European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards (2026)
1859-Education, Training and Skills 3. Education, Training & Skills

The Heritage Craft School

kNvAeWDd

Entry details

General information

Main country of application: Iceland

Brief description of the project

> The Heritage Craft School preserves and revitalizes traditional Icelandic building skills, bridging craftsmanship and architectural heritage. Its programs focus on turf-cutting, turf and stone masonry, woodwork, and metalwork—skills essential for maintaining Iceland's unique turf-building tradition. Students gain practical, hands-on knowledge while learning directly from heritage professionals. By training both experts and enthusiasts, the school ensures that centuries-old craftsmanship is not lost but carried forward. The Heritage Craft School is not only about preserving the past; it empowers future generations to safeguard and apply these traditional techniques in restoring and maintaining Iceland's cultural heritage.

Start date of the project: 2006-12-15

Completion date of the project/ initiative: The Heritage Craft School is still ongoing.

Website(s) of the project/nominee: https://www.glaumbaer.is/en/the-heritage-craft-school-1/the-heritage-craft-school

Facebook page of the project, if any: https://www.facebook.com/fornverkaskolinn.is

Does the site or heritage in question have national/regional/ local cultural heritage designation or protection status in its country?: Yes

If yes, please specify:

> All buildings that the Heritage Craft School restores are protected.
> Yearly the Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland (Minjastofnun Íslands) awards an organization/project/individual the

> Minjaverndarviðurkenning (Heritage Protection Award). In 2023 The Heritage Craft School was the awardee. The award was grounded on the important educational work and training the school has made available for almost two decades.

Is the project focused on or taking place in heritage included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, either as an individual site or as part of a larger World Heritage property? If so, please specify which one.

> No. It is worth mentioning that the Turf House Tradition is on UNESCO's Tentative World Heritage List, a testament to a vernacular architectural tradition that adapted to Iceland's climate using local materials such as turf, wood, and stone.

Is the project focused on or taking place in a heritage designated as a European Heritage Label? If so, please specify which one.

> No.

If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to the public?	Yes

What steps have been taken to ensure that the site / project is inclusive and accessible to as wide an audience as possible?

> The courses are advertized as open to all those interesed to learn the trditional turf building skills. Participants—both local and international—include enthusiasts and professionals in heritage preservation.

Please indicate whether your project falls under the subcategory of Education, Training, or Skills (select one type only, as applicable):	✓ Skills

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Contact details

Name of the entrant	Mrs. Berglind Thorsteinsdottir
Entrant's position	Museum director
Organisation of the entrant	Byggðasafn Skagfirðinga (Skagafjörður Heritage Museum)
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Website of the entrant	https://www.glaumbaer.is/en
Organisation of the owner	Byggðasafn Skagfirðinga (Skagafjörður Heritage Museum)
Name of the project leader	Ms. Inga Katrín D. Magnúsdóttir
Project leader's position	Project Manager for the the Heritage Craft School / Project Manager for Museum Collections
Organisation of the project leader	Byggðasafn Skagfirðinga (Skagafjörður Heritage Museum)
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Other relevant participants

> Mr. Sigurður Helgi Sigurðsson – Fornverk ehf. – turf master builder and head teacher

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Concise summary

Concise summary

> Turf, along with stone and timber, was Iceland's primary building material for a millennium, used for houses, boundary walls, bridges, and roads. While turf construction was once widespread across the northern hemisphere, much of the knowledge has disappeared. In Iceland, however, skills such as locating, harvesting, and building with turf have survived, due to resent use and supported by the maintenance of historic houses. These crafts form part of Iceland's intangible cultural heritage but face the risk of vanishing due to limited funding, insufficient preservation strategies, and declining practice.
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> To safeguard this knowledge, the Skagafjörður Heritage Museum founded the Heritage Craft School (Fornverkaskólinn) in 2006. Its mission is to preserve and promote traditional building skills, while documenting the vernacular terminology of Icelandic construction. Since 2007, the school has run nearly 50 courses, with about 500 participants from Iceland and abroad. Training emphasizes hands-on learning, guided by conservation law and best practice, with a strong focus on authenticity and integrity in restoring historic buildings.
>
> Much of this work takes place at Tyrfingsstaðir in Skagafjörður, where students restore a turf farmstead and its outbuildings. The farm serves as the school's "classroom," where assignments become real restoration projects. To date, eight outhouses and a seven-part farmhouse have been rebuilt, with many structures returned to practical use. The site remains open to the public, raising awareness of turf heritage.
>
> The Icelandic turf house, rooted in a Northern European tradition, became more essential here than anywhere else. While turf buildings have largely disappeared elsewhere, the Heritage Craft School has trained international students—including from Scotland and Norway—enabling them to maintain and restore turf buildings in their own regions. The school collaborates with organizations such as ARCH Network (Scotland) through the CHIST project, Erasmus-funded programs, the Department of Architecture and Technology at NTNU (Trondheim, Norway), The Iceland University of the Arts, and LungA School. Courses are open to all, regardless of experience, and funded primarily through grants from the Icelandic Cultural Heritage Fund and the Museum Fund, with a cost of approximately €15,000 per course.

In 2023, the Heritage Craft School received special recognition from the Icelandic Heritage Agency for its contribution to preserving historic craftsmanship. Minister Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson emphasized that this heritage, while preserved in Iceland, belongs to the world. The school's work ensures the survival of a rare European craft, combining education, restoration, and international collaboration to safeguard this invaluable cultural heritage.

Objectives and work undertaken

Aims and objectives of the project/initiative.

The Heritage Craft School preserves Iceland's disappearing turf-building skills through hands-on courses that raise awareness, teach traditional techniques, and restore historic buildings—ensuring this unique craft continues for future generations.

The school aims to share and safeguard knowledge of intangible heritage, particularly fast-disappearing building skills related to turf, with anyone interested in traditional crafts, while simultaneously preserving a craft tradition in decline. Its main objectives are:

- Graduating students with practical knowledge of the characteristics, development, and preservation of buildings and rural landscapes in Icelandic countryside.
- Graduating students familiar with traditional Icelandic building techniques, particularly turf-cutting, turf and stone masonry, woodworking, and metalworking.
- Graduating students capable of welcoming and guiding visitors interested in exploring the cultural heritage embodied in the rural landscape and traditional buildings.

By combining education, practical training, and building restoration, the Heritage Craft School ensures that Iceland's turf-building tradition remains alive and accessible, both nationally and internationally.

Any historical and technical research undertaken for the project/initiative.

As part of the project, extensive historical research was undertaken at Tyrfingsstaðir farm. Most of the houses at Tyrfingsstaðir date primarily from 1870–1895. Since all structures older than 100 years are protected, it was necessary to measure the walls carefully in some buildings. An archaeologist was present during the clearing of the ruins, and special care was taken not to go below the last floor level or disturb any remains. Houses and remnants were thoroughly examined to extract as much information as possible about their construction and the craftsmanship involved. Drawings were made of several buildings where the lower parts of walls had to be partially dismantled to ensure accurate measurements. Preliminary archaeological research indicates that the farm was settled before 1300.

The buildings at Tyrfingsstaðir are unique in that they are the only surviving medium-sized farmhouses in Skagafjörður preserved into the 20th century. In 1975, a group of architecture students from Copenhagen visited the farm and produced detailed plans. This was fortunate, as it was only six years after the last inhabitants moved out, and these plans have since proved a valuable tool in the restoration of the farm.

Activities carried out and stages of implementation of the project/initiative.

The Skagafjörður Heritage Museum established a dedicated research focus on turf structures and craftsmanship in its 1999 museum strategy, leading to the documentation of turf construction remains in Skagafjörður.

The Heritage Craft School project began in 2006, when an agreement was made with the owners of Tyrfingsstaðir, Skagafjörður, to use the site as a training ground for historic construction techniques. The site contains various turf and stone buildings, including residential structures, outbuildings, and barns.

Preparations for courses in traditional building methods began, and a project manager with a background in education was hired to develop a curriculum and course descriptions for a program in traditional building crafts,

planned to begin in spring 2007. Historical research and archaeological studies were undertaken at Tyrfingsstaðir farm.

Since 2007, restoration work at Tyrfingsstaðir has rebuilt eight outhouses and a seven-part farmhouse, returning many structures to practical use, including housing livestock, storing hay, and smoking meat. The farm serves as a "living classroom," where hands-on courses allow participants to apply traditional techniques directly to restoration projects. Over 40 courses have been delivered, training roughly 500 students from Iceland and abroad.

International collaboration has been integral to the project, with students from Scotland, Norway, and other countries learning turf-building skills to maintain heritage in their own regions. Partnerships include Erasmus-funded projects such as CHIST and "Our Way Heritage Lives," as well as collaborations with NTNU Trondheim, The Iceland University of the Arts, and LungA School.

Through research, restoration, education, and cross-border exchange, the Heritage Craft School has made it its mission to ensure the survival of rare traditional Icelandic building skills. Its activities have preserved unique farmhouses, raised awareness of traditional craftsmanship, and created a model for safeguarding vernacular architecture both nationally and in a European context.

Challenges or problems encountered and solutions found to overcome them.

The Heritage Craft School faces limited funding and few funding options. As a small operation, it relies on the dedication of a handful of passionate individuals who consistently go beyond their formal duties to ensure the project's success. Like similar initiatives, the project is fragile, and the lack of a governmental framework or formal support increases its vulnerability.

To address these challenges, the museum has built national and international partnerships to secure resources, share expertise, and broaden impact. Erasmus-funded projects, collaborations with universities, and outreach to international students have helped sustain the program and transfer knowledge beyond Iceland. The goodwill of Skagafjörður municipality, owner of the Heritage Museum, has been crucial, supporting the project and providing the project manager, a museum staff member since the beginning.

By combining committed individuals with strategic partnerships, the Heritage Craft School continues to preserve rare Icelandic building skills despite limited formal support.

European significance

European significance of the project/initiative/nominee.

The Heritage Craft School holds European significance by preserving rare Icelandic building skills while fostering international cooperation and knowledge exchange. Turf-building techniques, once common across Northern Europe, have largely disappeared outside Iceland, making the school a unique repository of shared European vernacular heritage. Through Erasmus-funded projects such as CHIST and "Our Way Heritage Lives," collaborations with universities, and outreach to international students—including from Scotland and Norway—the school has promoted cross-border learning, cultural exchange, and the transfer of skills to other regions. By training professionals and enthusiasts from multiple countries, it strengthens a sense of shared European identity rooted in tangible and intangible heritage. The school also demonstrates cultural heritage as a driver of integration, mutual understanding, and social cohesion, showing how preserving traditional crafts can unite diverse communities around common values. Its impact extends well beyond Iceland, serving as a model for safeguarding vernacular architecture across Europe.

Results and impact

Summary of the main results achieved and knowledge that has been gained. List the ways that the project/initiative contributes to the preservation and/or enhancement of the historical, cultural, environmental, educational and/or social values of the heritage in question. Mention the project's impact on conservation policy and practice, if any.

> Since its inception in 2006, the Heritage Craft School has achieved significant results in preserving Iceland's traditional turf-building skills, a craft that has largely disappeared elsewhere in Northern Europe. Over 40 hands-on courses have been delivered since 2007, training nearly 500 participants from Iceland and abroad. Students gain practical knowledge of turf, stone, and timber construction, combining theoretical understanding with applied restoration experience. The school has restored eight outhouses and a seven-part farmhouse at Tyrfingsstaðir, returning many structures to practical use, including housing livestock, storing hay, and smoking meat, while maintaining historical authenticity.
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> The project has generated considerable qualitative knowledge about historical building techniques, vernacular terminology, and conservation best practice, all documented through measured drawings, photographs, and course-based reports. These resources contribute to the wider heritage field, informing both national and international conservation practice.
>
> International collaboration has extended the project's impact across Europe. Erasmus-funded projects and partnerships, and outreach to students from Scotland, Norway, and beyond, have facilitated the transfer of skills and knowledge to other countries. This demonstrates cultural heritage as a driver of international cooperation and education. An example of a turf building that has been constructed, where methods learned at the Heritage Craft School was applied, is the turf and creel house at the Glencoe Visitor Center in Scotland, constucted in 2021.
>
> The Heritage Craft School has also influenced conservation policy and practice by demonstrating the importance of hands-on training in preserving intangible heritage alongside physical structures. Its work supports social and educational values, raising awareness of traditional craftsmanship, fostering community engagement, and creating a model for safeguarding vernacular architecture. Public access to Tyrfingsstaðir further enhances the project's cultural and social impact, ensuring that the heritage remains visible and meaningful to both local communities and international visitors.

Aspects of the project that can be considered innovative within its area or field.

> The Heritage Craft School is innovative in its integration of education, hands-on conservation, and international collaboration within the field of traditional building crafts. By using Tyrfingsstaðir farm as a "living classroom," the project combines practical restoration with theoretical knowledge, enabling students to learn ancient Icelandic construction techniques—including turf-cutting, stone and timber masonry, and metalwork—through direct application.
>
> The school's partnerships with Erasmus-funded programs, universities, and architectural departments, including NTNU Trondheim and The Iceland University of the Arts, foster cross-disciplinary learning and knowledge transfer. Architectural students and programs, in particular, have expressed strong interest, as the project provides unique insight into vernacular construction and conservation practice, enhancing their understanding of sustainable building methods and cultural heritage.
>
> By blending education, restoration, and international exchange, the school offers a model for socially and culturally sustainable preservation of traditional craftsmanship.

Steps taken to reach people who have not previously interacted with the site/project. This might include youth, local communities, non-traditional audiences, people with disabilities, etc.

> The Heritage Craft School actively engages audiences who have not previously interacted with traditional building heritage. Public events, such as the Open Day at Tyrfingsstaðir during European Heritage Days 2019, invited the local community to explore recent restorations and learn about turf-building techniques. Similarly, the 2023 Open Day at

> Syðsta-Grund in Skagafjörður allowed participants of all ages to take part in hands-on activities, including roofing a turf building and laying turf, fostering direct engagement and community involvement.
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> The school also hosts an annual, free symposium on turf heritage featuring local, national, and international speakers. As part of European Heritage Days 2025, the symposium was streamed online, enabling wider access for those unable to attend in person. Through these initiatives, the school reaches diverse audiences—providing education, participation, and exposure to Iceland's unique construction skills and cultural heritage, thereby broadening the impact of its conservation work.

Participation in the initiative (number of participants/audience/users per year and/or, in the case of websites and digital platforms, information regarding visitor numbers and online interaction).

> Participation in the Heritage Craft School varies depending on the number of courses offered each year and available funding. Typically, each course accommodates about 12 students, with two to three courses held annually. Occasionally, larger student groups of 15–25 participate, though these are less frequent. Public engagement through Open Days and the annual turf symposium has attracted between 50 and 150 participants, including local community members, heritage enthusiasts, and international visitors.
>
> The online impact of the Heritage Craft School is more difficult to predict but growing steadily. For example, the Turf Symposium 2025 was viewed by 231 online participants, 240 viewed the 2024 symposium, and 76 viewed the 2023 event. The school also maintains an active Facebook presence with multiple engagements, extending reach and interaction beyond physical participants. This combination of hands-on courses, public events, and digital outreach ensures broad and diverse participation in the school's activities.

Environmental, social, and economic sustainability of the project (e.g. contribution to climate action and environmental protection; measures to ensure long-term financial sustainability or future viability; benefits for people and communities, where relevant).

> The Heritage Craft School contributes to sustainability on multiple levels, integrating environmental, social, and economic dimensions through the preservation and practical application of traditional Icelandic building techniques. Turf buildings, the primary focus of the school, are inherently sustainable. Constructed from locally sourced, natural materials such as turf, stone, and timber, these buildings have minimal environmental impact during construction. They are highly energy-efficient, providing excellent insulation, and when their lifespan ends, the materials naturally reintegrate with the environment, leaving no lasting ecological footprint. By teaching these techniques, the school promotes environmentally conscious construction practices and highlights the value of sustainable building materials that are renewable, local, and low-impact.
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> Socially, the project strengthens communities by engaging diverse audiences—local residents, youth, heritage enthusiasts, and international students. Public events such as Open Days at Tyrfingsstaðir and Syðsta-Grund, as well as the annual turf symposium, create inclusive learning opportunities, encourage participation, and foster a sense of shared cultural heritage. By combining hands-on restoration work with education, the school empowers participants to actively contribute to the preservation of historic buildings while increasing awareness of traditional craftsmanship. These initiatives help sustain cultural identity, community cohesion, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.
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> Economically, the project relies on a combination of funding sources, including grants from the Icelandic Cultural Heritage Fund and the Museum Fund, as well as strategic partnerships with universities and international programs. This diverse funding structure enhances the school's long-term viability, ensuring continuity despite limited governmental support. By training students—including architects, heritage professionals, and enthusiasts—the school indirectly supports heritage-related employment, skills development, and knowledge dissemination beyond Iceland, contributing to a sustainable cultural economy.
>
> Through its integrated approach, the Heritage Craft School demonstrates that cultural heritage preservation can align with environmental responsibility, community engagement, and economic sustainability. By safeguarding traditional skills, restoring historic buildings, and educating both local and international participants, the school

ensures that Iceland's turf-building heritage remains alive and relevant, providing a model for sustainable heritage practice that balances ecological integrity, social benefit, and economic resilience.

Dissemination of the project's results and knowledge gained and any outreach or educational activities.

The Heritage Craft School actively disseminates its knowledge through hands-on courses, public engagement, and international collaboration. Since 2007, over 40 courses have trained nearly 500 students in traditional turf, stone, and timber construction. Open Days allow the local community and visitors to participate directly in restoration activities, including turf roofing and laying, fostering engagement with Icelandic heritage.

The annual turf symposium, featuring local, national, and international speakers, is streamed online as part of European Heritage Days, extending access to audiences across Europe and beyond. Collaborations with universities, Erasmus-funded projects, and architectural programs ensure knowledge transfer to students and professionals internationally.

Through these educational and outreach activities, the Heritage Craft School shares its expertise widely, strengthens cross-border cultural exchange, and ensures the preservation and application of traditional Icelandic building skills within a European heritage context.

Contribution to intercultural dialogue and to the protection of cultural diversity.

The Heritage Craft School fosters intercultural dialogue and protects cultural diversity by preserving Iceland's rare turf-building skills. Training participants from Iceland and abroad enables knowledge exchange, skill transfer, and mutual understanding between communities. Public events, Open Days, and the annual turf symposium—streamed online—bring together local residents, heritage enthusiasts, and international audiences. By making traditional building techniques widely accessible, the school ensures Iceland's architectural heritage is valued, sustained, and contributes to cross-cultural learning and European heritage exchange.

Transferability of the initiative to other contexts and its scalability potential.

The Heritage Craft School offers a transferable and scalable model for preserving traditional building skills. Its "living classroom" approach combines hands-on training, restoration projects, and public engagement, allowing participants to learn while directly contributing to conservation. International collaborations with universities, Erasmus-funded projects, and architectural programs demonstrate its adaptability across borders. Open Days and online symposiums further extend accessibility to diverse audiences. To further disseminate methods and lessons learned, the school aims to publish a book in the coming months, supported by funding grants. This methodology can be applied to other regions and heritage types, providing a replicable framework for safeguarding intangible and tangible heritage, promoting sustainable conservation practices, and fostering cross-cultural learning in different European and international contexts.

Any related work that still needs to be completed, if applicable.

Several related activities are planned to build on the Heritage Craft School's achievements and ensure the continued dissemination of knowledge. A key priority is the publication of a book detailing the project's methods, lessons learned, and restoration practices, which has already received funding grants. This publication will serve as both a practical guide and a historical record, extending the school's reach beyond course participants.

In addition, the school is developing new teaching materials, including printed reading resources and digital content, to enhance accessibility for students, professionals, and the wider public. These resources aim to complement hands-on courses and provide structured guidance for learning traditional building skills remotely or in different contexts.

Further work includes updating and expanding course curricula and strengthening online platforms to reach new audiences. These initiatives will consolidate the school's expertise, ensure long-term sustainability, and support the continued preservation and promotion of Icelandic turf-building heritage.

Costs of the project/initiative

Costs of the project (in euro), financial and management arrangements, funding partners and/or the type of funding.

> The project spans almost 20 years, with each year different focus points and funding. Here's the translated budget for The Heritage Craft School 2025, with amounts converted to euros (€) (1 EUR = 143.40 ISK), as an example:
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> **Expenses**
>
> - Courses: €30,583.15
> - Symposium: €2,928.87
> - Project Manager: €14,618.66
>
> Total Expenses: €48,130.68
>
> **Income**
>
> - Course fees: –€6,973.50
> - Grants from House Preservation Fund & Museum Fund: –€23,014.67
> - Skagafjörður Heritage Museum contribution: –€18,143.00
> - Total Income: –€48,131.17

Funding provided by the European Union or the EEA/Norway Grants (including programme, year and amount of the Grant), if any.

> No direct funding has been received for the Heritage Craft School and its operation. The Skagafjörður Heritage Museum participated in the Erasmus programme from 2019–2022, which benefited the project manager of the Heritage Craft School—primarily a museum staff member—through networking, skills training, and her educational role for both the museum and the school. In addition, the Erasmus-funded CHIST programme provided funding for participants to attend courses at the Heritage Craft School.

Additional information

How would winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award benefit you, your project and/or your organisation?

> Receiving the award would shine a spotlight on Iceland's rapidly disappearing turf-building traditions, an important part of our shared world intangible heritage. This recognition would raise awareness of the endangered craft, strengthening efforts to preserve and pass on the skills. It would help secure resources, attract international collaboration, and inspire new generations to engage with traditional craftsmanship. Above all, it would affirm the importance of safeguarding these practices as part of Europe's shared cultural identity.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, what will the monetary award be used for?

> The prize would be used to enhance the Heritage Craft School's curriculum and teaching materials, including updated content and new print and digital resources. This investment would strengthen hands-on training, improve learning experiences, and support the preservation and transmission of Iceland's rare turf-building skills to students locally and internationally.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, who will be the recipient of the monetary award?

> Skagafjörður Heritage Museum, the owner of the Heritage Craft School, would accept the award on the school's behalf and use it to implement the planned improvements, including the further development of the school's curriculum, teaching materials, and hands-on training programs.

How did you find out about the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Other
Is this the first time that this entry has been submitted to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Yes
On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with this online submission form?	✓ 8

Do you have any comments on the application form or suggestions that you would like to share with us?

> We found the application form clear and well-structured, making it easy to provide detailed information about our project. Thank you for the opportunity to submit our project. We appreciate the chance to share the Heritage Craft School's work and are grateful for your consideration

By submitting your data, photographs and other material to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards you agree to the processing and sharing of your data in accordance with Europa Nostra's Privacy Policy. Please check the box to indicate you agree with the Privacy Policy.	✓

Log in to european-heritage.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



1_Tyrfingsstadir... 3.3 MiB



2_Tyrfingsstadir... 2.3 MiB



3_Syðsta-Grund... 3.7 MiB



4_Syðsta-Grund... 3.3 MiB



5_Minni-Akrar_t... 3.2 MiB



6_Tyrfingsstadir... 4.5 MiB



7_Tyrfingsstadir... 3.4 MiB



8_Tyrfingsstadir... 3.0 MiB



9_Tyrfingsstadir... 2.2 MiB



10_Tyrfingsstad... 2.5 MiB



11_Tyrfingsstad... 393 KiB



12_Tyrfingsstad... 4.9 MiB



13_Tyrfingsstad... 3.0 MiB



14_Tyrfingsstad... 3.5 MiB

DOCX

Photo-register.... 16 KiB

PDF

Entrant Declara... 64 KiB

Attachment name

A video showing the sp...

https://youtu.be/QyTf7...