

Gyða Jóhannsdóttir and
Jón Torfi Jónasson: External
and internal influences on the
development of Icelandic
higher education.
Nordic Studies in Education,
Vol. 34, pp. 153–171 Oslo.
ISSN 1891-5914.

This study (2011–2012) investigates the influence of internal vs external drivers on chosen aspects of the development of the Icelandic HE system. It also explores the structural development of the system, its expansion and the strengthening of graduate programmes. The role of internal drivers such as the state, the HE institutions themselves and students is explored in the light of academic drift. External drivers are transnational forces, traced to the OECD and the Bologna declaration. Analysis of official documents, including legislation, regulations and strategy documents, showed that both external and external drivers are at play, but they interact in complex ways.

Keywords: Iceland · HE systems · internal drivers · external drivers

Manuscript received: May 2014
(peer reviewed)

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External and internal influences on the development of Icelandic higher education

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Introduction

The impact of transnational processes (such as those driven by the Bologna and Lisbon goals of the European Union, the recommendations of the OECD, etc.) on reforms of Nordic higher educational policy has been significant in discussions on higher education (HE) over the past fifteen years (Neave and Maasen, 2007), in Iceland and in the other Nordic countries. Musselin (2009) introduces the concept of re-nationalization, suggesting that governmental actors are not simply controlled top-down by European measures, but such external instruments are also used to tackle difficult and unpopular local and national problems in order to avoid national resistance. The impact of external drivers may be difficult to ascertain as they may interact with internal drivers such as those engineered by national governments.

But transnational instruments and nation state governments, with their law enforcement and funding powers, are not the only or the main drivers of the development of HE policy. There are other external drivers, such as the discourse on university rankings (Hazelkorn, 2013), which has a global scope, and the blueprints offered by the new public management ideology (Ramirez, 2006). Furthermore, it has also been argued that the longstanding influence of internal drivers such as institutions – including their staff and students – are also very important agents of change (Morphew, 2000; Jónasson, 2004a; Kyvik, 2009; Jóhannsdóttir, 2012). Kyvik (2009) introduced a comprehensive categorization of the concept *academic drift* as an over-arching framework for the notable changes taking place in the development of HE. He identifies several internal drivers that influence the development of the HE organization, including the state, university and non-university institutions, teachers (often with the highest academic degree) teaching at non-university institutions, and students.

Given the importance of on the one hand external drivers on the development of multiple HE systems, and on the other hand the importance of national internal drivers, we carried out a study undertaken mainly in the period 2011–2012, in which we explored the development of the HE system in Iceland. It is clear that its development is under the influence of transnational drivers, some of which may have a global reach and which we call external drivers, but also influenced by national or domestic drivers of various kinds, which we call internal drivers. The aim of the study is to explore the relative influence of these drivers on the development of the Icelandic HE system, and gauge which variables describe the development of the system and how the drivers perhaps differentially affect these variables. We explore the development of the structure and expan-

sion of the Icelandic HE system in the light of Kyvik's (2009) detailed model of academic drift, with its sub-components. In the study we explore first the development of the structure of Icelandic HE in the light of policy drift, sector drift and institutional drift, as well as in the light of ranking discourse and institutional ambition. Then we address the expansion of the Icelandic HE system and the strengthening of Icelandic graduate programmes, and attempt to understand to which actors this development can be attributed.

In order to account for the role of internal drivers, we use Kyvik's categorization of the concept *academic drift*. As academic drift is connected with the development of the structure of HE, we relate our analysis of academic drift and internal drivers also to Scott's (1995) typology of the structure of HE systems, in particular to gauge the influence of external drivers. In order to detect the influence of external influences on the Icelandic HE system, we explore the recommendations of, in particular, the OECD and the Bologna declaration regarding HE systems and how Iceland has responded to such recommendations. We also explore the impact of the global ranking discourse. In order to find out whether re-nationalization has taken place, we analyse the context and also the legislation and regulations on Icelandic HE.

The analytical framework to the study and Nordic context

It may be useful to explore developments within HE from the framework of academic drift as discussed by Kyvik (2009). This tool for analysis draws attention to important changes at different levels in HE and offers a fruitful perspective from which to gauge their nature. Furthermore, academic drift is closely related to the structural development of HE systems. Therefore, Scott's typology

of the structure of HE system provides a useful tool for our analysis. In this chapter, the concept of academic drift and the structure of HE systems are addressed.

Academic drift

Academic drift has been defined as the tendency of non-university institutions to copy certain aspects of more prestigious institutions, usually universities (Morphew, 2000). According to several scholars, academic drift has come to refer to a gradual process involving the actions of different but related actors, and to the consequences of these actions, which are normally directed towards creating a more academic environment or higher academic status (Neave, 1979; Jónasson, 2004a; Kyvik, 2004, 2009).

Kyvik (2009) introduces an integral comprehensive analysis of the concept of academic drift and defines six categories, which may be considered the types of academic drift. He elaborates on his and other scholars' (especially Neaves', 1979) number of categories of academic drift, including *policy drift*, *sector drift*, *institutional drift*, *staff drift*, *student drift* and *programme drift*. In this article we refer to these categories, except programme drift, as it is outside the scope of the study.

Here follows our interpretation of Kyvik's (2009) categorization. Each category indicates the main driver for the changes which does not exclude other drivers being operative as well.

Policy drift refers to the state's gradual departures from a series of publicly stated and accepted aims and objectives of education, such as the purpose of college education and the working conditions of college academic staff, such that the rights and obligations of non-university teachers become more like those of a university faculty. College teachers can be supposed to engage in applied research and what were once college diplomas become replaced by university degree. This

drift can lead non-university institutions or colleges to move upward in the system and be allotted university status. Several actors can influence the authorities and press for policy drift, such as municipalities, educational institutions and professional associations. Policy drift can also occur when the authorities look at change in policy and even sector drift (below) as a part of natural educational development. The state is the main driver here.

Sector drift. Policy drift can also affect the college sector as a whole. An example is when the English binary system was abolished and a unified system was adopted, in which the former polytechnics acquired university status. Sector drift can also refer to new legislation or rules on the college sector that direct the sector in a particular academic direction, for example when a dual system is changed to a binary system, but also when non-university teachers in a binary system are supposed to carry out applied research. Policy drift is a precursor of sector drift. Here the main driver is probably the state but perhaps with considerable influence from the institutions within the sector themselves.

Institutional drift refers to the tendency of an entire institution to move upward in the education system and become more like a university. It can strive for full university status, or it can apply for limited university status such as the authorization to confer doctoral degrees. In this way, the institution seeks to depart from former publicly stated objectives. The main difference between sector drift and institutional drift is that institutional drift refers to one institution and system drift refers to a limited part of the system or the system as a whole. The institution is often the main driver.

Staff drift refers to the tendency of teachers, generally with a higher academic degree, within non-university institutions, to adopt

academic values such as seeking to have research included in their workload. Non-university staff are the main drivers.

Student drift refers to the tendency of a student population to shift their choice from one class of programme to another, or to seek a higher degree in increasing numbers, such as baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degrees (Jónasson, 2004b). Available data indicate that students tend to choose academically-based, rather than vocationally-based, programmes at the upper secondary school level, provided that the status of the former is superior; this is a long term trend. In western societies and indeed in many systems worldwide, it is the students who choose programmes, rather than industry, the government or the institutions for that matter. From this perspective, it is the students as a group who become very important drivers of educational change. It is they who decide, to a very significant degree, which programmes become viable in the long run and which do not – which grow and which shrink. (Systems with quotas of course present important complications to this story.) Thus, students may be the principal drivers of the development of education systems. For example, if a government wants to increase the popularity of professional programmes that are not popular with potential students or do not attract able students, one way it has to do this is to enhance the status of those courses by giving them university status, for example by moving from a dual to a binary or a unified system.

Behind Kyvik's categories of academic drift are drivers that further the development of non-university institutions towards becoming universities. Furthermore, the drivers can further the development of whole sectors in the education system. He argues that the different categories (drivers included) of academic drift are not hierarchical; on the contrary, they are closely related and can

occur on several levels simultaneously. Drift at one level can lead to a drift at another level (Kyvik, 2009). Kyvik's categorization refers mainly to the interplay of internal drivers but does not really deal with the influence of transnational tendencies, i.e. external drivers.

The influence and interrelation of three important internal drivers are explored and discussed in this article. These drivers are the state, non-university institutions and students. We lack data to gauge the impact of professional associations but see strong hints that encourage us to address the question of their influence.

Structural developments of HE systems: the context for Icelandic development

In many countries, HE consisted largely of traditional universities before 1960. After 1960, expansion in student enrolment became a concern for governments, which funded this expansion to a large degree. Experts at the OECD, a transnational agency, agreed that this expansion could not be covered by the traditional and homogenous universities. It was presumed that only a diversified HE system could meet manifold students' needs regarding their motives, talents and possible careers (OECD, 1974; Teichler, 2008). Consequently, many countries established a binary system of HE consisting of a non-university sector and a university sector (Kyvik, 2004; Teichler, 2008). This development in the structure of HE systems is closely related to academic drift. Several scholars have explored academic drift (Neave, 1979; Kyvik, 2004, 2009, Morphew, 2000; Jónasson 2003, 2004a, Jóhannsdóttir, 2008, 2012), an example of which is the establishment in the UK of a two-tier HE system of polytechnics and the universities, which were later merged into one category, as all became universities.

Scott (1995) introduced a typology of how different countries organize their HE. The typology comprises five categories:

- 1 *University-dominant system*, which included secondary schools and traditional universities. This system was common in Europe until the beginning of the 1960s.
- 2 *Dual system*, including traditional universities but also small, specialized post-secondary vocational colleges offering a diploma and not connected to the universities.
- 3 *Binary system*, including two parallel HE systems: the traditional universities and a non-university sector such as polytechnics or a college sector. The colleges of the dual system have now merged into multidisciplinary centres of many institutions, with common laws and regulations. Research, if any is undertaken by staff, should be the applied type. A good example is the establishment of the polytechnic sector in the UK in the mid-1960s.
- 4 *Unified system*. In this system, the university and non-university sectors have been united into a comprehensive HE system, and the same nomenclature (usually university) applies to all HE institutions, which are not formally differentiated as in the binary system. Still there may be some difference between the institutions, such as status and research capacity or role. Again the development of the British binary system into a unified system in the mid-1990s is a good example.
- 5 *Stratified system*. A HE system is seen as a total system, but nevertheless the institutions are internally and externally differentiated. The system(s) found in the US would generally fit into this category.

The change from one system to another, such as from dual system to a binary system and from binary to unified system, are examples of policy drift and sector drift.

The development of the Icelandic HE system – method and results

In this section, we refer first to the method, and then the following four topics are addressed:

- 1 The structural development of the Icelandic HE system.
- 2 The expansion of the Icelandic HE system.
- 3 The strengthening of Icelandic graduate programmes.
- 4 The ranking discourse and institutional ambition.

The data is obtained, guided by the principal features of the analytic framework, by analysis of official documents, including legislation, regulations and strategy documents. Statistical data were obtained from Statistics Iceland.

4.1 The structural development of Icelandic HE systems

Jóhannsdóttir (2008, 2012) investigated and compared the development of the organization of Nordic HE according to Scott's and Kyvik's typology; she also explored academic drift in this development, including policy, sector and institutional drift. The results are shown in Figure 1, below.

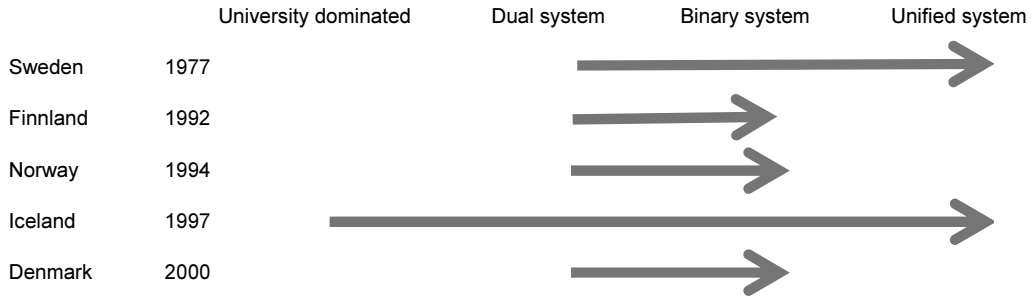


Figure 1. The classification of the organization of HE in the Nordic countries. The figure shows when the last change was made in each country and from which system.

According to Figure 1, the development of the Icelandic HE system reflects academic drift, i.e. policy and sector drift, as Iceland adopted a unified system in 1997. The adoption of a unified system was seemingly via a university-dominated system, as Icelandic HE has never been formally organized according to a dual or a binary system. Icelandic vocational and professional education has been and still is either within secondary schools or universities. In this way, Iceland differs from the development of other Nordic countries, which usually adopt a binary system via a dual system.

Only a few European countries have adopted unified systems. In Kyvik’s (2004) comparative study, he elaborated on Scott’s typology and compared the organization of fifteen European countries, the majority of which had adopted a binary system, with only the UK and Spain adopting a unified system. Kyvik categorized the Swedish system as a binary system. While Iceland was not included in Kyvik’s study, Jóhannsdóttir (2008) has classified it as a unified system. Table 1 shows his conclusions, adding Iceland as a unified system.

Table 1. A typology of the European HE systems, adapted from Kyvik (2004, Table 1, p. 396), with the addition of Iceland.

University-dominated system	Dual system	Binary systems	Unified systems
Italy	Austria	The Netherlands Germany Belgium Sweden Norway Ireland Greece Portugal Denmark Finland Switzerland	Iceland The United Kingdom Spain

According to Kyvik, all of the countries adopting a binary system entered this stage via a dual system. However, the UK adopted

a unified system via dual and binary systems, whereas Spain did not. The Spanish development coincides with Iceland’s, both coun-

tries adopting a unified system from a university-dominated system. We suggest that this comparison underlines the overall influence of the external drivers on HE policy. Most notably the drivers identified with Bologna or the OECD regarding the establishment of diversified HE systems. The exceptions are Iceland and Spain. (See more detailed information of the structural development of HE systems in ten European countries in CHEPS, 2006.)

In order to explain Icelandic development of HE, it is helpful to offer a more detailed description of it. It is important to point out that the Icelandic HE system is relatively young. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, professional schools were established early on to teach theology and medicine; a third came later, to teach law. Following on from this, these three schools were merged into the University of Iceland in 1911. During the latter half of the 20th century, several non-university institutions for vocational education were established, such as for primary school teachers, technicians, nurses, pre-school teachers, social educators and artists. These institutions began at the secondary school level but gradually and informally (without change in legislation) they drifted upwards and thus moved closer to university level, all in their own way. Gradually, the university sector also expanded to steadily embrace more programmes. Then the schools which had been at the upper secondary level moved up to the university level by the state. The Teacher Training College for primary school teachers was the first school that was elevated by law to become a university in 1971. Others followed gradually, either by elevation or by merger with the existing universities. New universities were also established (Jónasson, 2004c).

All of these changes were *ad hoc*, i.e. changes for a particular institution, often as a

result of pressure from the non-university vocational schools themselves, such as in the case of the Teacher Training College for primary school teachers in 1970 (Jóhannsdóttir, 2001). The pressure on the educational authorities could also come from professional associations, as was the case during the 1990s before the upgrading of the education pre-school teachers to university level in 1998 (Sigurðardóttir, 1998). Thus the Icelandic internal drivers were strong, exerting significant pressure on the government to upgrade selected vocational schools to universities or merge them into existing universities. No evidence was found of the influence of external drivers such as the OECD or other experts that had generally suggested the establishment of a two-tier higher educational system (Teichler, 2008).

These incremental changes did not result in governmental policy of the HE sector until 1997, when a legal framework for the universities was passed and eight university institutions fell under that framework (Lög um Háskóla 136/1997). In addition, separate charters were passed for each of these eight universities. The institutions differed, as some had already had university status for a considerable time (the University of Iceland and the Iceland University College of Education); others had recently obtained university status; and new universities had also been established. However, not all of these institutions met the international requirements of a university, such as conducting research, despite the fact that research was either stipulated in their respective institutional laws or they offered postgraduate programmes, meaning that research was implied. Table 2 provides an overview of the origin of the eight universities, in particular whether they should carry out research and offer postgraduate degrees from the outset.

Table 2. An overview over the origin and obligations of Icelandic universities at the turn of the century (Jónasson, 2004c, based on Table 4.1.)

	Institution	Became University in year	Research	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Ph.D. degree
University of Iceland (UI)	1911	1911	yes	yes	yes	yes
Iceland University College of Education (IUCE)	1908	1971	yes	yes	yes	yes
The Technical School (TS)	1964	1973	no	yes	no	no
University at Akureyri (UA)	1987	1987	yes	yes	yes	no
Reykjavík University (RU)		1998	no	yes	no	no
Iceland Academy of the Arts (IAA)	1932	1999	no	yes	no	no
The Agricultural University at Hvanneyri (AUH)	(1889) 1947	1999	yes	yes	no	no
Bifröst University (BU)	1918	1994	no	yes	no	no
Hólaskóli Hólar University College (HHUC)*	1882	2003	no	yes	no	no

* Hólaskóli was authorized to offer study programmes leading to BA degree from 2003.

Table 2 shows first the year in which the laws or charters established each institution, the year it gained university status, and whether at the turn of the century research was expected. Two of the universities offered a Ph.D. degree. Three offered a master's degree (See further Jónasson, 2004c and Jóhannsdóttir, 2008) (see Table 3 for later developments).

The table shows clearly the diversity of Icelandic university activities at the turn of the century. We argue that some of these institutions fall under Scott's categorization of an institution located in the non-university sector in a HE binary system, i.e. they are neither supposed to conduct research nor offer post-graduate degree programmes, even if they had formal university status. The internal drivers seem to be strong, as all HE institutions wanted to be universities and this desire steered the governmental HE policy.

The Higher Education Institution Act brought an end to all of the individual insti-

tutional laws in 2006. The major changes were that all universities were obliged to conduct research, meaning that all academic instructors were required to engage in research activities. The new act also stipulated that the administration of the universities should be in line with new public management ideas. The administration was in the hands of the rector and a university council, but the council was the supreme decision-making body (p. 15). It has to be noted that this new public management characterized the administration of European universities. The act also stipulated accreditation of universities and permission to offer doctoral programmes, which, however, required ministerial approval. These policy aims are in line with the Bologna agreements, which Iceland had signed in 1999. Finally, an important change put forth in the act on HE institutions of 2006 is the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, which is a systematic description of degrees

and diplomas and competencies in levels of study, specifically based on learning outcomes, in line with the Bologna Process (see clarification in the EUA document *Bologna – An overview of the main elements*; also the Bill presenting the HE act, *Frumvarp til laga um háskóla, 132.löggjafarþing, 2005–2006*). Failure to meet the set criteria within an agreed time schedule could, according to the new law, result in withdrawal of the accreditation for particular fields of study or for the university as a whole (The Higher Education Institution Act, 63/2006, p. 4).

The criteria of the accreditation of universities were in line with the Bergen communiqué of 2005. The influence of the Bologna declaration is further reflected in the report with the Bill on HE institutions of 2006, which states that its aim is to propose a general legislative framework based on the rapid development of universities, both in Iceland and abroad, especially in the OECD countries. The authors point out the significance of international cooperation between universities and the importance of Iceland competing in an increasingly tougher international competition in the arena of university education, research and innovation.

Therefore, clear evidence exists of the impact of external drivers, specifically the Bologna declaration. Some resistance from the universities might have been expected vis-à-vis the extensive and thorough implementation of Bologna, since it had all the appearances of externally-motivated top-down control. But that did not happen, even if there was a strong demand for accreditation in the new law. However, after a closer look at the data, it became gradually more obvious that a distinction between external and internal drivers is not always clear cut. The report accompanying the bill on HE institutions stated that 'all of the Icelandic universities welcomed the Bologna Process and saw

it as an opportunity to improve their institutions status, attractiveness and competitiveness internationally' (*Frumvarp til laga um háskóla, 132.löggjafarþing, 2005–2006*). We have seen no evidence which contradicts this claim. We suggest that the decision to implement all the aspects of the Bologna declaration within a space of two years is an effort by the government to deal in a balanced way with the differentiated HE institutions. The implementation was carried out explicitly with reference to the Bologna agreement and the accreditation clause in the Icelandic law. In this way, the government avoided possible institutional resistance, as the HE institutions could hardly refuse to do this or to complain, as they needed the accreditation. This is perhaps most fruitfully understood as an example of re-nationalization, as suggested by Musselin (2009), where international instruments are used to achieve national goals. This understanding of re-nationalization occurring is supported by Haapakorpi, Jóhannsdóttir and Geirsdóttir (2013), who studied the usefulness of quality assurance for university staff in Finland and Iceland. References to the recent policy formation, which had a very global and ambitious goal, were frequent at the University of Iceland. The accreditation of the university was seen as a necessary task that could not be avoided; it needed the accreditation. The findings of Geirsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2009) are along the same lines. They did not detect any resistance against accreditation, especially the implementation of learning outcomes, in two Icelandic universities. As could be expected given the accreditation process, Icelandic universities have developed since 1997 by expanding their research activities and supply of post-graduate study programmes. Table 3 shows a comparison of the development of university activities between 2001, 2008 and 2013.

Table 3. A schematic description of universities in 2001, 2008 and 2013. The change of no to yes is marked with shadowed cells. See table 2 for comparison. The years in the heading do not specify when the changes took place; they are simply convenient reference points (Jóhannsdóttir and Jónasson, 2013, Table 3).

Institution	2001				2008				2013			
	Research	BA	MA	Ph.D.	Research	BA	MA	Ph.D.	Research	BA	MA	Ph.D.
University of Iceland (UI)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Iceland University College of Education (IUCE)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Merged with the University of Iceland 2008			
University of Akureyri (UA)	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Iceland Technical School (ITS)	no	yes	no	no	Merged with RU 2005							
Reykjavík University (RU)	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Iceland Academy of the Arts (IAA)	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI)	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Bifröst University (BU)	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Hólar University College (UCH)*					yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no

* Hólar University College obtained a preliminary university status in 2003 and formal university status in 2007. The University College offers quality graduate and undergraduate education and a strong research programme in three special fields: equine science, aqua-culture and aquatic biology, and tourism studies. (Háskólinn á Hólum 2013).

Table 3 shows that the activities of universities changed markedly between 2001 and 2008. By 2006, all universities were expected to conduct research, since this was stipulated in the act on HE institutions of 2006. By 2008, there had been a considerable increase in the number of institutions offering master's programmes, with seven of eight universities doing so. However there are only three institutions offering Ph.D. programmes in 2013.

The years 2001–2013 of course amount to a very brief period, and this does not give a long-term perspective, and changes occur quite gradually, not exactly in the years specified. Both the increase in master's and doctoral programmes show very dynamic developments (see Figures 3 and 4).

Finally, it is of importance to note some facts regarding the development of Icelandic quality assessment. In Iceland, quality assessment was planned and conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture until 2010, instead of being carried out by independent agencies such as NOKUT in Norway or FINHEEC in Finland. This direct involvement of the government was openly criticized, both at the national level and by international experts. It means that Iceland cannot be a full member of ENQA, as membership requires a quality assurance agency. Iceland is, however, an auxiliary (subsidiary) member. Iceland has been a member of an informal network of agencies, established in 1992 and formalized in 2003 as the Nordic Quality As-

insurance Network in Higher Education (NO-QA). The history of Icelandic quality assessment up to 2010 reflects a clear influence of external drivers, i.e. the Bologna declaration and ENQA, as the Icelandic government followed international evaluation criteria set up by ENQA where it was possible.

The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education was established in 2010 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. It consists of a foreign group of experts who are required to develop an Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) for the Icelandic HE sector. The Board has worked closely with the Icelandic Ministry of Education and Science, as well as with the HE institutions (Rannís, 2010a). The design of the QEF is also based on European experience and expertise, and is related to international quality standards, for example those set up by ENQA (Rannís, 2010b). The QEF accentuates the importance of the university's own say in the evaluation process, such as suggesting foreign experts to participate in the evaluation process, as well as being able to decide (within some time limit) when the evaluation process takes place. This solution promises close cooperation between Icelandic HE institutions and international expertise regarding quality control in HE (Rannís, 2010b). Our analysis shows a clear interplay between internal drivers for change, such as non-universities and professional associations, some of which put pressure on the government to upgrade their institutions to university level. At the same time, the development of the structure reflects external influence – academic drift – even if the drift per se is not inherent in supra-national recommendations. During the period 1970–2006, explicit external drivers do not seem to have had much impact on the development of the structure of HE. But with the passing of the law in 2006, when the Icelandic government implemented all

aspects of the Bologna agreement, the extensive impact of external drivers becomes clear. The results also indicate re-nationalization: the government used the Bologna agreement to construct a framework for the diversified universities, and used the implementation of all Bologna aspects to avoid possible resistance from the universities that might have opposed some aspects of the National Qualification framework, such as implementing learning outcomes in all subjects. Furthermore, it is argued here that the establishment of the QEF reflects an inter-related influence on national drivers (the universities) and external drivers such as ENQA.

The expansion of the Icelandic HE system and student drift

The expansion of the Icelandic HE system reflects the impact of internal drivers. Jónsson (2004a, 2004c) has explored the expansion of HE by comparing the increase in enrolment of students to that found in Nordic HE institutions over a whole century, and very similar growth in student enrolment has been shown for the USA and Japan (Jóhannsdóttir and Jónsson, 2013). Increased enrolment reflects academic drift, with the steady increase of students entering university apparently well described by exponential population growth.

In Figure 2 we indicate, on the one hand, the number of students enrolled at university level in the Nordic countries over the past century. These are enrolment numbers that are normalized with reference to the size of the age groups normally attending university. This is done to correct for population growth (or decrement). On the other hand, we show the number of students enrolled at the university level in Iceland, USA and Japan using the same method.

There are many problems in documenting this trend because in many cases the available

statistics are fragmented. But the main problem is the difficulty in obtaining comparable statistics over long periods because the systems change. As an example, it used to be very clear some hundred years ago which institutions counted as universities and which did not, but this is no longer unequivocal, and thus it may be uncertain what data to

compare between systems. Even though some countries have developed dual systems, where it could in principle be decided which institutions belong to the university category and which do not, this does not hold for countries that have opted for a unified system, such as the UK, Iceland and Spain, and from one perspective, Sweden.

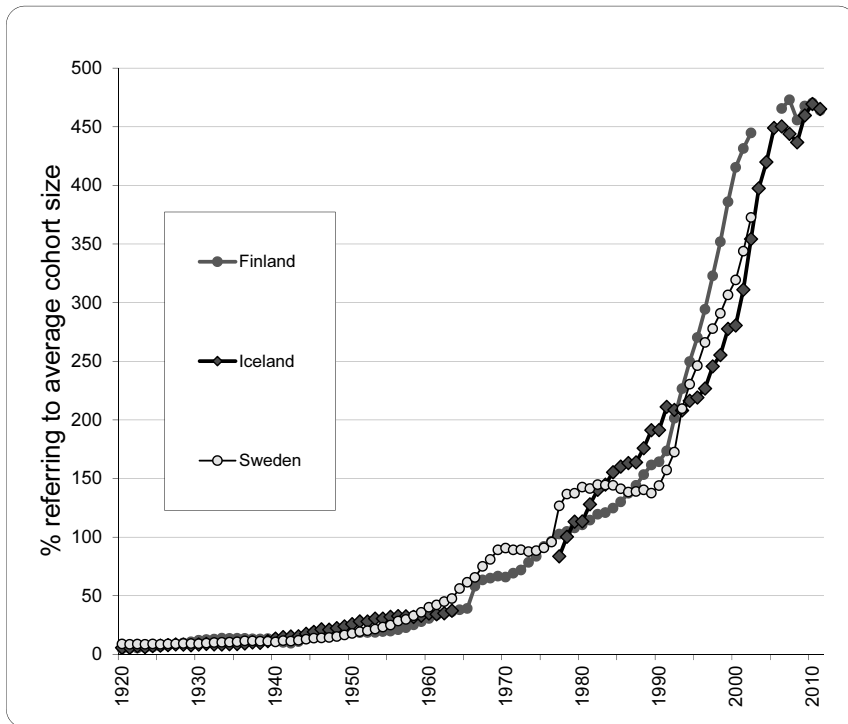


Figure 2. Tertiary enrolment in three Nordic countries. The figure shows the expansion of HE education over almost a whole century in three Nordic countries, Finland, Iceland and Sweden, for which longitudinal data was available. The number of students enrolled at the tertiary level in these countries. The numbers are modulated by cohort sizes and expressed as percentages of a cohort.

It can also be argued that in order to understand the dynamics of educational development of the HE sector, one should always look at both the polytechnics or *högskola*, including those in countries like Finland and Norway, which are similar to countries with a unified system; only in this way can we understand the nature of the development of these systems and compare them. It is sugge-

sted that the pressure for change comes, indeed, from these institutions. Figure 2 demonstrates the similarities between the developments within at least three of the Nordic systems, but one must be careful nevertheless to note which parts of the systems are included in the figure. It also shows that very different systems share some basic cha-

racteristics of growth, even though there are also very clear differences.

This comparison shows that the growth of student enrolment in the Nordic countries is quite similar, but the Icelandic HE system differs in structure from the others as it has not adopted a non-university sector. External drivers, in particular ideas involving the suggestion to establish a diversified HE system in order to meet (or stream) the increase in student enrolment, do not influence Icelandic HE policy. The expansion evidenced, however, reflects a strong student drift, resulting in an ad hoc or piecemeal policy drift on the part of the Icelandic educational authorities. This is manifested in a number of ways: in the mergers of a number of former vocational study programmes within existing universities, by upgrading the non-university institutions to university level, and finally with the establishment of new universities.

The strengthening of graduate programmes

The strengthening of graduate programmes reflects mainly the influence of internal drivers. In Iceland, the first programmes in the late 19th and the early 20th century were all professional degrees, such as for the clergy, medical doctors and lawyers. From the 1940s, there were examples of the baccalaureate degree, but these did not gain popularity at the time. During the late 1960s, Icelandic authorities worked specially on the development of the University of Iceland, for example in diversifying its programmes.

It was predicted that the number of students applying to the University of Iceland would multiply in the next few years. In order to meet this increase in student numbers and a societal need for specialized education for a variety of jobs, a government-appointed

committee was established. It suggested that during the next ten years the University of Iceland should develop a much more diversified spectrum of courses, mainly three-to-four-year programmes of study leading to a BA/BSc degree (Háskólanefnd, 1969). These programmes were meant to prepare students for: a) the traditional labour market, and thus the university was expected to pay more attention to important industries; b) work in the field of finance, law, psychological counselling, social work, journalism, business, upper secondary teaching, etc.; and c) further education abroad in disciplines that could not be offered in Iceland for the time being, except as short courses (Háskólanefnd, 1969).

The master's degree programmes started to emerge as a general option during the 1990s, although the pillars of the original University of Iceland were five-year professional degrees in divinity, medicine and law, and there were long-standing magister degrees in the humanities. It should be noted that in the University Act of 2006, one of the aspects of the Bologna agreement was to implement a common degree structure consisting of a baccalaureate examination (3 years), a master's degree (2 years) and a doctoral degree (3 years). This implementation was easy, as this degree system was in tune with the already existing Icelandic degree system, having its roots in 1950s. According to Table 2, in which university activities are compared in 2001 and 2008, it is clear that the availability of study programmes leading to a master's degree increased considerably, as in 2001 only three of eight universities offered programmes leading to a master's degree, whereas seven of eight offered these programmes in 2008, and all of them in 2013.

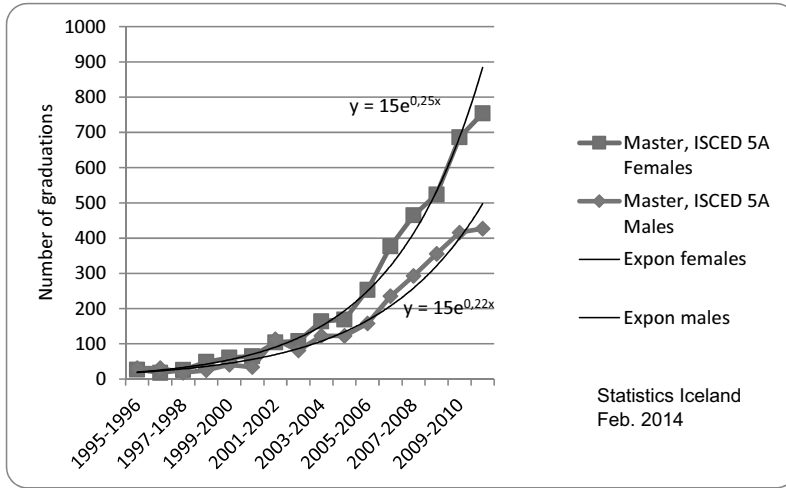


Figure 3. Enrolment at master's level. The figure shows the number of students graduating with a master's degree in the time period 1996–2011. Also showing the exponential best fit for each gender, near 25% growth for females and slightly less, or approx. 22% for males (<http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Education/Universities>).

It is clear from Figure 3 that the increase in awarded master's degrees in Iceland grew exponentially at a rate well over 20% during the 15-year period 1996–2010. Prior to this, it was the norm for Icelandic students to obtain their master's degrees abroad in most disciplines, except the traditional professional programmes and in some of the humanities. Thus, here we are talking about the growth of the HE system due to the operation of internal drivers.

The development of the doctoral degree is also quite clear, as can be seen in Figure 4. During the 20th century, Icelanders had to go abroad for a Ph.D., but during the first part of the 21st century the University of Iceland started systematically enhancing its doctoral programme. The emphasis is nevertheless placed on strong external evaluation, expecting in many faculties (but not requiring)

the candidates to write their theses or papers in English and use external examiners as much as possible. As for the master's degrees, this only shows the number of degrees awarded within the Icelandic system, with the overwhelming number awarded by the University of Iceland. Even though the numbers are small, we have added a best-fit exponential curve, which shows growth of nearly 25% per year for this brief period. This massive increase is interesting, but such growth can hardly be sustained for very long.

The increase of doctoral degrees has largely internal roots, i.e. the students enrolling and the institutions catering for these programmes, but we suggest that the latter are strongly supported by the influence of external drivers that are at play in the ranking discourse.

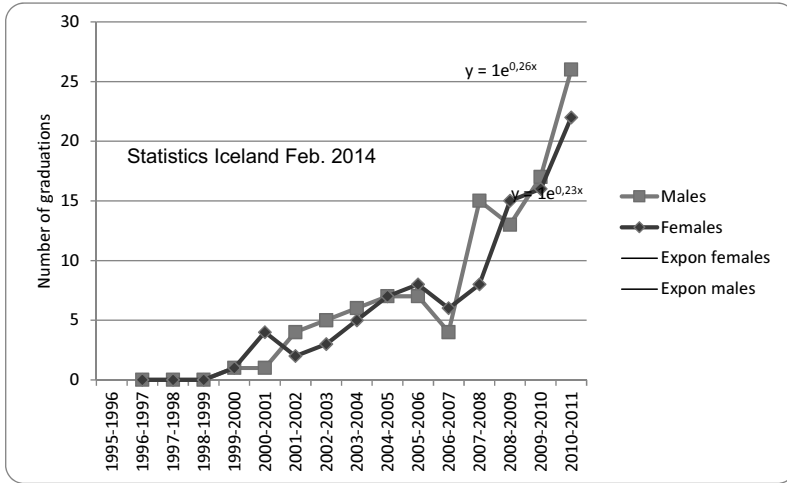


Figure 4. The number of doctoral degrees awarded in Iceland in the period 1999–2011. It has to be noted that prior to this time there were only two awarded degrees according to the regulations of the time regarding doctoral programmes (<http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Education/Universities>).

Ranking discourse
– Institutional ambitions

The ranking discourse is mainly a result of external transnational drivers, but the discourse also reflects interaction with internal ones.

The competition among universities to score high on the world ranking list is well known in a global context. Institutions, not only non-university institutions but universities, show strong signs of an academic drift. The most obvious examples are universities that strive to climb in global ranking. According to Hazelkorn (2013), the importance that is often attached to these rankings is based on how simple or transparent the international comparison is of institutional performance, and of the productivity that it implies. Ranking is seen as a proxy for quality, as it provides information on the variables that are seen best to describe the top universities in the world. If universities are seen as crucial drivers of economic growth, then their ranking counts as evidence of

both institutional and even of national competitiveness in a larger context.

These competitive ambitions are found in Iceland. The 2006 mission statement of the University of Iceland articulates its aim to join the top 100 on the world ranking lists (Stefna 2006–2011). This decision was made in collaboration with the educational authorities, who promised financial support for this end, although the governmental financial support came to nothing because of severe cuts in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. In 2011, on its one hundredth anniversary, the University of Iceland was ranked in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings at number 276, thereby placed for the first time on the list (Háskóli Íslands, 2013). According to the Times Higher Education Supplement, the University of Iceland ranked number 271 world-wide in 2012–2013 and number 269 in 2013–2014.

This inclusion of world ranking as a part of university ambition is a clear example of the impact of external drivers. But it interrelates with the impact of national drivers, re-

flected in the ambitions of the University of Iceland, and the government, which was willing to promise financial support even if that came to nothing. Again it seems evident that the distinction between internal and external drivers is not clear, as they tend to resonate quite well with each other.

Conclusion and discussion

The results reveal that there are a number of different drivers that mould the system of HE at all levels, and it is not always clear what changes or developments can be attributed to a particular driver. Most often they push in the same direction; an example is the recent Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF). The working procedure of the QEF combines drivers internal to the system, which the universities find important, and external drivers, or international quality standards, such as ENQA. Thus, developments seem to push from two directions, but it may be difficult to ascertain which comes first or which is the primary mover.

Another example of the interplay between internal and external drivers, which we would classify as re-nationalization, occurred when the government implemented all aspects of the Bologna declaration in a relatively short time between 2006 and 2008, including increased governmental demands of university activities. Some resistance by the universities could have been expected, but no form of formal resistance seems to have taken place (Haapakorpi, Jóhannsdóttir and Geirsdóttir, 2013). On the other hand, the universities offered their support, and several academics were instrumental in the introduction and dissemination of the agenda. The authors of the University Bill noted that the universities saw the Bologna Process as an opportunity to increase their institutions' international reputation, and welcomed the opportunity to do so. Again, de-

velopments pushed from both directions, though there is no doubt in this case that the external driver was the primary mover.

Yet another example of the interplay between internal and external drivers is the universities' participation in the ranking exercise. Such participation is clearly in line with the international ethos, but was also institutionally driven quite forcefully by the University of Iceland, and supported by the government, at least rhetorically.

Comparison of the years 2001 and 2008 indicates that the impact of external drivers, as well as the governmental re-nationalization (seen as an internal driver), has been very noticeable. On the other hand, a comparison of 2008 and 2013 shows that the formal aspects of university activities remained virtually unchanged, except that now the Iceland Academy of the Arts offered master's programmes. The study also reveals that the development of HE in Iceland differs from other countries, as Iceland has not formally established a dual or binary system, but seems to have adopted a unified university-dominated system.

According to Figure 1, this may be seen as if Iceland jumped ahead by not making a temporary stop in a binary system in its move to a unitary system, like all the other Nordic countries did. We might even be tempted to suggest that making such a stop is what the other Nordic countries have done, and that they have still to take the last step, but it is too early to say. If external drivers or a blueprint had been the only forces operating, Iceland would presumably have moved only from a dual to a binary system. Thus we suggest that internal drivers, specifically the government and the institutions themselves, were instrumental in speeding up this movement.

It may be relevant that the Icelandic university sector is young compared to most other countries, in particular the Nordic

countries. After all, the University of Iceland was formally established relatively recently, in 1911. At the time when the second university, the Teacher Training College for primary school teachers, was upgraded to a University College with university status in 1971, the government worked at extensive reforms at all levels of the education system, including compulsory education, secondary school education and university education.

At about this time, a substantial increase in student enrolment was correctly forecast over the next ten years, and in order to meet this anticipated increase it was suggested that more varied professional programmes should be offered at the University of Iceland (Háskólanefnd, 1969). In an interview in 2000 with the former Minister of Education, who had been in office in 1971, he confirmed that there had been no intention of establishing a dichotomized university sector. He claimed that there had been nothing to divide; the University of Iceland had mostly offered undergraduate education, and the educational authorities had concentrated on the further development of this institution, which at that time had lacked even faculties of natural science and social science. We argue that the upgrading of the Teacher Training College became a strong model for other vocational schools to strive for university status, which the Icelandic government gave them gradually, but on an ad hoc basis rather than as part of a long-term strategy.

We suggest that the expansion of student enrolment (and graduation) was similar in Iceland to the situation in the other Nordic countries, and the 'adjustment' of the system to cater to this increased number of students could have been the same (and would have been the same if the systems had been dominated by external drivers). But this was not the case, as can be seen when we look at the details. Despite the similarity, we do not take the view that there was either an external

driver, or a blueprint, or even a governmental driver in action. This development was, in our view, due to the demand by students to acquire, first bachelor's, then master's, and ultimately doctoral degrees, leading to the massive growth of the universities, led by the University of Iceland, offering such programmes. A great variety of bachelor's programmes was opened up in the 1970s, of master's programmes in the 1990s, and now of doctoral programmes in the 21st century. But opening new programmes is of no relevance if the students do not register. Here there are clearly internal drivers operating.

So behind all these developments are forces, both external and internal to the national system, that in considerable harmony facilitate academic drift at all levels: at the level of students, institutions and the system of HE.

The results reveal that the process of academic drift has been stronger than the forces that attempted to adhere to the original policy of differentiating the higher educational system and establishing a HE non-university sector envisioned around the world of work and closely connected to trades. Kyvik (2009, p. 157) refers to this as a universal trend and cites Pratt and Burgess (1973), where they refer to it as 'an historical process of aspiration'.

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