

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE ON THE
ACCESSION OF ICELAND TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

NEGOTIATING POSITION OF ICELAND

Chapter 26
Education and Culture

Summary of the negotiating position

1. Chapter 26 on Education and Culture is covered by the EEA Agreement. The EEA ensures Iceland's participation and financial contribution to relevant EU programmes and Iceland implements and applies EEA relevant *acquis* under this chapter on an ongoing basis.
2. Iceland accepts the *acquis communautaire* with respect to Chapter 26 on Education and Culture as of 14 January 2011¹. Iceland will have implemented any outstanding *acquis*, as of that date, under this chapter by the date of accession.
3. Iceland has the legislative and institutional framework necessary to continue implementing the *acquis* in this chapter.
4. Iceland does not request special arrangements, derogations or transitional periods under this chapter.

EEA Agreement

Iceland has been a party to the agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) since its entry into force in 1994. As a result, Iceland has participated in the single market for more than 16 years and implemented all relevant EU legislation with respect to the four freedoms, as well as in other important areas such as research and development, education, social policy, the environment, consumer protection, tourism and culture. The EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) regularly monitors Iceland's performance under the EEA Agreement and publishes information about Iceland's implementation record twice yearly in an internal market scoreboard.

In those chapters covered by the EEA, Iceland has built its legislative framework and institutional framework to comply with and implement relevant EU legislation. Chapter 26 on Education and Culture is covered by the EEA Agreement, and the Agreement ensures Iceland's participation and financial contribution to relevant EU programmes.

¹ Date of bilateral screening meeting

Legislative Framework

The legislative framework is in place to continue to implement the *acquis* in this chapter.

The *acquis* on education and culture is built around cooperation between Member States through programmes and the open method of coordination (OMC). Iceland has participated in centralised and decentralised programmes on education/training and culture since the early 1990s. Iceland has also participated in the EU OMC on education since 2002 and has expressed its wish to participate in the EU OMC on culture. Overall, Iceland develops its policies in these fields in line with European policies.

Education and Training

Iceland is aligned with the EU *acquis* on education and training and has participated in relevant EU programmes through the EEA Agreement since 1994.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for legislation implemented at all school levels, from primary and compulsory education through the upper secondary and higher education levels.

The right to receive general education is guaranteed by article 76 of the Constitution of Iceland. Article 76 of the Constitution stipulates that the Act shall guarantee for everyone suitable general education. The European Convention for Human Rights, incorporated into the Icelandic legal order by Act No. 62/1994, protects the right to education. Icelandic educational legislation and the National Curriculum Guidelines include provisions and objectives concerning social values and human rights.

According to the relevant school acts in the Icelandic legal order, the objectives and practice of study and instruction shall aim at preventing discrimination on the basis of origin, gender, sexual orientation, residence, social class, religion, health condition, handicap or situation in general. On the basis of the EEA Agreement, there is no discrimination between Icelandic and EU nationals with respect to access to education and training in Iceland.

Directive 77/486/EEC on the right to education for migrant children has been transposed through the Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008. Provisions are in place to ensure special assistance for the children of immigrants, such as supplemental language courses.

Iceland has participated in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) since its launch in 2007 and follows Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning. Iceland has an operational national agency for the LLP. The national agency manages and promotes LLP sub- programmes such as Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo and Grundtvig. All Icelandic universities and most primary and secondary schools have participated in projects under the LLP.

Iceland also participates as an observer in the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and in the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT).

Due to the high level of labour demand in recent years in Iceland, the proportion of early school leavers has been higher than the EU average. To respond to this, *inter alia*, the Iceland 2020 Strategy is being implemented by the Prime Minister's Office in order to reduce a labour force with minimal education from 30% in 2010 to 10% or less by 2020.

Youth and Sport

In youth related matters, Iceland has participated closely in EU cooperation and Iceland's policies are in line with the EU Youth Strategy for 2010-2018.

Iceland is participating in the European Union Youth in Action Programme (2007- 2013) adopted by the European Parliament and the Council with Decision 1719/2006/EC. The Programme has an implementing agency in Iceland with a staff of 5 people.

The Parliament passed the Youth Act No. 70/2007 with the aim of enhancing individual quality and to increase democratic awareness of young people. The Minister of Education, Science and Culture is the highest authority on youth affairs according to this act.

Culture

Iceland has developed a culture system in line with EU standards. Iceland has been a participant in programmes concerning culture in the EU since 1994 and currently has a Cultural Contact Point which promotes EU Culture programmes from 2007-2013. Reykjavik was chosen as one of the European Cities of Culture for the year 2000 and Iceland has been a participant in programmes and collaboration projects within the EU for over 16 years.

Institutional Framework

The institutional framework is available to continue to implement the *acquis* in this chapter.

The administrative structures to implement EU programmes in the fields of education and training, youth and sports and culture are in line with EU requirements.

Education and Training

Education in Iceland is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, which is composed of about 80 staff members. The school system is decentralised and pre-schools and compulsory schools are run by the municipalities. However, the Ministry is responsible for releasing curriculum guides and issuing regulations concerning education. The Ministry is also responsible for general and vocational education and training (VET) as well as continuing and adult education.

The administrative capacity in Iceland is sufficient to continue implementing the *acquis* under education and training.

Youth and Sport

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, along with the Youth Council, is responsible for youth related matters. However, the municipal governments define the role and function of youth related activities. The general organisational approach towards sports is managed by a centralised national policy but the implementation is decentralised. Iceland has participated in EU programmes on youth since 1994 and young people's involvement in them has exceeded expectations.

The Ministry of Welfare is responsible for providing resources for young unemployed people (16- 24 years old), to prevent them from becoming inactive in the society.

Matters concerning sports also fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Sports are mostly organised at the municipal level. However, the Ministry is responsible for co-operation between Iceland and the EU in that field.

The administrative capacity in Iceland is sufficient to continue implementing the *acquis* under youth and sport.

Culture

The competent authority concerning cultural matters is the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. However, most cultural activities in Iceland are in the hands of individuals or non-governmental organizations. There are state owned cultural sectors such as the National Theatre, the National Gallery and the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service. The Ministry funds projects and research in the cultural sphere through various grants available for artists. Iceland has formally asked to participate in the OMC on culture.

The administrative capacity in Iceland is sufficient to continue implementing the *acquis* under culture.

Acceptance of the *acquis*

Iceland accepts the *acquis communautaire* in Chapter 26 on Education and Culture as of 14 January 2011. No transitional periods, derogations or special solutions are requested under this chapter.