

**Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, at
the opening of the NERA (Nordic Educational Research Association)
conference on Wednesday 1 June 2022, 9 am**

Dear keynote speakers, organisers and conference guests, It is my honour and pleasure to say a few words here at the start of this NERA conference.

The Nordic Educational Research Association was founded in 1972. This year therefore marks its 50th anniversary and I would like to congratulate you all on reaching this landmark date. It is an honour for the University of Iceland to host the NERA conference and be involved in celebrating this milestone in the Association's history.

The University of Iceland has hosted the NERA conference several times, most recently in 2013. The University of Iceland values this relationship and it is enormously important for us to be actively involved in promoting Nordic collaboration in educational research.

Strong education systems and equal and universal access to education have always been hallmarks of the Nordic countries and one of the main factors underpinning our welfare societies that are held up as exemplary models all over the world. A significant part of this success can be attributed to outstanding educational research in the broadest sense, so it is wonderful to see gathered here today over 800 experts in all the major fields of educational science. These experts will present their research with almost 700 lectures on the programme.

Educational research is more important than ever if we are to make education visible in our societies. Equally, research is used to enhance education at all levels. A good example of this is the COVID-19 pandemic that has caused major disruptions across the world but now seems to finally be subsiding, at least in our part of the world. During these unusual times, educational researchers all over the Nordic countries explored how it was possible to convert from analogue to digital learning environments. As a result, the education community in the Nordic countries – and indeed all over the world – has started changing the way they think about and practice teaching at all school levels. This change would not have been evident and as effective as it has been without research in the area. It is therefore very fitting that the theme of this conference is 'Education and involvement in precarious times' and the conference programme shows that COVID-19 is a major topic in some of the sessions.

But the pandemic isn't the only reason to argue that we live in precarious times. We are also facing other challenges, such as the war in Europe that none of us could have predicted just a short while ago. Then there is the challenge of human-caused climate change, which literally poses a threat to all life on our planet in the long term. All these challenges will have a significant impact on our communities and education systems, requiring diverse educational research. This is evident from the conference programme, which reflects a huge range of interesting topics connected to teaching and learning in our times, from preschool to university.

Dear conference guests, here in Iceland educational research has a long history. The Icelandic University of Education - Kennaraháskóli Íslands - was for a long time the centre of this research. This changed in 2008 when the Icelandic University of Education merged with the University of Iceland and became one of the five schools making up UI today. The goal was to combine the strengths of both institutions in order to achieve greater academic consistency and synergy. From the outset, it was also clear that in order to achieve this goal, the School of Education, which is currently located on the east side of Reykjavík, would need to move to the main campus. At the end of last year, we finally received the good news that the University of Iceland had succeeded in acquiring a large building, a former hotel at the heart of the campus, and the School of Education will be transferred to this building in the near future. I have no doubt that this move will strengthen research, teaching and training in the educational sciences still further and better equip the School to take on the challenges of the future.

Dear conference guests, without further ado, I wish you an enjoyable and productive conference.

Now Kristjana Stefáns Trio (Kristjana, Ómar Guðjóns, Þorgrímur Jónsson) will play a song.

Thank you.