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The Faroe Islands are located in the North Atlantic, halfway between Norway and Iceland. The archipelago consists of 18 islands, 17 of them inhabited, covering an overall territory of 1,399 km<sup>2</sup>. Until 1948, the islands were a Danish county. Since that time, they have been a self-governing territory of the Kingdom of Denmark, as laid down in the Home Rule Act, passed by the Danish *Folketing* on 23 March 1948. On this basis, the Faroe Islands have their own legislative assembly (*Løgting*) and their own government (*Landsstýri*). The Home Rule Act declares Faroese, a West Nordic language, derived from Old Norse and closely related to Norwegian and Icelandic, as the principal language, and Faroese is used as the language of instruction in the Faroese education system. At the same time, the Home Rule Act stipulates that Danish is learned well and carefully, and Danish may also be used in public affairs. While responsibility for defense issues and foreign policy is exercised jointly with Denmark, the Faroe Islands did not follow Denmark in 1972 in joining the European Community, and they are not a member of the European Union today. Approximately 48,000 people live on the Faroe Islands, 38 % of them in the area of the capital, Tórshavn. The economy of the islands is heavily based on the fishing industry.

By and large, the Faroese education system is very similar to the system in Denmark. The Faroese Ministry of Education, Research, and Culture (*Mentamálaráðið*) oversees education from infant school to higher and adult education. Its responsibilities include the appointment of head teachers, the financing of teacher's salaries, and cooperation with other Nordic countries in the areas of education, research, and culture.

Day care for children from the age of 0 to 6 is offered in private homes and in municipal day-care centers, organized as nurseries or kindergartens. Compulsory schooling begins at 7 years of age and lasts for 9 years. Primary education

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(Years 1–7) and lower secondary education (Years 8–10) is provided by the fólkaskúlin. Today, the fólkaskúlin usually also encompasses preschool classes. In the fólkaskúlin Danish is taught from Year 3 and English from Year 5. Small villages often have primary schools, but the last 3 years of the fólkaskúlin are taught in district schools. Starting in Year 8, the curriculum encompasses both compulsory and optional subjects. Successful completion of the school leaving examination in Year 9 allows pupils to continue their education in an upper secondary establishment either on the Faroe Islands, in most cases in the capital, or in Denmark. Pupils without a Year 9 school leaving certificate can take general education courses in Year 10 of the fólkaskúlin. As part of an ongoing settlement development policy, considerable efforts are made to preserve primary schools in the villages and on scarcely populated islands.

Education at upper secondary level has two main tracks: general and vocational. The 3-year general education track, provided by studentaskúlin, enables pupils after successful completion to continue their education immediately in higher education. Within this track, students may choose between science-based and language-based programs. A great variety of vocational training programs are offered by a number of specialized colleges in the areas of business, technology, fishery, and health. Most of these programs start with a basic year at college, after which students either continue their studies for 2 more years in this institution or start practical training in an enterprise. Vocational education on the Faroe Islands includes various forms of apprenticeship training. In these cases, a college provides theoretical training, while an enterprise takes over the practical part.

The University of the Faroe Islands (*Fróðskaparsetrið*), founded in 1965, is the main provider of higher education. Today it offers degree courses in five faculties: the Faculty of Faroese Language and Literature, the Faculty of History and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Sciences and Technology, the Department of Education, and the Department of Nursing. The Department of Education, formally the Teachers' College (*Læraraskúli*), provides training for kindergarten and primary and lower secondary school teachers and for social educators. Its history dates back to 1870, when the first teacher training course was started on the Faroe Islands. The *Læraraskúli* was integrated into the University and transformed into the Department of Education in 2008. It now offers 3-year BA programs and 1-year postgraduate programs. Completion of a BA and an additional 1-year program is a prerequisite today to work as a primary and lower secondary school teacher or as a social educator. In addition to the university, the Centre of Maritime Studies and Engineering (*Vinnuháskúlin*) offers training at postsecondary level for professions in the areas of navigation, engineering, and firefighting.

The wish to preserve the cultural traditions of the Faroe Islands and the demands of modern economy have contributed to the development of a great variety of educational opportunities for adult learners. These include courses organized by the evening schools (*kvöldskúlin*), which are established in nearly all municipalities and by the Faroese folk high school (*fólkaháskúli*).

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## References

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