



FJÖLBRAUTASKÓLI
VESTURLANDS

**Making vocational education more flexible and more attractive to young students.
Proposal for a *Transfer of innovation* Leonardo Project.**

Fjölbrautaskóli Vesturlands á Akranesi (The comprehensive secondary school in Akranes, Iceland) offers:

- ✓ Academic study lines for students who are preparing for college or university.
- ✓ Vocational education in carpentry/construction work, mechanics/metalwork, and electricity.
- ✓ One year general preparatory line of study for those who either have not made up their mind or did not finish primary school with grades high enough to enter the academic or vocational lines.

From our experience we have learned that most students in their 16th year, who have just finished primary education, are reluctant to enter specialised vocational courses. Most of them are not ready to choose a future occupation and therefore want to keep many possibilities open. One consequence of this has been that a sizable group of young teenagers enter the academic lines or the general preparatory line and discover one, two, or even three years later they want to pursue vocational education.

Since the year 2000 the school has tried to attract more young students to vocational studies by offering them to take additional modules in academic subjects and finish both a journeyman examination and the Icelandic university preparatory examination („stúdentsspróf“). Students who opt for this normally add one year to the vocational course to finish the academic modules, so if it takes, say, three years to complete the final examination as a fully qualified mechanic it takes four years to become both a mechanic and get the right to enter college or university. This mix of vocational and academic lines is in accordance with the *National Curriculum Guide for Secondary Schools* that was issued by the Icelandic Ministry of education in 1999. It has proved successful to some extent and more students (especially students who finish primary schools with grades above the average) enter our vocational courses now than before the year 2000 – knowing that they can keep open the possibility of entering college or university after they have graduated from secondary school.

However, we still find young students reluctant to enter specialized vocational lines, and therefore we started a new experiment last year (in 2011) when we changed two of our vocational lines. The purpose of the changes is to make it possible for students to finish the first year of secondary school without having decided whether they will graduate as carpenters, mechanics or with the university preparatory examination. To accomplish this we rearranged the modules and their content and collected everything that is common to carpentry and metalwork in first year modules (including practical workshop training and handcrafting, technical drawing, CAD, first aid and safety, mathematics, and material technology). In coming years we hope to extend this experiment to include electricity.

Teachers and school heads at Fjölbrautaskóli Vesturlands á Akranesi are willing to share their experience and cooperate with European schools engaged in curriculum development with the aim of making vocational education more flexible and thus more attractive to young students.

Regards

Atli Harðarson, principal