

WP2 Framework Analysis Iceland Country Report

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This study was conducted from January to April 2013 to review the current situation in Iceland regarding resilience and other related terms. Research shows that not many studies of resilience have been made in Iceland but many related terms have been examined. The focus will be on secondary education, university education, adult education and training, dropouts, public health and students' well-being.

Resilience is quite a well-known concept in the Icelandic language as "seigla" and it is common knowledge that people must possess resilience in order to succeed in life and be able to resist serious threats to their adaptation or development.

There are many different definitions of the term "resilience" but in this study the focus is mainly on risk, risk factors and prevention factors. As previously mentioned not much information is available on resilience in Icelandic research but addresses the concept in connection with related terms such as dropouts, well-being and risk factors.

According to Toland and Carrigan (2011), resilience is a dynamic concept which sees the quality of an individual's adaption as resulting from interactive processes between factors operating at the level of individuals, families, schools and communities. For Masten (2001) resilience is characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaption or development. Some individuals who have suffered significant threats to their development have been able to deal with the situations effectively. Those individuals display resilience and make choices that create positive results for their lives. Resilience is therefore a dynamic process. School environment is important in order to determine the level of social and emotional well-being of students. Many studies have found that the school environment is important when determining the level of emotional well-being of students.

There are five main chapters in this study that serve the purpose of explaining the situation in Iceland.

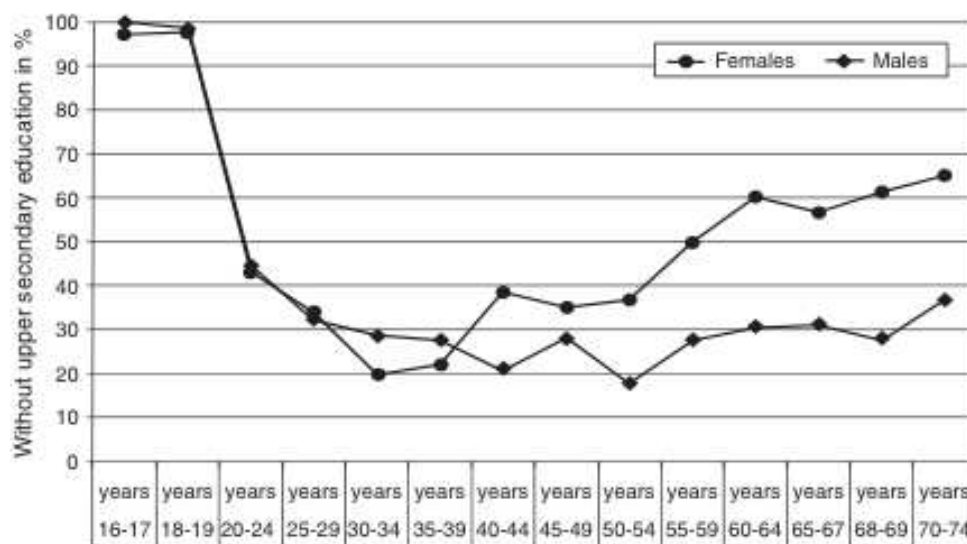
1. A summary of existing figures within the national adult education systems concerning the perception of resilience or other related terms.

The Icelandic population is a total of about 330,000. Jonasson and Blondal (2011) cited that numerous studies have shown that the Icelandic education system has developed similarly to some other much larger educational systems and it has been dealing with the

same problems. In order to understand the context in Iceland it is necessary to examine statistics related to various terms that are connected with resilience, such as dropouts, support systems, public health, well-being and unemployment.

1.2 Dropouts from education

According to Jonasson and Blondal (2011) early school leaving is more common in Iceland than in many other OECD countries. An Icelandic study of a cohort born in 1975 showed that around 40% had not finished upper secondary school at the age of 24. But some individuals often go back to school a few years later often within the adult education system. A total of 16% of those who had not completed upper secondary school at the age of 24 were studying at the time the study was done.



Proportion of a cohort which has not obtained any formal certificate after compulsory education in Iceland, 2003. (Source: Jonasson & Dofradottir, 2008)

1.3 Secondary education

According to OECD statistics from 2012, it is estimated that an average of 84% of today’s young people in the OECD countries will complete an upper secondary education in their lifetime. In Iceland, 88% of the population complete an upper secondary education, putting Iceland a little higher than the OECD average figures. Of these 88%, there are 69% who complete their education when they are less than 25 years of age and 19% who are 25 years old and older.

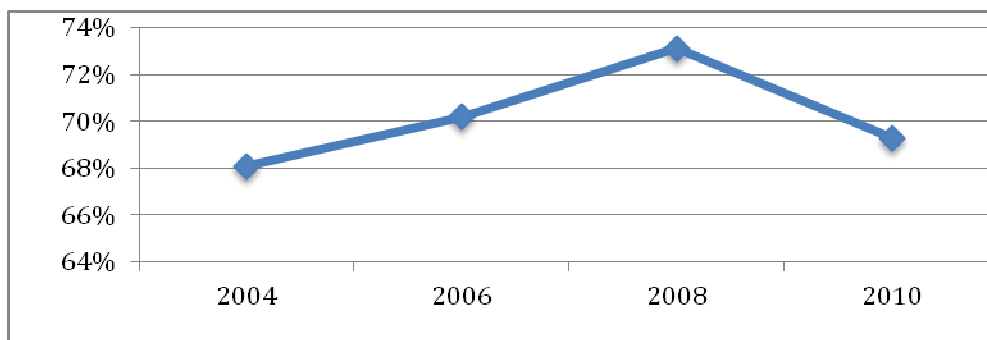
For years, Kristjana Stella Blondal and Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir have been researching various factors related to young people and their education.

According to them, young people who do not complete an upper secondary education face a greater disadvantage than ever before. One of their researches focused on student

disengagement in relation to expected and unexpected educational pathways. They were able to detect important critical differences in what happens to a proportion of students during the age of 14 to 15: some become more vulnerable to dropout and others become more resilient. The findings regarding change over a period of time are particularly interesting in the case of academically competent students; those who eventually dropped out became even more disengaged the following year and those who graduated became considerably less disengaged.

Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir is currently doing a long-term research; *Risk behaviour and resilience in young people*. The main purpose of the research is to study risk factors in the lives of teenagers and young people, focusing on substance use, school performance and dropouts. The participants in the research are all young people who were in the 9th grade in the spring of 1994 and have been observed ever since. The findings have not yet been published but it will be interesting to see their impact on the debate on resilience in Iceland.

1.4 University education



Collected data about graduation rates in universities in Iceland from 2004-2010 from Statistics Iceland.

In recent decades there has been an increased demand for university programmes in Europe. Of those who begin university programmes in Iceland only about 2/3 of them complete their education.

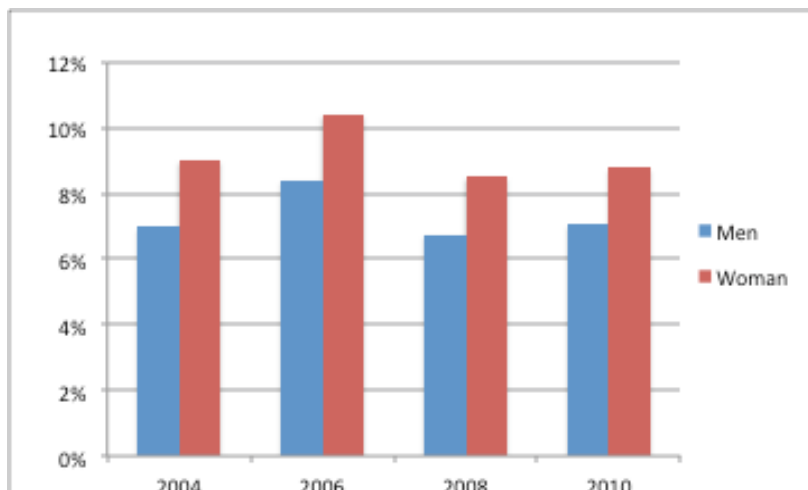
Even though there has been a greater demand for university programmes, there is still room for shorter, vocationally-oriented programmes. In the *Education at Glance 2012* report an average of 11% of today's young adults in the OECD countries are expected to complete short, vocationally-oriented programmes in their lifetimes. One way to reduce dropouts is to provide shorter study programmes for those who are not suited for an extended formal education and give them an opportunity to get an education that will

benefit them in the labour market and/or can be the first step towards further education later in life.

1.5 Adult education

Adult education and training have played an important role in Iceland, both in the formal school system and elsewhere. Even though adult education has been important, it has not been included in discussions about the development of education until recently. Furthermore, not many statistics can be found that show resilience within the adult educational system.

Statistics Iceland collects data annually within the field of education. The institution provides information about students, staff and school operation at all school levels. Furthermore, it has collected data from the labour market about education that adults seek outside of the formal school system, such as seminars, workshops and other courses.



Collected data from Statistics Iceland about adults that seek education outside of the formal school system such as seminars, workshops and other courses. The data is percentages of the population from 25 to 64 years old.

According to the information from Statistics Iceland more women participated in seminars and courses outside the formal school systems than men during the years 2004-2010. Furthermore, there seems to be a tendency that fewer individuals seek seminars and courses after the financial crisis in Iceland in 2008. If this development continues it might affect the welfare and well-being of the population in the future.

1.6. Support systems

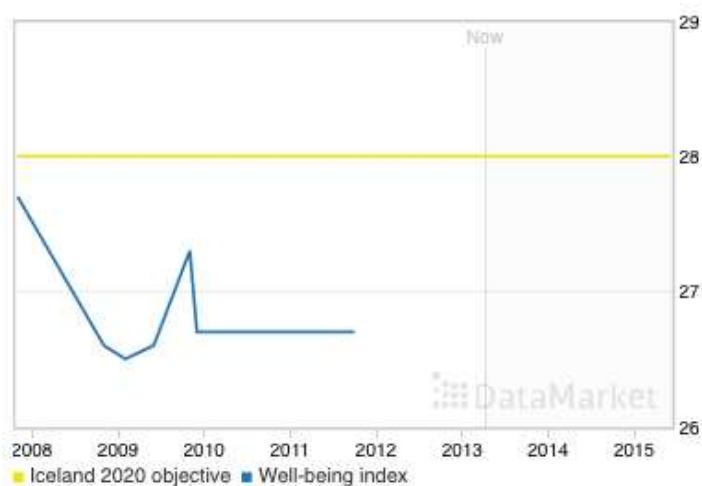
According to Birgisdottir, Jonsdottir, and Sigurdardottir (2004) some countries focus on prevention within the educational system in order to reduce as soon as possible the numbers of students dropping out of school and to deal with the problem before it actually arises. Many interventions and support programmes have been developed over the years

and when students feel that they are socially supported, it appears to help them in at-risk situations and in achieving positive educational outcomes. Bjorg Birgisdottir, Sigridur Hulda Jonsdottir and Anna Sigurdardottir developed the *WATCH* (What Alternatives, Thinking, Coping, Hoping) programme and it has been in use in many schools and educational centres in Iceland. It has also been used in other countries in Europe, especially in Sweden and Denmark as it has been translated into these languages. One of the main goals of the programme is to provide potential dropouts with a support system to develop positive attitudes and assist them in choosing positive coping strategies when facing difficult moments in life. Such support systems play an important role when considering integrating resilience into the educational system.

1.7 Public health and well-being

The general state of health is good in Iceland, life expectancy is as high as can be, infant mortality is lower than in most other OECD countries, and the percentage of people who are considered to be in good health is also high. There is, nevertheless, a pressing need to make improvements in society so that citizens can easily make informed decisions about healthy lifestyles. For the last decade the concept “lifestyle” has been more important when discussing health and welfare.

One of the main objectives of the *Iceland 2020 governmental policy statement* is to improve well-being amongst individuals in Iceland for the coming years.



To improve well-being so that the average measurement on the well-being index rises from 26.6% in 2009 to 28% in 2020.

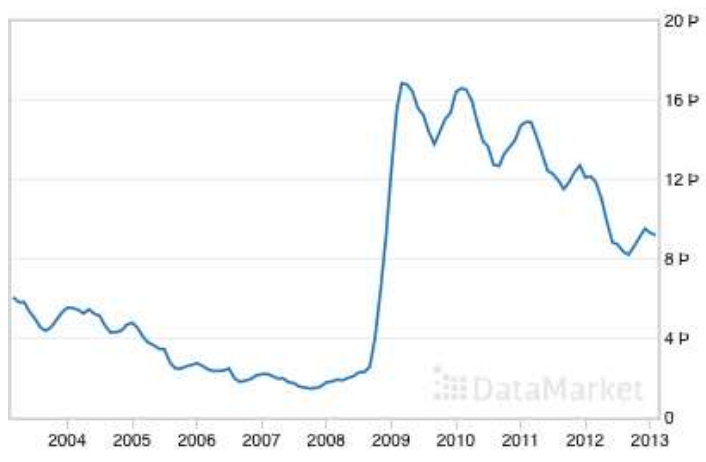
The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis, ICSRA, (Icel.: Rannsóknarmiðstöðin Rannsóknir & greining) specialises in researching the well-being

and conditions of young people in the last decade. Numerous researches have been made on various factors in the lives of young people, such as leisure activities, hobbies, well-being and substance use. The research has revealed that young people, who eat healthy food and regularly take part in some kind of physical exercise, are more likely to do better in school than those whose lifestyles are less healthy, and they are also more likely to have a stronger self-concept. The research has also shown that there is a connection between the consumption of alcohol and tobacco and performance in school, well-being and other risk behaviour. In the reports from ICSRA practical information can be found for people who work with children and young people.

1.8 Unemployment

Iceland has a tradition of people working very much and also a history of low unemployment. Most students from an early age work during the summer months and for decades there have been enough jobs for anyone who wants to work. Unemployment has been almost unknown until a few years ago. The Directorate of Labour, (Icel.: Vinnumálastofnun), provides employment services within the country as well as the daily management of the Unemployment Benefit Fund.

The directorate submits reports on the employment situation and statistics of unemployment. The unemployment rate used to be quite low in Iceland but the financial crisis in 2008 had a great impact on the unemployment situation in the country and the unemployment rate has risen considerably. This situation has led to great numbers of individuals seeking jobs in other countries, mainly Norway. Therefore the Icelandic government has been facing new challenges in the labour market and are constantly looking for new strategies to deal with the situation.



Unemployment rates in Iceland (in thousands) from the Directorate of Labour, 2013

2. Present national strategies for implementation of emphasising strengths and capacity that support physical, social, mental and spiritual well-being in the educational curricula in adult and lifelong learning education.

2.1. Iceland 2020 - governmental policy statement

According to the *Iceland 2020 - governmental policy statement* for the economy and community, from the Prime Minister's office, Iceland aims to become a dynamic society capable of protecting its welfare in a manner that is sustainable and serves all members of the community by the year 2020.

In the development of the policy statement, particular consideration was given to those groups that risk long-term unemployment in the wake of the financial crisis. In a period of economic downturn, it is more important than ever to ensure that plans are in place to strengthen social participation and the active inclusion of all citizens, in addition to boosting the social infrastructure of welfare services, the education system and culture. All of the tasks that fall under *Iceland 2020* are expected to incorporate gender perspectives into their work.

2.2 Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture aims to facilitate people's access to education and to increase adult participation. It is important to give adults who have not completed a formal upper secondary education an opportunity to finish the studies they may have started and furthermore that their former studies, seminars and any kind of life- and work experience be evaluated towards reducing the current requirements for the completion of their studies.

The Ministry emphasizes the importance of people embracing the idea that education is a lifelong process that lasts from the cradle to the grave. Learning doesn't only take place in schools but also in workplaces, when taking part in leisure activities, in everyday life and wherever people acquire knowledge from experience. The Ministry is working towards the goal of lifelong education both by supporting the work of institutions that provide informal- as well as continuous education and by enabling upper secondary schools to offer study programmes in night school and by supporting the teaching of Icelandic to people of foreign origin.

In the year 2010 the Act on Adult Education came into effect. This Act covers the organisation of adult education, by education and training providers that receive accreditation based on the Act, and public allocation for its implementation. The main

objectives of adult education are among other things to provide increased opportunities for active participation in society to individuals with short formal education. In the Act there is also an objective to provide individuals with a way to increase their vocational skills and enhance their responsibilities in that respect and also to offer adult education to individuals who have reduced educational and professional opportunities, taking into account their competences and unequal situation.

2.3 Education is a Work Process

A special initiative, based on proposals from ministries, parliamentary groups, members of the labour market and a group of students was called *Education is a Work Process* (Icel.: *Nám er vinnandi vegur*) began in 2011. It was financed by the government and members of the labour market. The purpose of the initiative was to guarantee all applicants under the age of 25, who fulfilled certain requirements, access to an upper secondary school in the autumn of 2011. Furthermore, new educational opportunities were created for up to 1000 job applicants for two years in upper secondary schools, universities and in continuing education. About 1500 students were enrolled in upper secondary schools in the autumn of 2011 as a result of the initiative *Education is a Work Process*. This coincides among other things with the objective *Iceland 2020* to lower the proportion of Icelanders 20 to 66 years old who do not have a formal secondary education.

There were quite many dropouts in the students' group in the first semester, or about 21%. Parallel to the initiative educational and vocational counselling was strengthened in the upper secondary schools that enrolled students from the initiative and these students were given special support in order to attempt to prevent dropouts. The result was positive as the number of dropouts went down considerably in the following semester and was about 11.5%, almost half the number of the first semester. Another positive result is that a total of 7.83% of the students from the initiative have completed their studies. In the following two years the excellent cooperation of educational and vocational counsellors, students, schools and institutions has continued in order to support and maintain the success that has been acquired by the initiative.

3. Present activities of the nongovernmental sector concerning the introduction of resilience into lifelong education (associations, foundations, initiatives, projects, etc.)

3.1 The Association of Lifelong Learning and Adult Centres - *Kvasir*

The introduction of resilience into lifelong education by the nongovernmental sector can be described by the activities of the Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Centres in Iceland.

“Kvasir” is the Icelandic name of the association of these centres and their main objectives are:

- To advance lifelong learning and university education in Iceland.
- To enhance employer awareness of the importance of lifelong learning as a resource and investment for the future that will improve life for individuals, companies and society as a whole.
- To enhance awareness of the role of lifelong learning centres within the national education system and seek support for that awareness in overall society.

The centres are stationed all around the country and are ten in total. All of them have the same goal which is to guide and educate individuals to live their lives to the fullest. The concept of resilience being a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar, Gichetti and Becker, 2000) or as Masten (2001) stated: “... good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development”. This is taken into account when guiding individuals seeking learning opportunities within the lifelong Learning and Adult Education Centres.

3.2 *Mimir* - Centre for Lifelong Learning

Mimir is one of the Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Centres and is stationed in the capital Reykjavík. Mimir offers a variety of courses and the main goal is to improve people's skills and thus improve their situation on the labour market. The courses are organised in accordance with the needs of working people as well as those of the economy at any given time. The emphasis is on cooperation with the labour market as well as development of diverse educational offers. Mimir has signed a contract with the Education and Training Service Centre stating that Mimir works in accordance with a quality-system and -control, developed by the Education and Training Service centre. It also emphasises that teaching methods must suit the needs of adults. Mimir is based on three main sectors:

1. Multiculturalism and leisure activities
2. Education for the labour market
3. Career guidance

The general public seeks courses regarding Multiculturalism and leisure activities. The majority of those who attend other courses offered by Mimir are labourers with little formal education as well as immigrants.

3.3 The Icelandic Rehabilitation Fund - *VIRK*

The Icelandic Rehabilitation Fund VIRK has the main objective of systematically decreasing the probability of employees losing their jobs due to incapacity and sickness, by helping the individuals to increase their activities by promoting *Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)*, including *Return to Work (RTW)* and other interventions. At VIRK consulting services are provided for employees who are ill or injured and are off work for an extended period of time due to loss of their ability to work. The main emphasis is positive thinking and cooperation with all participants in the vocational rehabilitation. There is also emphasis on utilising and promoting interventions and activities in the vicinity of the employee's home and making sure the consultancy is individualised. There is also a focus on the individual's strengths and abilities.

3.4 A Medical Rehabilitation Centre - Janus

Janus is a medical rehabilitation centre which regards the infrastructure of the society as being sufficient for the individual's rehabilitation. Janus focuses on working with the individual with a holistic view of health and his or her prospects for the future. Furthermore, it is the assumption that the environment in its broad sense affects the individual and vice versa and that the individual is an expert of his own life and almost always knows what suits him best. The individual often has to seek the support of multiple professionals to achieve his or her goals.

4. Brief description of existing courses, seminars and workshops for the general public and for the expert public with focus on their methodology and the target groups (both commercial and non-profit)

Adults can find various courses and seminars within the lifelong learning system. The lifelong learning centres offer courses for the unemployed population and low skilled workers amongst others. The main emphasis is making a curriculum that meets the needs of the individual and to value the prior learning and experiences. As an example *Aftur í nám* which may be called "Back to Study" the main goal to enhance the self-esteem of the individual and to teach those who are dyslexic. The role of the teacher or the facilitator is to stimulate and motivate students and make an effort to respond to their needs for clarification and feedback.

The concept of resilience is not commonly used within the lifelong learning system but individuals who have finished their studies say that after taking one course they are more willing to continue their studies either within the formal educational system or elsewhere. The courses offered focus on recognising and strengthening existing skills and assets, enhancing self-esteem and promoting competence.

Another example offered to those who have been out of work for some time is *Sterkari starfsmaður - Upplýsingatækni og samskipti* and can be translated as: “A Stronger Employee - IT and Communication”. In this course the main emphasis is on adding to the pre-existing knowledge of the individual. Adults have experiences that must not be undervalued and therefore the teachers of the course work with the individual during the course. In addition to introducing the most common computer programs used today the teachers discuss communication in general and what knowledge and skills individuals must have on the job market.

Other adult education institutions run by municipalities offer various kinds of study options such as *Grettistak*, which is an option for individuals, customised rehabilitation made in cooperation with the individuals themselves. These individuals can study at Reykjavik Courses (Icel.: Námsflokkar Reykjavíkur).

5. List of possible stakeholders who are responsible for educational content within the educational structures.

5.1 Association of Educational-Vocational Counsellors

Institutions that offer education in Iceland have the obligation through legislation to hire an educational-vocational counsellor. All educational and vocational counsellors are members of one association called the Association of Educational-Vocational Counsellors. (Icel.: Félag náms- og starfsráðgjafa). This association has a forum online where matters concerning the profession are posted. The president of the Association is the contact person and the website is <http://www.fns.is>

5.2 *Kvasir* - The Association of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Centres

Educational and vocational counsellors are stationed in educational centres around the country where the aim is to focus on adult education. The centres are a part of the Education and Training Service Centre that was established in December 2002 by the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA) and since 2010 it is also owned by the Federation of State and Municipal Employees, the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland and the Ministry of Finance.

“Kvasir” is the name of the Association of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Centres. The contact person is Arnheidur Gigja Gudmundsdottir. These centres are:

Centres	Website
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Austurbru – Centre for Continuing Education in the East of Iceland	http://www.tna.is
Farskolinn – Centre for Continuing Education in the NW of Iceland	http://www.farskolinn.is
Framvegis - Centre for Continuing Education	http://www.framvegis.is
Centre for Continuing Education in the West Fjords	http://www.frmst.is
Centre for Continuing Education of the South of Iceland	http://www.fraedslunet.is
Centre for Continuing Education at Sudurnes	http://www.mss.is
Mimir – Centre for Continuing Education	http://www.mimir.is
Centre for Continuing Education in the West of Iceland	http://www.simenntun.is
Simey – Centre for Continuing Education in Eyjafjordur	http://www.simey.is
Viska – Centre for Continuing Education in the Westman Islands	http://www.viskave.is
Centre for Continuing Education in Thingeyjarsysla	http://hac.is

5.3 Upper Secondary Schools

Within the formal educational system adults have the opportunity to study through distance education in several upper secondary schools in Iceland. These schools are:

Secondary School	Website	Contact person
Borgarholt Upper Secondary School	http://www.bhs.is	Thorkatla Thorisdottir
Armuli Upper Secondary School	http://www.fa.is	Steinunn H. Hafstad
Gardabaer Upper Secondary School	http://www.fg.is	Jonina Kristjansdottir
Upper Secondary School of NW Iceland	http://www.fnv.is	Asbjorn Karlsson
Snaefell Upper Secondary School	http://www.fsn.is	Hrafnhildur Hallvarðsdóttir
Trollaskagi Upper Secondary School	http://www.mtr.is	Valgerdur O. Einarasdóttir
Technical College Reykjavik	http://www.tskoli.is	Gudmundur P. Asgeirsson
Akureyri Technical College	http://www.vma.is	Ingimar Arnason
The Commercial College of Iceland	http://www.verslo.is	Sigurlaug Kristmannsdottir

5.4. Other institutions

Service Centres

Icelandic municipalities run educational and service centres that serve people with the least formal education. The municipalities also operate service centres that offer counselling service for individuals and families and recreational counselling. Educational and vocational counsellors work in the service centres. Contact: Elma Vagnsdóttir.

Mimir- Centre for Lifelong Learning, <http://www.mimir.is>, Contact: Anna Kristin Gunnardottir

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, website:

<http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is>. Contact: Erna G. Arnadottir

Janus - Medical Rehabilitation Centre, website: <http://www.janus>, Contact: Kristin Siggeirsdottir

VIRK - The Icelandic Rehabilitation Fund, website: <http://www.virk.is>, Contact: Karen Bjornsdottir

6. List of literature in the national language concerning resilience (including scientific articles and popular science).

Below is a list of literature cited in this study, both in Icelandic and English:

The Adult Education Act, No.27, 31 March 2010. Accessed at: <http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-PDF-Althjodlegt/Adult-Education-Act.pdf>

Association of Educational-Vocational Counsellors. Accessed at <http://www.fns.is>

Birgisdottir, B., Jonsdottir, S.H., & Sigurdardottir, A. (2004) WATCH Handbook for Facilitators when Assisting Learners in Groups. Reykjavik: Svansprent.

Blondal, K.S., & Adalbjarnardottir, S. (2012). Student Disengagement in Relation to Expected and Unexpected Educational Pathways. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 56 (1), 85-100.

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Masten, A. S., (2001) Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56, 227-238.

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Toland, J., Carrigan, D. (2011) Educational Psychology and resilience: New concept, new opportunities. *School Psychology International*, 32(1) 95-106.

Virk starfsendurhæfingarsjóður. The Icelandic Rehabilitation Fund. Accessed at: <http://virk.is/>