

## 2024-2025 Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Research Program Iceland Country Profile

**Partner Organization:** Fulbright Commission Iceland

**Eligible Program Dates:** 3-5 months from January – May 2025 or September – December 2025.

**Host Institution Expectations:** The University of Iceland School of Education will serve as a host for the selected candidate. More information can be found on the School of Education's [page](#). The candidate may have additional hosts.

**Language Requirement:** None.

**Monthly Allowance:** Between \$5,700 - \$6,300 (exact amount to be confirmed at a later date).

**Dependent Information:** An allowance of \$2,000 per eligible dependent will be provided as part of the grant. Children can attend primary and lower-secondary public schools at little or no cost, which is a great way to integrate into Icelandic society. The Commission can assist grantees in finding an appropriate local public school. Grantees with dependents should read the family guide on our [webpage](#).

**Country Overview:** Iceland is a small Nordic country, an island republic in the North Atlantic, between the U.S. and the European mainland. Iceland is technologically advanced; English is widely spoken. The population of now 388,000 has changed drastically as the immigrant population has risen from about 3% since the millennium up to 20%. As a small, highly technologically advanced country, Iceland can support many types of research. English is widely spoken and used in academia. Fulbrighters can generally expect good access to people, institutions, and information for research purposes.

Iceland has spectacular nature and offers an opportunity for unique outdoor experiences, in addition to a vibrant cultural scene and a cuisine that has been gaining international recognition. The Fulbright Commission in Iceland prefers to maintain close ties with Fulbrighters during their stay and provide a sense of community. There are monthly grantee activities sponsored by the Commission, in addition to access to Fulbright alumni events and other social activities.

**Educational System Overview:** The education system in Iceland is divided into four levels: pre-school, compulsory, upper secondary, and higher education. The system is pre-dominantly publicly funded with very few private schools. The central government has the overall responsibility at all levels of education and sets the policies. Local authorities are responsible for the operation of pre-schools and the single structure compulsory school level (primary and secondary schools) in their area.



A fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system is that everyone should have equal opportunity to acquire an education, irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, possible handicap, and cultural or social background. The Education Strategy 2030 was adopted in 2021 and is a ten-year plan that establishes Iceland's objective to achieve a dynamic and flexible education system to drive economic and social change.

Six fundamental pillars of education are elaborated on in the National Curriculum Guide. These are:

- Literacy
- Sustainability
- Health and welfare
- Democracy and human rights
- Equality
- Creativity.

The current educational challenges include a general decline in literacy and science skills and an increasing achievement gap between socially disadvantaged students and their peers (OECD, 2021). Although the majority of students in compulsory school report a feeling of belonging and general satisfaction in school, students of immigrant background are more likely to experience a lack of connection with teachers and their peers.

Here are additional resources on the [National Education System](#) and [Curriculum](#) in Iceland.

### **Possible Topics of Interest for U.S. Educators:**

#### *Wellbeing and education (Education as Flourishing)*

Recent policy changes in Iceland mark an important shift to the education that focuses on the student as a whole, holistic skills, and student well-being. The aim of the Education Strategic Plan 2030 is to "... provide excellent education in an environment where everyone can learn and everyone matters" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2021). The Education Strategic Plan and the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity were both established in 2021, with the former being developed in collaboration with OECD. That same year, a new Ministry of Education and Children was established in 2021 to oversee the implementation of these components.

Well-being is a strategic pillar in these policy changes and highlights the importance of health promotion, mental health, school counselling, and student voices. The new laws are being implemented throughout the Icelandic municipalities through cross-sectoral professional collaboration. Iceland is an interesting case to explore the connection between global well-being trends in education and extended education, as Iceland has historically valued quality public education.

#### *Sustainable Education*

Sustainability became one of the six fundamental components of education in the integrated main curriculum for pre-school, primary, and secondary school levels in 2011. Subsequently, a significant focus on sustainability was implemented within courses at the School of Education, not least teacher education, pedagogy. and



education sciences. All student teachers take a mandatory course in sustainability education, and, in 2022, sustainability education was introduced as a new specialization in the five-year teacher education program. With the introduction of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, an even stronger incentive and set of tools were created for the academic staff of the School of Education to use as a guiding light in studies and research. In recent years, the understanding of the importance of social innovation and innovation in the field of education has also increased. To deal with important challenges in education, the School of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Youth at the City of Reykjavík, established the Innovation Hub for Education.

The Hub is intended to bring together the academic and professional community, students, and business life to develop and implement new approaches to school and extracurricular activities. In 2022, a new work unit was established within the School of Education entitled NýMennt, which supports the social impact of educational research and its dissemination by organizing career development for professionals in the field of education, supporting innovation and teaching development within the university and in the Icelandic educational community. Various projects have already been launched, including a collaboration platform on educational technology and its implementation; a project on the promotion of STEAM education in collaboration with the School of Engineering and Natural Sciences; and strengthening parenting skills in cooperation with schools and the government. Targeted action in educational research and social projects related to professional development and innovation in the field of education is the most important way for the School of Education to participate in creating a more sustainable and better society.

### *Inclusive Education and Diversity*

The Icelandic education system is built around the notion of open and accessible education for everyone. Inclusive education is a strong focus and children should be able to attend their local compulsory school. There are many concerns about the quality of support services and recent governmental initiatives serve to strengthen support services for school, teachers, and students around the whole country.

### *Additional topics might include:*

- Multicultural education and language acquisition
- Icelandic saga tradition, folklore, and culture

