

Ministry of Education and Children – Iceland

Progress Report on the ISTP 2024 Commitments

Commitment 1

Investing in attracting students in teacher training and teachers into the profession, improving teacher retainment and preventing early attrition by providing mentoring for novice teachers and quality professional development in line with the needs of teachers.

Progress:

Teacher shortage has remained a persistent challenge within the Icelandic education system. The government's five-year National Action Plan for Teacher Recruitment, initiated in spring 2019 and concluded in fall 2024, aimed to address this critical issue through strategic interventions. The initiative focused on attracting and retaining certified, highly qualified teachers across all educational levels and reducing attrition among novice teachers through structured mentorship programs. Significant progress has been made in reaching the objectives.

- **Increased enrolment:** Initial teacher training programs experienced substantial growth in enrolment numbers.
- **Improved graduation rates:** The number of qualified graduates from teacher training programs showed marked improvement. Compared to the 2015-2019 baseline period (prior to the Action Plan's implementation), 2025 saw a remarkable 150% increase in new qualified teachers graduating from initial teacher training programs.

Despite these achievements, the education system in Iceland is still facing challenges, especially in terms of retention issues. The rate of qualified teachers leaving the profession has shown a concerning upward trend during the past few years and long-term sustainability of the teaching workforce therefore remains at risk.

In autumn 2024, the Teachers' Union launched a media campaign highlighting the ongoing teacher shortage crisis. Following extensive negotiations, a new collective bargaining agreement was finalized in February 2025, which secured enhanced compensation packages for educators as well as a framework for reassessing the teaching profession. Two critical areas were prioritized; improving working conditions for teachers and allocating additional resources to schools to maintain educational quality.

Commitment 2

Improve the working conditions of teachers by providing schools with enhanced support and integrated services to safeguard quality education and improve retainment and sustainment of teachers in partnership with key stakeholders.

Progress:

The Ministry of Education and Children, in collaboration with key stakeholders, has been working on a comprehensive bill on inclusive education. The bill aims to implement standardized work practices, support mechanisms, and services that ensure equitable access to quality education for all students. At the heart of the proposal is a commitment to specify, coordinate, and legally mandate the services integral to inclusive education, with the goal of strengthening the support for students, parents, and educators. The primary focus being on both the structure and the responsibilities of services provided

with a significant emphasis on collaboration. The bill encompasses a framework consisting of a three-tiered service structure:

- **Internal School Services:** This framework serves as the internal support system within each school, ensuring that inclusive practices are embedded into the daily practices in schools.
- **External School Services:** This external support mechanism is designed to provide professional assistance to local authorities managing preschool and primary school settings, as well as to the state managing upper secondary schools. The Directorate of Education and School Services will oversee the provision of the services that encompass advisory support for school staff on teaching methodologies, professional development, collaboration between families and schools, counselling for students, and assessments of different factors impacting both learning and students' well-being.
- **National Support for School Services:** A centralized and coordinated support framework from The Directorate of Education and School Services that spans all educational levels nationwide. It aims to enhance and school practices nationwide, focus on continuous professional development of educators, facilitate school development, and provide professional support for disadvantaged students.

In fall 2024, the Icelandic government collapsed, leading to elections in late November. This transition resulted in new political parties assuming leadership and the appointment of a new Minister of Education and Children. Consequently, these governmental changes have led to a delay in the submission of the proposed bill to Parliament.

Commitment 3

Revise the content of initial teacher training and professional development programs to equip teachers with the necessary competencies to ensure that students acquire the skills needed for the future, whilst supporting all learners on their path of learning, enhancing academic achievement and engagement while protecting social and emotional well-being.

Progress:

In 2020, a new Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders in preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools was enacted. The Act, along with an associated regulation, established a comprehensive competence framework that outlines clear criteria for teachers and school leaders. The primary objective of the competence framework is to provide guidance to teacher education institution specifically in relation to learning outcomes and the qualifications necessary to become a teacher.

During the implementation period, teacher education institutions have undertaken a thorough revision of their initial teacher education programs to ensure alignment with the criteria established in the competence framework. This revision process is advancing effectively, with amendments made to uphold the quality of initial teacher education and to ensure that the competencies of teachers meet the evolving needs of the school community.