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Evaluation of Higher Education in Iceland for improvement of teaching and research

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ABSTRACT

A few facts about Iceland to put the higher education system in the right context. Seven higher education institutions. The first university founded 1911. First framework law on higher education 1997. Objective of the law to increase autonomy and secure the basis for private institutions. Quality assurance introduced by the framework law, both internal and external evaluation according to rules issued by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture.

Iceland signed the Bologna declaration on co-operation in the European Higher Education Area 1999. Introduction of the Bologna process in Iceland relatively unproblematic. Quality assurance in the forefront of the Bologna process.

Iceland participated in OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education 2004 and 2005 along with 24 countries, one of which is Japan. Report on Iceland published on OECD home page 22 August 2006. Quality assurance discussed rather positively in the report.

New law on higher education institutions came into force 1 July 2006. Main aim to strengthen the Icelandic higher education system and improve quality so that Icelandic higher education institutions can successfully compete internationally.

The new law introduce accreditation of higher education institutions, both for public and private institutions already existing. Criteria for accreditation is stipulated by the law. Institutions apply for accreditation of specific fields of study. The Minister appoints a committee of three independent experts to evaluate the applications. If the experts recommend accreditation it will be granted by the Minister.

The new Act also stipulates that the Minister shall issue National Qualification Framework in accordance with the decision by the Education Ministers in the Bologna process 2005. A National Qualification Framework has already been issued in Iceland.

The procedure introduced by the law for quality assurance of teaching is based on ENQA's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and a special process is to be put in place for research.

Each institution is responsible for internal evaluation, and the Minister is responsible for external evaluation and publishes a three year plan. The Ministry's Office of Evaluation and Analysis will be responsible for the administration of external evaluation, but the evaluation will be implemented by an independent agent.

Accreditation of all institutions should be in place mid 2008. The Ministry is certain that full implementation of the new law will strengthen the position of Icelandic higher education institutions in an increasingly competitive world where mutual trust is prerequisite for co-operation in the international arena.