

Act respecting the status of the Icelandic language and Icelandic sign language

2011 No 61 7 June

Entry into force 15 June 2011 Amended by Act No 126/2011 (entry into force 30 September 2011).

Any reference in this Act to “the Minister” or “the Ministry” not accompanied by express mention of or reference to a specific field of responsibility shall be understood as being a reference to the **Minister of Education, Science and Culture** or to the **Ministry of Education, Science and Culture** as responsible for the implementation of this Act.

■ **Article 1** *National language – Official language*

Icelandic is the national language of the Icelandic people and the official language of Iceland.

■ **Article 2** *The Icelandic language*

The national language is the common language of the Icelandic general public. Public authorities shall ensure that its use is possible in all areas of Icelandic society.

All persons residing in Iceland must be given the opportunity to learn Icelandic and to use it for their general participation in Icelandic society, as further provided in *leges speciales*.

■ **Article 3** *Icelandic sign language*

Icelandic sign language is the first language of those who must rely on it for expression and communication, and of their children. It must be fostered and supported by public authorities.

All persons who have a need for sign language must be given the opportunity to learn Icelandic sign language and to use it from the beginning of their language acquisition, or as soon as deafness, hearing impairment or deaf-blindness has been diagnosed. Their immediate family members shall have the same right.

■ **Article 4** *Icelandic Braille*

Icelandic Braille is the first written language of those who have to rely on it for expression and communication. All persons who need to be able to read braille because of impaired vision must be given the opportunity to learn and to use Icelandic Braille as soon as they have the capacity to do so.

■ **Article 5** *Language policy*

Central and local authorities shall be responsible for preserving and promoting the Icelandic language, and shall ensure that it is used. The collaboration of the Icelandic Language Council (see Article 6) should be sought in regard to language policy and matters relating to the status of the Icelandic language.

The Icelandic government and local authorities shall facilitate the development, study, teaching and wider use of Icelandic sign language, and provide other support for cultural activities and formal and informal education for deaf, hearing-impaired and deaf-blind people. The collaboration of the Icelandic Sign Language Council (see Article 7) should be sought in regard to language policy and matters relating to the status of Icelandic sign language.

[The Ministry]⁽¹⁾ shall monitor the implementation of this Act and may call upon individual administrative entities to prepare reports in that regard.

⁽¹⁾Act No 126/2011, Article 545.

■ **Article 6** *The Icelandic Language Council*

The Minister shall appoint the Icelandic Language Council for a four-year term. The Icelandic Language Council shall be composed of 16 members. The Council may moreover offer a seat on the Council to one or two additional persons if it considers this to be of benefit to its work. Each of the following shall nominate one person to the Council: the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, the National Theatre, the Association of Icelandic Language Teachers, the Writers' Union of Iceland, the Union of Icelandic Journalists, the Professional Terminology Society (*Íðorðafélagið*) on behalf of terminology committees, the Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters, Icelandic Standards, the Icelandic Library and Information Science Association (*Upplýsing*), the Association of Non-fiction and Educational Writers (*Hagþenkir*), and the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland. The Rectors' Conference of Icelandic Higher Education Institutions shall nominate two persons to the Council. The Minister shall appoint two persons without nomination, one of which shall serve as Chair and the other as Vice-chair. [The Minister responsible for immigration]⁽¹⁾ shall furthermore nominate one representative from the immigrant community. The Icelandic Language Council shall determine the division of tasks between its members.

The role of the Icelandic Language Council shall be to provide public authorities with academically-informed advice on matters concerning the Icelandic language, and to make proposals to the Minister regarding language policy; in addition, it shall annually issue a statement on the status of the Icelandic language. The Council may take the initiative to draw attention to both positive and negative aspects of the ways in which the Icelandic language is used in the public sphere. The Icelandic Language Council shall compile rules on Icelandic orthography which shall, amongst other things, govern spelling as taught in schools, and which shall be issued by the Minister. Fundamental changes to orthographical rules shall be subject to the approval of the Minister.

The Icelandic Language Council shall have an office at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

The Minister shall issue a Regulation⁽²⁾ further providing for the activities of the Icelandic Language Council.

⁽¹⁾Act No 126/2011, Article 545. ⁽²⁾Regulation No 440/2012.

■ **Article 7** *The Icelandic Sign Language Council*

The Minister shall appoint five members, and an equal number of alternates, to the Icelandic Sign Language Council for a four-year term. The School of Humanities of the University of Iceland, the Communications Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, special interest groups for the deaf and hard of hearing in Iceland and the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland shall be consulted on appointments to the Council. The Minister shall select the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Icelandic Sign Language Council.

The role of the Icelandic Sign Language Council shall be to advise public authorities on any matter concerning Icelandic sign language, and to facilitate the promotion of Icelandic sign language and its use in Icelandic society.

The Icelandic Sign Language Council shall have an office at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies.

The Minister shall issue a Regulation further providing for the activities of the Icelandic Sign Language Council.

■ **Article 8** *Official language of public authorities*

Icelandic is the language of the Althing, the courts, public authorities, schools at all levels of the education system, and other entities involved in public works or providing services to the public.

■ **Article 9** *Interpreting and sign-language interpreting before public authorities*

The right to interpretation services and the duty of the courts to seek the assistance of interpreters and sign-language interpreters are governed by the provisions of the Act on Civil Procedure and the Law on Criminal Procedure.

Public authorities shall seek to ensure that persons who do not understand Icelandic are able to have their necessary business transacted and to acquaint themselves with the content of documents and certificates relevant to them.

■ **Article 10** *Language policy of central and local authorities*

The language used by central and local authorities in the execution of their tasks, or on their behalf, should be in accordance with good usage, simple and clear.

■ **Article 11** *Academic terminology in Icelandic*

Public authorities shall facilitate the steady development of academic terminology in Icelandic and ensure that it is accessible to everyone and used as widely as possible.

■ **Article 12** *Official language in international contexts*

Icelandic is the official language of Iceland in international contexts.

■ **Article 13** *Duties of central and local authorities and the status of Icelandic sign language*

Central and local authorities shall ensure that all those who need Icelandic sign-language services have access to them. Central and local authorities shall be responsible for preserving, developing and facilitating the use of Icelandic sign language. Emphasis shall be given to enabling Icelandic sign language to develop academic terminology in different fields and put it to use.

Icelandic sign language has the same status as Icelandic as a medium of expression for interpersonal communication, and discrimination between persons on the basis of which of the two languages they use is prohibited.

■ **Article 14** *Entry into force; repealed provisions*

This Act shall enter into force forthwith. ...

Disclaimer: This is an English translation. The original Icelandic text, as published in the Law Gazette (Stjórnartíðindi) is the authoritative text. Should there be discrepancy between this translation and the authoritative text, the latter prevails.