objectives as well as the 2020 benchmarks.¹² Out of the five EU 2020 benchmarks, Iceland already could be considered as performing satisfactorily in three in 2008:

- Participation in early childhood education above 95% - IS = 95,4%
- Adult participation in lifelong learning above 15% - IS = 25,1%
- Higher education attainment (age 30-34) above 40% - IS = 38,3%

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm

However the results were less favourable concerning:

- Level of low achievers in PISA less than 15% - IS =17-20%
- Early leavers (age 18-24) less than 10% - IS = 24,4%

The LLP programme implementation in Iceland has contributed especially in raising the attainment level in higher education, as discussed above. Similarly participation in the programme has raised awareness between the important correlation at secondary level between drop-out levels and the important part stronger emphasis on adult education can play in giving older students the opportunity to complete their education although at a later stage in life than perhaps previously anticipated. The EU education and training policies and its priorities have had a positive impact on these developments in Iceland.

NA management has also used the LLP participation has also raised awareness of national authorities, especially through the NA Board, to make national priorities with programme participation more explicit both generally, and even with more short-term targets within each sub-programme. This has been well received and for instance disadvantaged groups have become a national priority in 2010. Both in Leonardo and Grundtvig special focus has been put on applications focusing on disadvantaged groups in the 2010 application round. Iceland has fortunately not had to face some of the social challenges addressed in the Community horizontal policies (the cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe, combating racism, prejudice and xenophobia, making provisions for learners with special needs and for their integration into the mainstream education and training, promoting equality and contributing to combating all forms of discrimination). However, as discussed above, challenges of rising unemployment and larger groups of nationals of foreign descent have become relevant in the last few years in Iceland.

The LLP consolidation of the Icelandic NA has been particularly evident in dissemination activities, adding more focus both in virtual and printed material. As in previous years, LLP dissemination activities in Iceland have been performed in cooperation with other European programmes in Iceland. For instance, NA staff, in co-operation with other organisations responsible for the implementation of European actions (such as Youth and others), have travelled with a “European Bus” around the island, giving presentations in larger municipalities. This effort may have contributed to the noticeable strong participation of the most rural Icelandic schools in Comenius, where most if not all have participated. This has in turn raised awareness of the programme especially in rural areas as participation in international education and training projects has not been common in these areas to date and therefore has received strong interest in local media.

According to NA management, a special NA effort has been put in recent years into visiting the secondary level graduating class, introducing the EuroPass and the programme opportunities in general. The NA intends to maintain this focus of visiting as many secondary level graduating students each year as possible. Regularly there are valorisation events and promotional meetings held in Reykjavik, again with the participation of other EU

programmes if applicable, where LLP is presented. All larger events are advertised in national media (TV/radio/newspapers) as well as with posters.

NA staff produces and distributes various information documents to targeted audiences upon request. All documents are available at the NA's information centre that is open to the public. The NA's homepage (www.lme.is) on the internet plays an important part in disseminating information and distributing documents. As mentioned above, the NA website has been integrated out of the previous Socrates and Leonardo websites. Application forms are available on the NA's homepage as well as other relevant documents. Links have been made and are updated to important and relevant homepages, such as the homepage of the European Commission.

The NA participates in the Icelandic HEIs annual Open House each fall. The staff of the NA organises annually an International day for all university students to promote the programme. Icelandic students who have taken part in the Erasmus programme inform about their experiences, and incoming Erasmus students provide information on their home universities and countries to Icelandic students planning to apply for the programme. The Commission calls for proposals are advertised in the national media. According to NA staff, target audiences have been reached by advertising in specialised press, periodicals of teacher associations and through various channels on the internet. NA experience has demonstrated that better success from programme introductory meetings can be expected when it is performed as an item in a larger setting, such as annual national teacher conferences, rather than stand-alone events.

Added emphasis has been put on raising programme awareness among Icelandic decision-makers and public officials, with information brochures sent to all members of parliament, Ministry of Education staff and key public officials. Iceland has enjoyed many success stories during its participation in the programme, with Icelandic projects receiving EU awards in most if not all sub-programmes.

According to NA management and staff, Erasmus has become a strong brand within the Icelandic HEIs. Leonardo is also very well known within the most relevant target groups, i.e. vocational schools (which have all participated) and the local lifelong learning community which has also been very active. National authorities similarly believe that LLP programme has obtained a strong presence among Icelandic target groups in recent years. As mentioned above, both manageable group sizes and high level of IT penetration in the national education and training system, makes reaching out to target groups easier than probably in many other participating countries. Also this gives opportunity for NA staff to maintain direct contact with participants, which received strong praise from Icelandic participants in all sub-programmes. The easy access to NA staff, strong service commitment and overall programme knowledge was mentioned by all Icelandic participants interviewed for this report.

2.3 Efficiency

The relationship between the Icelandic NA, national authorities and the LLP Committee has been good during the LLP period. This was confirmed by all parties. However the NA would have liked more active involvement of both actors, especially following the structural decentralisation changes implemented by the Commission with the LLP launch in 2007. Following increased government budget restraints due to the recent economic challenges, Icelandic LLP Committee members (ministry staff) have been forced to limit their involvement with the programme, most notably attending LLP Committee meetings less frequently. According to NA management, one of the conclusions from a Leonardo impact monitoring visit made by the Commission in 2008 was that national authorities could be better informed and involved in the programme implementation in Iceland. The Icelandic NA supports this view.

Both Icelandic national authorities and the NA confirm that their relationship with the Commission continues to be both good and an efficient working relationship. Despite the various challenges the Icelandic NA has faced following the recent local turmoil, it has almost without exception received quick and practical responses to the various issues that have arisen and often needing urgent Commission attention. On the other hand the NA maintains that the relationship with the Executive Agency (EACEA) has been very limited and formal. According to the NA, there seems to be a lack of the collegial relationships that exist for instance between the NA and Commission staff regarding programme implementation. This has manifested itself for example in an a priori formal distrust towards host organisation handling of EuroPass – quite the opposite of the Commission approach of trust, based on the Declarations of Assurance. The Icelandic NA would welcome EACEA improvements in this regard.

The centralised actions of the programme have had limited visibility and impact in Iceland. The NA claims there is virtually no cooperation between the NA and the EACEA, and the NA does not automatically receive information on Icelandic applicants or projects with Icelandic participants that receive centralised programme funding. The NA has applied and received funding for Thematic Monitoring projects that have been administered by the EACEA. Based on that experience, the NA believes the EACEA to be even more bureaucratic and overzealous than the Commission was in the previous programme phase.

According to the NA, the approach by the national authorities regarding its responsibility and the Declaration of Assurance has been somewhat hesitant and cautious. For each of the three LLP contractual years that have now been reported, there has been an external auditor that has audited the NA financial report, its accounts and working procedures. While NA management agrees that the finances and accounts should be audited each year, NA management feels it is not necessary to audit its work procedures on an annual basis, simply because they do not change very much from one year to the next. NA management maintains it has a well established track-record of effectively managing the programme selection-, contracting- and monitoring processes. According to the NA, this may explain why the

Commission has not yet been on a System Monitoring visit to Iceland – as the risk is regarded relatively low and the track-record of the hosting organisation of the NA is good.

The national NA quality system, encompassing all working procedures with proper control and internal audits, is continuously under review and actively amended, according to NA management. The NA aims to further improve its quality control system in the latter half of the LLP programme. NA management maintains that national authorities have confirmed its willingness to be more actively involved in monitoring NA operations and overall implementation of the programme.

Regular meetings in Brussels for each sub-programme have always been the best way for NA staff to network and form relationships that day-to-day cooperation is then based on. These meetings are less frequent than in previous years, according to NA management, which it deems a negative development. From 2009 onwards there has been a marked deterioration in the number of sub-programme meetings. Also there are informal meetings, for directors both thematic and/or regional. For Iceland, the regular Nordic/Baltic meetings have been very useful and will undoubtedly continue to be.

The Icelandic NA is very disappointed in the management supporting tools (LLPLink) supported by the Commission, both in the quality of output as well as the product technical capabilities. It is the view of the NA that the LLP main management supporting tool is still not adequate – at the mid way point of the programme. Much more automation of reports, required statistics etc. should have been an integral part of the system from the beginning. NA management suggests the Commission commit resources immediately to prepare a centralized management system for the successor of the LLP programme. It should not matter that the detailed content or precise nature of the actions is not known – as all the main elements of process requirements are known. The NA proposes it should be a centralized database with no replications and the Commission should consult other DGs on how they have completed similar projects successfully, such as DG Research, DG ICT and DG Regio.

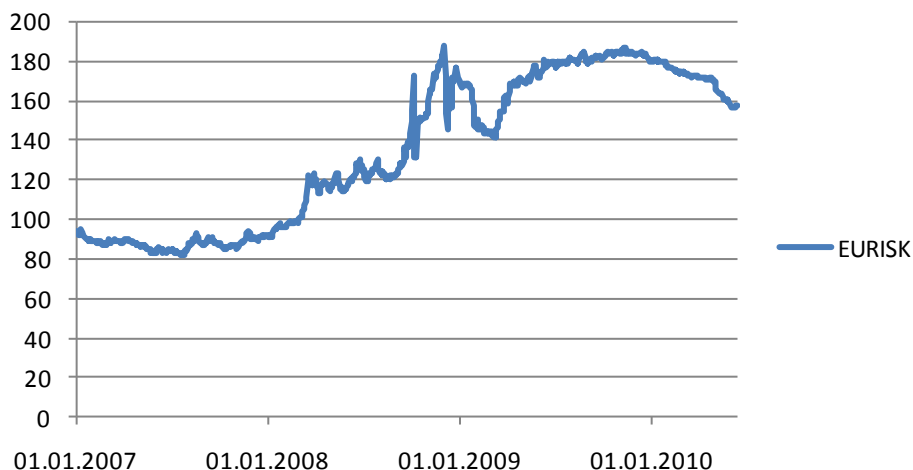
“The NA has very strong opinions on the centralized administration system that the Commission supplies (LLPLink). The most positive adjective is dismal but bordering on the criminal. We have asked this question for a long time: How can so many people, with so substantive financial resources, produce so little results, so poorly, for such a long time? The managerial and technical incompetence shown by the responsible unit at the Commission is beyond belief. No NA would ever be permitted by the EU to show such dismal results and ineffective management. The Commission should try to apply the same standards to itself as it does to the NAs – if the Commission could deliver the same kind of quality, efficient management as most the NAs do, the overall implementation would be easier for everyone.”

-Icelandic NA management

The general view of Icelandic authorities and implementing actors is that the level of Commission funding for Icelandic LLP participation is generally adequate. As demonstrated above in chapter 2.2 (pp. 14-16), there is a considerable difference between demand in the sub-programmes, which have become particularly evident in the last 1-2 years.

A significant underlying factor behind this growing demand is probably the local economic turmoil, which can most simply be demonstrated by the exchange rate development of the Icelandic *krona* (ISK) towards the Euro (EUR) below.

7: EURISK currency rate development 2007-2010



The economic turmoil can in its simplest form be demonstrated in the value of the ISK depreciating from below 100 ISK per €1 before 2008, up to above 180 ISK/€ (Graph 7). This trend has fortunately started to normalize with the stabilization of the local economy and the slow but steady appreciation of the ISK in 2010.

The economic developments in Iceland 2008 caused great strain on the Icelandic LLP implementing actors, with many issues requiring particular and immediate attention. But with the generally good cooperation between the NA and Commission most if not all of the most pressing issues at the time were solved successfully. The Icelandic NA and local LLP participants suffered surprisingly little loss, bearing in mind the almost total economic collapse in Iceland in October 2008. However there were some isolated instances of LLP funds, not being stored on € currency accounts, creating heavy currency losses for the particular participants or project. This was fortunately not very common.

Prior to the LLP launch, the Icelandic NA had administered for instance the Erasmus mobility grants centrally. This was deemed prudent for practical reasons, as many of the Icelandic HEIs did not have sophisticated central administration to handle this administration individually. But with the growing level of Icelandic participation during Socrates II, ensuing growth in Commission funding, and the rapid development of many Icelandic HEIs both in student number and administrative capacity, there was an increasing call for decentralisation of the Icelandic Erasmus funding process. The Icelandic NA thus responded by decentralising the process following the 2007 application round, providing each participating HEI with a single lump sum for each institution to distribute. However, the experience in the first year immediately proved this decentralisation process to be somewhat premature, as considerable difficulties arose especially within the smaller Icelandic HEIs. This experience prompted the NA to scale-back the funding processes, in good cooperation with the Icelandic HEIs, who in fact welcomed the change back to the previous setup.

One of the most significant and simultaneously exciting changes in Icelandic participation during the LLP period has been the rapid growth of Comenius participants (Table 8). With over 60% growth in total number of participants between 2007 and 2009, Comenius was the most vibrant sub-programme in Iceland during the period. However the subsequent growth in funding did not match the growth in participant numbers, raising concerns voiced by both Icelandic participants and the NA that funding may be becoming too low per Icelandic Comenius participant. This funding/participant ratio went from approx. €1.340 in 2007 to approx. €940 in 2009, a 43% decrease.

8: LLP Comenius overview 2007-2009

Comenius	2007			2008			2009		
	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €
School partnerships	47	322	429.800	24	400	434.500	25	484	374.000
Individual pupil mobility	1	15	11.200	2	48	40.000	4	100	80.000
In-service training of staff grants	x	62	98.837	x	66	95.985	x	81	130.900
Preparatory visits	11	13	15.450	9	15	17.220	18	24	33.754
Assistantship grants	1	1	4.590	x	2	14.383	x	3	14.346
Student teacher training (2007 and 2008)	1	10	7.000	1	10	7.000	x	x	x
Comenius Regio	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	20.000
Total	61	423	566.877	36	541	609.088	47	692	653.000

As discussed above, Icelandic Erasmus participation has for the most part been stable 2007-2009, with the exception of the strong growth in teacher- and staff mobility (Table 9). This has even prompted the transfer of funds from student mobility, with Commission approval. With the strong ongoing trend of continuously rising numbers of incoming Erasmus students, the NA has explicitly issued the target of 250 outgoing Erasmus students as a working national target from 2009. The Erasmus student mobility however remains the best known LLP action in Iceland within the higher education community.

9: LLP Erasmus overview 2007-2009

Erasmus	2007			2008			2009		
	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €
Student mobility	7	216	507.499	6	198	549.750	6	230	590.000
Teacher and staff mobility	7	78	98.396	6	100	119.723	6	85	100.000
Intensive programmes	1	32	35.063	1	32	43.980	1	32	42.000
Language courses	1	53	17.087	1	49	19.000	1	60	18.000
Preparatory visits & university charter	7	7	65.751	6	6	51.310	6	6	59.000
Total	23	386	723.796	20	385	783.763	20	413	809.000

Iceland has maintained its strong presence in the Leonardo sub-programme during the period, with 3-4 Transfer-of-Innovation projects ongoing each year (Table 10). Other aspects of Leonardo have also remained stable or strong, with the only exception perhaps being a drop in VETPRO (*professionals in vocational education and training*) participation in 2009.

Applications for 2010, especially in ICT, however strongly indicate that oversubscription in Leonardo could become a problem in Iceland in the very near future.

10: LLP Leonardo overview 2007-2009

Leonardo	2007			2008			2009		
	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €
People in Initial Vocational Training (IVT)	6	63	103.036	11	71	116.100	6	62	135.060
People in the labour market (PLM)	2	47	103.087	3	39	81.951	5	38	106.821
Professionals in vocational education and training (VETPRO)	13	101	120.274	14	95	108.000	10	51	83.119
"Development of innovation" projects	x	x	x	5	x	82.200	7	x	104.000
"Transfer of innovation" projects	4	x	751.844	4	x	726.949	3	x	723.574
Preparatory visits	11	11	14.801	14	14	19.012	20	20	30.912
Total	36	222	1.093.042	51	219	1.134.212	51	171	1.183.486

Although fairly limited in participant/project numbers, Icelandic Grundtvig participation has been growing rapidly (Table 11). This trend is even further strengthened with still rising Icelandic Grundtvig demand in the 2010 application process, according to NA staff.

11: LLP Grundtvig overview 2007-2009

Grundtvig	2007			2008			2009		
	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €	Number of projects	Number of beneficiaries	Grant amount €
Multilateral projects	5	x	55.120	4	x	68.000	7	x	114.000
Preparatory visits	3	3	3.600	4	4	5.300	3	6	8.500
In-service training	x	6	9.834	x	8	9.670	x	9	17.800
Workshops	x	x	x	x	x	x	1	x	19.050
Senior volunteering projects	x	x	x	x	x	x	1	x	15.880
Visits and exchanges	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11	8.240
Total	8	9	68.554	8	12	82.970	12	26	183.470

Overall, although witnessing perhaps differing developments within individual sub-programme actions in Iceland, the general trend especially in 2009 and 2010 is that of strong growth in LLP demand among Icelandic target groups, according to NA management. This is the development Icelandic implementing actors are currently preparing to meet, and best allocate the increasingly strained resources available.

3 General conclusions and recommendations

Following are the conclusions (3.1) and recommendations (3.2) drawn from the Icelandic LLP implementation, in *Executive Summary* format.

3.1 Conclusions

- The LLP implementation in Iceland 2007-2009 has in general been successful. There has been a continuation from the preceding Socrates and Leonardo programmes in Iceland, as the same actors are responsible for the national programme implementation. The participation of Iceland in LLP has proved important, for instance influencing the recent comprehensive national education and training legislation review, and continues to be relevant for the Icelandic education and training community.
- During the period, Iceland suffered substantive economic turmoil in the fall of 2008, both affecting Icelandic LLP implementation short-term with practical difficulties for individual participants and projects as well as causing longer-term growing demand within LLP sub-programmes and actions. The Icelandic economic collapse resulted in the immediate drop in the local currency (ISK) value of well over 50%, double-figure % GDP drop with ensuing strain on public finances for years to come. Fortunately Icelandic participants and implementing authorities were not hard-hit by the economic collapse as the NA and Commission worked well together in solving the many pressing issues. These recent developments in Iceland may however increase the relevance of LLP objectives as well as Community horizontal policies in Iceland in the coming years.
- National authorities are satisfied with the implementation of the programme. From the view of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, which is responsible for the programme in Iceland, the LLP has brought organizational simplification for the ministry, with the establishment of a single National Agency (NA) instead of the previous two. The ministry is slowly adjusting to its increased responsibility for national implementation of the programme introduced by the LLP, a development made even more challenging due to the current public financial constraints which have for instance limited Icelandic official participation in LLP Committee meetings.
- The ministry completed a contract with the University of Iceland regarding the continuing LLP national implementation until the end of 2013. This setup has been in place in Iceland from the outset of its programme participation in the early 1990s. The Icelandic NA benefits from the high-level of experience of key staff and management, most of whom have been involved with the programme in Iceland for over a decade.
- Following the LLP implementation, the Icelandic NA has been integrated to a degree, with IT, dissemination activities and general work processes reviewed, creating a stronger sense of single national LLP identity or virtual office. However, the NA has

remained physically separated, as it is still located in two different buildings on the UI campus, although within walking distance.

- The location of the Icelandic NA within UI offices has been a source of criticism, especially from competing HEIs, as they point out that Erasmus NA staff are working side-by-side with UI international office staff possibly creating an unfair advantage for the hosting HEI. NA management has responded to this criticism both by separating more clearly the working space between NA activities and UI activities, as well as reviewing work processes with the aim of minimizing any possible conflicts of interest arising.
- Icelandic LLP participants in all sub-programmes were very pleased with the service of the Icelandic NA and its staff. They praised the programme and the opportunities it provides, often in areas where international cooperation has been previously limited. Icelandic participants emphasised the importance of actually visiting European colleagues and/or counterparts, so much more educating, rewarding and revealing than communicating using latest modern technology. They praised increased use of IT during programme application- and reporting procedures, while still urging the continued Commission focus on less bureaucracy and increased level of proportionality between funding and reporting requirements.
- The two programme pillars of Erasmus and Leonardo maintained its strong status in Iceland during the period. The growing discrepancy between incoming and outgoing Erasmus students has prompted the NA to set a national target on outgoing student number, in an effort to close the gap. Strong growth has been witnessed in the Erasmus teacher and staff mobility, prompting transfer of Erasmus funds between actions. Leonardo has maintained its standing in Transfer of Innovation projects, while increased demand has been witnessed in IVT (People in Initial Vocational Training), especially in 2010 applications.
- The LLP sub-programme demonstrating the strongest growth in participation in Iceland is however undoubtedly Comenius. The NA has experienced oversubscription levels in Comenius previously not experienced in Iceland. Grundtvig participation in Iceland is limited although growing during the period.
- There is a general sense within the NA of strong demand growth in Iceland, evident during the last 1-2 years and especially in 2010 applications, undoubtedly fuelled by the economic turmoil and its following effects. This is the development Icelandic implementing actors are currently preparing to meet, and best allocate the resources available.
- The Icelandic NA is critical of the lack of information dissemination regarding the programme centralised actions. According to NA management, little or no information is received on Icelandic participation in centralised actions. The NA is also critical of the too formal, and bureaucratic approach applied by the EACEA, lacking a stronger

sense of service and collegiality currently present in Commission and NA relations during LLP.

- LLP management tools (LLPLink) are similarly strongly criticised by the Icelandic NA. According to NA management the tools provided have proved regrettably insufficient and not fully functional at present, half-way through the LLP programme lifecycle.
- Dissemination activities seem performed sensibly by implementing actors in Iceland and programme target groups well penetrated. This view is shared by NA staff and national authorities alike. Disadvantaged groups were put in special priority in the national 2009 application process.
- Decentralisation of Erasmus finance allocation was introduced in Iceland following the LLP launch. However, the experience demonstrated that the decentralisation was premature, and a scale-back towards the earlier structure was called for and implemented in close cooperation with the Icelandic HEIs.
- Disadvantages mentioned by NA staff following the LLP, are mainly focused on the increased level of reporting to Brussels with annual work plans and reports– as all programmes are now reported in one joint report that is quite time consuming to deliver. NA staff especially mentioned that different officials/departments seem to review particular chapters of NA annual reports, often resulting in the same or very similar questions and requests repeated to NA staff. More synchronisation at central level would be beneficial prior to approaching NAs.

3.2 Recommendations

- National LLP objectives could be more explicitly put forward by national authorities, both general longer-term aims as well as perhaps more short-term measureable targets. Such objective-setting should be the result of careful weighing of Icelandic interests and the best utilization of increasingly limited resources. The ongoing development of growing Icelandic LLP participation with ensuing increase in LLP funding, with the addition of recent unfortunate developments in Iceland of local currency depreciation as well as more limited availability of national funding, makes the importance of Icelandic LLP participation even more important for Icelandic stakeholders.
- National authorities and NA management alike should consider if additional improvements could be made regarding the current location of LLP activities within UI offices, to further accommodate concerns raised and with the aim of minimizing any possible conflicts of interest. Similarly the benefits and disadvantages of both physically and further integrating the Icelandic LLP NA should be considered.
- Icelandic NA management suggests the Commission commit resources immediately to prepare a centralized IT management system for the successor of the LLP programme. It should not matter that the detailed content or precise nature of the actions has not been fully developed – as all the main elements of process requirements are known. The current LLP management system (LLPLink) has been a big disappointment to the Icelandic NA management.
- The Icelandic NA is disappointed with the lack of cooperation between the EACEA and NAs concerning centralised actions and calls for improvements in this regard. Lessons should be drawn from the successful cooperation between the Commission and the NA in LLP implementation.
- Simplification of NA annual reporting requirements and more synchronisation of annual report review processes by Brussels centrally before approaching NAs are called for.
- Icelandic LLP participants, although welcoming increased use of IT in LLP application and reporting processes, call for further simplification, continued utilization of IT and especially increased emphasis on proportionality between Commission funding and reporting requirements.
- Participants urge the importance of actual mobility, so successful in the LLP and its predecessors. These initiatives are particularly important in creating a stronger sense of European identity and should be strengthened further. This view is shared by the Icelandic NA, which is sceptical of any virtual mobility initiatives if they come at the expense of LLP existing mobility structures.

- The added programme emphasis on Comenius during the LLP has been a particular success and should be strengthened further. Special attention should however simultaneously be put on levels of funding, as Icelandic participants were concerned that funding levels are becoming insufficient for Icelandic Comenius participants and even increasingly so with the continuous growth in demand displayed in Iceland.

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Internet sites and information sources:

www.lme.is

<http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/>

http://ec.europa.eu/education/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc1208_en.htm

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

<http://evropusamvinna.is/>

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/index_en.php

<http://www.statice.is/>

¹³ Ministry of Education (Mrs. Sólrun Jensdóttir); NA management (Mr Ágúst H Ingþórsson and Mrs Karitas Kvaran); NA staff; Háskóli Íslands; Háskólinn í Reykjavík; Listaháskóli Íslands; Landbúnaðarháskóli Íslands; Tækniskólinn; Verzlunarskóli Íslands; Myndlistarskólinn Reykjavík; Menntaskólinn Kópavogi; Rimaskóli; Leikskólinn Sólhlíð; Leikskólinn Álftún; Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins; Alþjóðamálastofnun; Intercultural Iceland; Sjálfsbjörg.

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