

**NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE
FOR UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL
LIFE SKILLS
2004**

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Ministry of Education,
Science and Culture:
Curriculum Guide 39

April 2004

Publisher: Ministry of Education,
Science and Culture
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Printing: Gutenberg
English translation: Keneva Kunz

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Science and Culture
ISBN 9979-777-12-5

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FOREWORD

This volume of the Curriculum Guide contains information on the subject of life skills in the study programme core of upper secondary school. It deals with the main aspects which justify the existence of the subject in the core of upper secondary school study programmes. It also discusses study and instruction in the subject and the arrangement of study, and discusses assessment of life skills in general terms. The objectives are set out in two groups: on the one hand, final objectives for life skills and, on the other, intermediate objectives, which are mentioned in discussion of the courses as well as in the course descriptions and main approaches.

LIFE SKILLS IN THE STUDY PROGRAMME CORE

Introduction

According to Article 17 of the Upper Secondary School Act, the study programme core is to include subjects to further general education and prepare pupils for participation in society. Life skills in upper secondary school should be based on the subject's emphases in compulsory school, strengthen pupils' overall development and make them well balanced individuals. This involves, for instance, having pupils make an effort to develop spiritual values, physical health and psychological strength. They should develop their social maturity, morality and respect for themselves and others. In addition, an effort should be made to strengthen self-confidence, initiative, natural creativity and adaptability, in order to meet the demands and challenges of daily life.

Life skills are specific abilities which individuals acquire throughout their lives. All life long, individuals have to meet the demands and challenges of daily life in accordance with their age and development. Through this exchange between an individual and his/her inner self and outer environment life skills develop and flourish. The subject known as life skills is primarily an opportunity to support the pupil in strengthening his/her own life skills.

Life skills in upper secondary school is intended to provide the pupil with a chance to deepen his/her understanding of him-/herself and his/her environment, and strengthen the capability to face the demands and challenges of daily life. Life skills can involve aspects which make pupils more capable of living in a democratic society and deepen their understanding of society, including its historical background, industrial pursuits, arts and culture, nature and

environment, economy and natural resources, relationships, family responsibilities and individual responsibilities.

It could be said, of course, that all schooling involves education of this sort. True education should expand our horizons, intellectual ability and emotions, enabling us to view the world in a new light and acquire a deeper understanding of reality. What distinguishes life skills from other subjects dealing with the same issues is that in life skills the issues are not approached through specific studies or conceptual systems, but instead the pupils' own ideas, attitudes and premises form the basis. It is up to the pupil to deepen his/her understanding of him-/herself, culture, society and nature based on the premises he/she selects. In following this approach, the school gives pupils the opportunity to consider where they are heading and what avenues are open to them, and gives them time to cultivate their own humanity, purpose, world view and values.

In school it is not least during the intervals in their studies, when pupils meet outside the classroom and discuss their interests, that fragmentary knowledge can be pieced together to form a whole. Education thus becomes a powerful tool in pupils' interpersonal relationships, enriching not only themselves but also their educational environment and its culture. A subject, which can manage to create the same sort of situation and encourage pupils to become better acquainted with one another at the beginning of their study, not only lays the foundations for developing a fertile educational environment, but also increases the likelihood of strong social ties forming between pupils, which can support them in undertaking demanding studies.

In this age of endless information flow, with a great variety of options to choose from in study, work or play, with rapid change and new advances in science, technology, arts and leisure, everyone needs to be able to assess their

situation, have the opportunity to stop a moment, look around and orient themselves. This applies equally to youngsters, who are beginning upper secondary school study immediately after completing compulsory school, and to other individuals who are re-entering the classroom after a long period of absence. The importance of life skills as a subject in the programme core depends not least on being able to create this space for pupils beginning their study. Pupils thus have the opportunity to examine closely what programmes of study are open to them, assess their own strengths and weaknesses for the study programme ahead, and take the necessary measures to be able to respond in time.

Study and instruction

It is important to take into consideration the variety of upper secondary studies available and the wide difference in pupils' age and maturity, so that study and instruction in this subject can be fairly flexible depending upon the pupils and school. Life skills study must, by its nature, be varied, depending upon the pupil groups, individuals, study programmes, etc. Instruction should be comprised of a variety of methods, encouraging active participation by pupils.

Issues dealt with in life skills are often part of other studies. This gives schools opportunities to integrate the subject with other courses. By so doing studies, both in life skills and the courses it is integrated with, can be given more depth. This possibility is yet further reason for each school to have considerable independence in adapting the subject to its unique situation and the situation of individual courses of study within the school. Examples of integration of this sort could be an outdoor excursion or field trip in connection with a course in ecology, integration with oral expression, humanitarian work in connection with a course in ethics, etc.



It is important for schools to avail themselves of co-operation with NGOs, institutions, enterprises and individuals in the various life skills courses. In so doing the school takes advantage of experience existing in the society aimed at increasing human development and individual life skills. This co-operation can take the form of public lectures, project courses, etc. It should, however, always be the school which takes the lead in such co-operation, and teachers and school administrators should be ultimately responsible for the course.

In implementing life skills instruction in schools it is important to bear in mind that this is a new subject, and it is thus only natural that its first years will be characterised by developing the subject in the schools. It is important for schools to learn from the experience of similar studies which have been developing in recent years. These include, for instance, the so-called SAM courses, which have been taught for a number of years in some upper secondary schools. It is important, however, that schools do their best to adapt the subject to their special situation with regard to studies offered and other local circumstances.

The central theme of life skills is the individual in his/her environment. The emphasis of the subject can thus be separated into two areas. On the one hand, there are issues with an internal focus, intended to encourage a positive attitude among pupils towards cultivating spiritual values, physical health and psychological strength and balance, as well as strengthening their social maturity, moral capacity and respect for themselves and others. On the other hand, there are issues with an external focus, intended to strengthen pupils' determination, initiative, creativity and adaptability to deal with new demands and challenges in daily life.

Arrangement of study

Life skills is a mandatory course in the programme core of all upper secondary school study programmes. In academic study programmes and longer vocational programmes life skills is three credits. In the shorter study programmes the number of credits can vary depending on the nature of the programme. Elective courses in life skills can also be offered. There are various possibilities for implementing life skills instruction. One possibility is to offer it as a three-credit course. Another possibility would be to divide the life skills course into three one-credit courses, LKN 101, LKN 111 and LKN 121. If this is done, Life Skills 101 should preferably be offered at the beginning of study. Schools may, however, place the one-credit courses in any order they wish, since none of them have prerequisites.

In the National Curriculum Guide the courses are presented both as one three-credit course and as three one-credit courses. Schools therefore have some latitude in arranging these courses as they feel best. This also makes it possible, for example, to integrate life skills courses with other study subjects. If a life skills course is integrated with another subject or course, it is necessary that this be clearly indicated in the school curriculum guide. These courses shall be identified especially by adding the course number of the life skills course behind their course number.

For example: LIF 213 + LKN 121

Integration of this sort enables schools to give subjects new dimensions and perhaps bring them to some extent closer to the pupil and his/her personal experiences of the study. These three courses can also be spread over a pupil's period of study. Schools should make an effort to develop and offer a varied selection of elective courses in life skills. In developing life skills courses, each course should preferably involve issues focusing both on the pupil and on the



challenges of daily life. It then depends on the content of each course how much emphasis is placed on each aspect. The electives can thus serve to deepen certain aspects in the final objectives of life skills or of the subject's intermediate objectives.

Evaluation

Evaluation in this subject can be based on pupils' self-evaluation, giving them an opportunity to take various standardised, recognised tests to assess their strong and weak points in various areas of human characteristics. It should be strongly emphasised that the results of such tests are always the student's private concern, as they are conceived as a tool for him/her to understand him-/herself better and to learn to use the test results critically and constructively.

Evaluation in the course can be based on a variety of project work, but must always be connected to the study objectives. Assessment of project work can be based on a large number of factors. It could include initiative, resourcefulness, working procedures, co-operative ability and organisation, critical treatment and processing of information, attention to detail and presentation of the subject.

Final objectives

A pupil shall

- foster a sense of solidarity, sympathy and respect for the opinions and values of others in order to be able to have rich and productive relations with other individuals irrespective of their race, gender, nationality, religion or physical and mental ability;
- acquire communicative skills and practice in expressing and following up on his/her opinions, emotions and interests in public and with friends;
- show initiative in developing his/her creativity and adaptability in tasks within and outside of the school, including demonstrating:
 - creative and original ideas,
 - resourcefulness in placing phenomena and topics in a new context,
 - logical assessment and ability to draw conclusions,
 - critical thinking,
 - courage to resolve issues,
 - initiative to act;
- make realistic plans concerning the study possibilities open to him/her in upper secondary school, having regard to further study or entry into the labour market;
- take responsibility for his/her own life, which includes, for instance, taking a responsible stand on narcotic and therapeutic drugs;
- acquire knowledge of society to shape and improve his/her environment in a responsible manner with democratic methods, actions and discussion;
- have an opportunity to take part in and enjoy artistic and cultural events;
- have an opportunity to discuss various current issues which may arise in connection with study, the immediate environment or the public scene;
- be conscious of his/her responsibility as a consumer in a complex and varied society;

- develop
 - an understanding of the importance of ecological balance,
 - an understanding of the global context of the earth's ecosystem,
 - a realisation of his/her own situation and responsibility for the earth's ecosystem;
- have an opportunity to utilise a variety of media to communicate his/her ideas.

Courses

LKN 103 Life skills

Course description

The aims of the course are twofold: on the one hand, to assist the pupil in better understanding the programmes of study offered by the school, realising where they lead and appreciating the demands of possible subsequent schools or the labour market. In this course the pupil will also become acquainted with school routines and pupils' social activities, his/her supervisory teacher and the latter's role. On the other hand, emphasis is placed on strengthening pupils' solidarity, ability to express themselves and self-confidence, in order to be able to express their opinions and theories on a variety of issues and discuss them amongst themselves. Pupils can thus choose a variety of projects linked to the course theme and present them to their classmates using a variety of methods to communicate information. Thus, all pupils are not expected to deal with the same issues. The course could enlist the support of, for example, a pupil's supervisory teacher, the school guidance counsellor, school librarian, other pupils (in connection with peer education and school social activities), external parties, etc. However, one teacher should preferably bear chief responsibility for the course and look after its arrangement.

Intermediate objectives

A pupil shall

- be able to take advantage of the studies and study programmes offered by the school in an optimal manner;
- be able to examine a variety of study programmes, draw a flow chart of them and assess where they lead;

- know the requirements made by various subsequent schools or faculties and by the labour market for preparatory studies and scholastic achievement;
- learn successful methods for study in upper secondary school;
- be able to use various standardised and recognised self-evaluation tests to assess his/her interests and abilities in a critical and realistic manner;
- be able to take advantage of various social activities and other student services provided by the school;
- have an opportunity to become acquainted with and actively participate in school social activities in accordance with his/her interests;
- know what specialist services the school offers and where to obtain them, e.g. supervisory teacher, student counsellor, library.

A pupil should

- speculate on his/her position as an individual in a society and culture; this includes, for instance
 - appreciating the connection between image, lifestyle and opinions and plans concerning his/her own future;
 - taking responsibility for his/her own life, which includes, for instance, taking a responsible position on narcotic and therapeutic drugs;
 - acquiring a knowledge of society to shape and improve his/her environment in a responsible manner with democratic methods, actions and discussion;
 - having an opportunity to take part in and enjoy artistic and cultural events;
 - having an opportunity to discuss various current issues which may arise in connection with study, the immediate environment or the public scene;
 - being a responsible consumer in a complex and varied society;



- speculate on his/her position as an individual in the built and natural environment; this includes, for instance, that the pupil:
 - develop international consciousness and responsibility for future generations concerning utilisation of common resources;
 - realise the importance of the concept of sustainable development in environmental issues;
 - understand what interactive natural and social forces direct our treatment of nature and natural resources;
 - develop the conviction that his/her contribution is worthwhile, and that he/she can make a significant contribution to improving the environment.

A pupil should

- practice presenting his/her fields of interest to others formally and informally;
- acquire confidence in expressing and following up on his/her opinions, emotions and interests in public and with friends;
- be able to have enriching and productive relations with other individuals regardless of race, gender, nationality, faith, or physical or mental ability;
- be able to apply a variety of methods to communicate ideas and opinions to others.



LKN 101 Study in upper secondary school

Course description

A pupil should preferably take this course at the beginning of his/her upper secondary school study. The objective of the course is to assist the pupil in better understanding the programmes of study offered by the school, realising where they lead, learning to draw a flow chart of the various programmes he/she finds interesting, and better appreciating the demands of possible further schooling or the labour market. The course also gives a pupil an introduction to how the school operates and to students' social activities, to his/her supervisory teacher and the latter's role. Emphasis is placed on strengthening pupils' solidarity, their ability to express themselves and confidence in presenting their own opinions and theories on a variety of issues and discussing these amongst themselves. The course could enlist the support of, for example, the school guidance counsellor, a pupil's supervisory teacher, school librarian, other pupils (in connection with peer education and school social activities), etc. However, one teacher should preferably bear chief responsibility for the course and look after its arrangement.

Intermediate objectives

A pupil should

- be able to take advantage of the studies and study programmes offered by the school in an optimal manner. This means that the pupil should:
 - be able to examine a variety of study programmes, draw a flow chart of them and assess where they lead;
 - know the admission requirements made by various subsequent schools or faculties and by the labour market for preparatory studies and scholastic achievement;
 - learn successful methods for study in upper secondary school;

- be able to use various standardised and recognised self-evaluation tests to assess his/her interest and abilities in a critical and realistic manner;
- be able to take advantage of various social activities and other student services provided by the school;
- have an opportunity to become acquainted with and actively participate in school social activities in accordance with his/her interests;
- practice presenting his/her fields of interest and opinions to others formally and informally;
- know what specialist services the school offers and where to obtain them, e.g. supervisory teacher, student counsellor, library.

Contents/Core concepts

Study techniques, school/national curriculum guide, course descriptions, credit system, grade system, admission requirements of subsequent schools, study programmes, educational demands of the labour market, group dynamics, reinforcement, aptitude/interest tests.

Evaluation

Evaluation is based on the pupil's project work which could, for instance, involve pictorial representation of the various programmes of study which interest him/her.



LKN 111 Individual, society, culture

Course description

Projects undertaken in this course should provide the pupil with the opportunity to discuss the interaction of the individual, society and culture. Questions examined can vary and be connected with religion, the arts, politics, gender issues, consumer issues, history, leisure activities, philosophy, science and practical skills.

Intermediate objectives

A pupil shall

- have the opportunity to work on projects which deepen his/her understanding of his/her position in a society and culture;
- acquire practice in expressing and following up on his/her opinions, emotions and interests in public and with friends;
- be able to have enriching and productive relations with other individuals regardless of race, gender, nationality, faith, or physical or mental ability;
- be able to apply a variety of methods to communicate ideas and opinions to others.
- take a responsible stand on narcotic and therapeutic drugs;
- learn to take a responsible position as a consumer in a complex and varied society.

Contents/Core concepts

Individual, society, culture, mass media, responsibility, joint responsibility.

Evaluation

Evaluation can be based on a pupil's project work on a specific theme. The assessment may include initiative and independent working methods, clarity of presentation and ability to apply the media used to illustrate and present the subject.

LKN 121 Individual, environment nature

Prerequisite: none

Course description

The task of this course is to discuss the interaction of the individual with the natural and built environment. Questions dealt with may vary and be connected with conservation, nature study, protection of fauna and ecosystems, utilisation of natural resources, pollution and the built environment in contrast to the natural environment.

Intermediate objectives

A pupil shall

- have the opportunity to work on projects which deepen his/her understanding of his/her position in nature and his/her surroundings;
- acquire practice in expressing and following up on his/her opinions, emotions and interests in public and with friends;
- be able to have enriching and productive relations with other individuals regardless of race, gender, nationality, faith, or physical or mental ability;
- be able to apply a variety of methods to communicate ideas and opinions to others.
- develop international consciousness and responsibility for future generations concerning utilisation of common resources;
- realise the importance of the concept of sustainable development in environmental issues;
- understand what interactive natural and social forces direct our treatment of nature and natural resources;
- acquire a conviction that his/her contribution is worthwhile, and that he/she can make a significant contribution to improving the environment;
- have an opportunity for outdoor recreation in Icelandic nature.



Evaluation

Evaluation can be based on a pupil's project work on a specific theme. The assessment may include initiative and independent working methods, clarity of presentation and ability to apply the media used to illustrate and present the subject.