

NEW GRADING SYSTEM

Information sheet for parents/guardians and for students in Grade 10 of compulsory school

New system for assessment at the end of compulsory school and in preparation for admission to upper secondary school

Beginning in the spring of 2016, students leaving compulsory school receive an assessment in the form of letter grades in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools. The main reasons for introducing a new grading system are the sharpened focus on skills and the new assessment criteria found in the recently updated National Curriculum Guide. The changes are in keeping with new emphases in education in Iceland and in a number of neighbouring countries. Schools are now required to assign letter grades to students in the following subjects and subject areas: Icelandic, English, mathematics, one Scandinavian language, arts, crafts, natural sciences, information and technology studies, physical education, and social studies.

Skills-based assessment at the end of compulsory school

The National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools details a set of skills and assessment criteria which describe the competence required for each grade. 'Competence' refers to a certain breadth of knowledge and to the ability to take advantage of the knowledge and skills acquired. Thus, the assessment of competence consists in an assessment not only of students' knowledge or practical skills, but also of their ability to plan and organise, to explain, and to employ concepts relating to the subject or subject area being studied. Grades are assigned using the letters A, B+, B, C+, C and D.

- A** corresponds to 'exceptional competence'
- B** corresponds to 'good competence'
- C** corresponds to 'passable competence'
- D** corresponds to competence falling short of the criteria described under C.

As a grade, 'B+' means that the student has met most or all of the criteria to receive a 'B' as well as part of the criteria necessary to receive an 'A'. The grade C+ is assigned in the same fashion.

Where students pursue their studies entirely or partially in accordance with an individual curriculum based on an assessment of their special needs, they will be assigned the grades A, B, C and D marked with an asterisk *, all deviations from the regular curriculum being accounted for in each case. An asterisk is added to better ensure that the students are provided with suitable course material when they enter upper secondary school.

Identical criteria in all schools

The National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools lists coordinated assessment and competence criteria for grades 8 to 10 which teachers can use as the basis for their choice of teaching

approaches, study materials and assessment methods in each individual subject or subject area. This means that although schools are free to organise assessment in different ways, the assessment carried out at the end of compulsory school must take place in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide and grades must be assigned accordingly. Consequently, all schools apply identical competence and assessment criteria in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools.

Admission to upper secondary school

Course units taken at the beginning of upper secondary school belong to either qualification level 1 or qualification level 2 as defined in the National Curriculum Guide for upper secondary schools. The assessment scale A to D, as used at the end of compulsory school, is defined in such a manner that a student receiving one of the grades A, B+ or B is considered to have acquired the competence to study Icelandic, Danish, English and mathematics for qualification level 2 in upper secondary school.

Given that grades are assigned based on the same competence and assessment criteria regardless of which compulsory school the student attended, upper secondary schools can base their admissions decisions on those grades and provide relevant services to the students.

Admission criteria

By law, upper secondary schools are individually responsible for the admission of students. Each upper secondary school publishes its admission criteria on its website. Information about admission procedures can be found on menntagatt.is and in a letter sent to parents/guardians by the Directorate of Education.

The vast majority of students gain admission to the school of their choice. In autumn 2017, a total of 98.3 per cent of applicants were admitted to either of their two preferred schools, including nearly 88 per cent who were admitted to the school that they selected as their first choice. Upper secondary schools have adapted their admission criteria to the new grading system for assessment at the end of compulsory school, and will treat all applicants equally.

The Directorate of Education will ensure that school places are provided to those students who are not admitted to either of the schools that they selected as their first and second choices.

Varied educational programmes

Upper secondary schools offer varied academic, artistic and vocational programmes. It is important to become familiar with the offer available, to make a well-considered choice, and to choose an education adapted to each student's field of interest, future plans and areas of strength.

More detailed information about the new grading system can be found online at mms.is