



Country report

UK/Wales

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Country Report UK/Wales

The British Education System

England

Education in England may differ from the system used elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Basically, there are two systems: one covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland and one covering Scotland. The two education systems have different emphases. Traditionally the English, Welsh and Northern Irish system has emphasised depth of education whereas the Scottish system has emphasised breadth. Thus English, Welsh and Northern Irish students tend to sit a small number of more advanced examinations and Scottish students tend to sit a larger number of less advanced examinations.

Education in Wales

Nowadays education in Wales differs slightly from the system used in England. The statutory national key stage tests in Wales were until 2000, the same as in England and were managed by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA). In 2000, the National Assembly for Wales took responsibility for these tests in Wales, at which point they were developed by test agencies on behalf of the Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (ACCAC), whilst the tests in England were developed for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). In 2002, the Welsh Assembly decided to cease the tests at Key Stage One. Instead, optional teacher assessment materials were provided to schools in 2003 for use in English, mathematics and Welsh. These had been adapted from materials that had originally been developed by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the other test agencies to be used as statutory assessment materials for 2003. At the end of 2003, the Daugherty Report was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly to undertake a review of the country's assessment procedures. The interim report by the committee was perceived by the media as supporting a complete abolishment of the assessments at key stages two and three.

The school years in England and Wales

In general, the cut-off point for ages is the end of August, so all children must be of a particular age on the 1st of September in order to begin class that month.

- Primary Education

- Infant School or Primary School
 - Reception, age 4 to 5
 - Year 1, age 5 to 6
 - Year 2, age 6 to 7 (KS1 National Curriculum Tests - England only)
- Junior School or Primary School
 - Year 3, age 7 to 8
 - Year 4, age 8 to 9
 - Year 5, age 9 to 10
 - Year 6, age 10 to 11 (Eleven plus exams in some areas of England, Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Tests)
- Secondary Education
 - Middle School, High School or Secondary School
 - Year 7, old First Form, age 11 to 12
 - Year 8, old Second Form, age 12 to 13
 - Year 9, old Third Form, age 13 to 14 (Key Stage 3 National Curriculum Tests, known as SATs (Standard Assessment Tests))
 - Upper School or Secondary School
 - Year 10, old Fourth Form, age 14 to 15
 - Year 11, old Fifth Form, age 15 to 16 (old O Level examinations, modern GCSE examinations)
 - Upper School, Secondary School, or Sixth Form College
 - Year 12 or Lower Sixth, age 16 to 17 (AS-level examinations)
 - Year 13 or Upper Sixth, age 17 to 18 (A2-level examinations. Both AS-levels and A2-levels count towards A-levels)

In some regions of England, pupils attend a Lower (Primary) School before going to a Middle School between 8 and 12 or more commonly 9 and 13, and then a High School or Upper School. Other, more vocational qualifications offered including GNVQs and BTECs .

Education in Scotland

Education in Scotland differs from the system used elsewhere in the United Kingdom . Basically, there are two systems: one covering [England Wales](#) or [Northern Ireland](#) and one covering Scotland. The two education systems have different emphases. Traditionally the English Welsh and Northern Irish system has emphasised depth of education whereas the Scottish system has emphasised breadth. Thus English, Welsh and Northern Irish students tend to sit a small number of more advanced examinations and Scottish students tend to sit a larger number of less advanced examinations.

The school years in Scotland

In general the cut-off point for ages is the end of August, so all children must be of a particular age on the 1st of September in order to begin class that month.

- Nursery School
 - Year 1, age 3 - 5.
- Primary School
 - Primary 1, age range 4 - 6.
 - Primary 2, age range 5 - 7.
 - Primary 3, age range 6 - 8.
 - Primary 4, age range 7 - 9.
 - Primary 5, age range 8 - 10.
 - Primary 6, age range 9 - 11.
 - Primary 7, age range 10 - 12.
- Secondary School
 - First year, age range 11 - 13.
 - Second year, age range 12 - 14.
 - Third year, age range 13 - 15.
 - Fourth year, age range 14 - 16.
 - Fifth year, age range 15 - 17.
 - Sixth year, age range 16 - 18.

Note that the age ranges specify the youngest age for a child entering that year and the oldest age for a child leaving that year. Also note that children may leave school at the end of any school year after they reach 16 years of age and that they may attend Scottish universities when they are 17. Therefore two sets of national examinations are held. The first set, the Standard Grade examinations take place in the Fourth year of secondary school and show basic education level. The second set the Higher examinations take place in the Fifth and Sixth years. A third level Advanced Higher is sometimes taken by students intending to study at an English university, or those wishing to pass straight into second year at a Scottish university, and covers the gap between the Scottish "Higher" level and the English "Advanced" level courses, although there is not always a one-to-one mapping.

Education in Northern Ireland

Education in Northern Ireland differs slightly from the system used elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Northern Irish system emphasises a greater depth of education compared to the [English](#) and [Welsh](#) systems. The majority of examinations sat and education plans followed in Northern Irish schools are set by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).

School holidays in Northern Ireland are also considerably different to the rest of the United Kingdom. Northern Irish schools generally only get 1 day off for the half term holiday (in February, May and October). Christmas holidays usually only consist of a week or so, the same with the Easter vacation, compared to England's two weeks. The major difference however is that Northern Irish summer holidays are considerably longer with the entirety of July and August off giving a nine week summer holiday.

The school years in Northern Ireland

In general the cut-off point for ages is the end of August, so all children must be of a particular age on the 1st of September in order to begin class that month.

- Primary Education
 - Primary School
 - Primary 1, age 4 to 5
 - Primary 2, age 5 to 6
 - Primary 3, age 6 to 7
 - Primary 4, age 7 to 8
 - Primary 5, age 8 to 9

- Primary 6, age 9 to 10
- Primary 7, age 10 to 11 (Eleven plus exams to determine secondary school placement.)
- Secondary Education
 - High School or Grammar School
 - First Form, age 11 to 12
 - Second Form, age 12 to 13
 - Third Form, age 13 to 14
 - Fourth Form, age 14 to 15
 - Fifth Form, age 15 to 16 (old O-Level examinations, modern GCSE examinations)
 - High School, Grammar School, or Sixth Form College
 - Lower Sixth, age 16 to 17 (AS-level examinations, where applicable)
 - Upper Sixth, age 17 to 18 (A-levels)

Primary education

Primary or [elementary](#) education is the first years of formal structured education that occurs during childhood. In most Western countries it is compulsory for children to receive primary education (though in many jurisdictions it is permissible for parents to provide it).

Primary education generally begins when children are four to seven years of age. The division between primary and secondary education is somewhat arbitrary, but it generally occurs at about twelve years of age (adolescence); some educational systems have separate middle schools for that period. Primary and secondary education together are sometimes (in particular, in Canada and the United States) referred to as " K-12 " education, (K is for [kindergarten](#), 12 is for twelfth grade).

Typically, primary education is provided in schools, where (in the absence of parental movement or other intervening factors) the child will stay, in steadily advancing classes, until they complete it and move on to secondary schooling. Children are usually placed in classes with one teacher who will be primarily responsible for their education and welfare for that year. This teacher may be assisted to varying degrees by specialist teachers in certain subject areas, often music or physical education. The continuity with a single teacher and the opportunity to build up a close relationship with the class is a notable feature of the primary education system. Over the past few

decades, schools have been testing various arrangements which break from the one-teacher, one-class mould.

The major goals of primary education are achieving basic literacy and numeracy amongst all their students, as well as establishing foundations in science, geography, history and other social sciences. The relative priority of various areas, and the methods used to teach them, are an area of considerable political debate.

Traditionally, various forms of corporal punishment were an integral part of early education in the UK. This practice has now been outlawed in the UK.

Elementary school

The elementary school consists of the first seven years of school, that is grades 1 through 5 or 6, as well as [kindergarten](#), a preliminary year of school before grade 1 (known in England and Wales as ' Reception '). Originally however it was studied after primary school in the 19th century, (some schools that have only the youngest students are called primary schools to this day). Also known as grammar school in the United States it is a major segment of compulsory education. Until the latter third of the 20th century, however, grammar school (or elementary school) was grades 1 through 8. After grammar school, one usually attends high school. (In many districts grades 5-8 or 5-9 were called " middle school ", or further separated into " intermediate school ", "middle school", and/or " junior high school ".)

Secondary education

Secondary education or secondary school is a period of education which follows directly after [primary education](#) (such as intermediate school or [elementary school](#)), and which may be followed by tertiary or "post-secondary" education. The purpose of a secondary education can be to prepare for either [higher education](#) or vocational training. The exact boundary between primary and secondary education varies from country to country and even within them, but is generally around the seventh to the tenth year of education, with middle school covering any gaps. Secondary education occurs mainly during the teenage years.

Higher education

Higher education is education provided by universities and other institutions that award academic [degrees](#) such as university colleges, and liberal arts colleges.

Higher education includes both the teaching and the research activities of universities and within the realm of teaching it includes both the undergraduate level (sometimes referred to as tertiary education) and the [graduate](#) (or postgraduate) level (sometimes referred to as quaternary education). Higher education differs from other

forms of post-secondary education such as vocational education. However most professional education is included within higher education and many postgraduate qualifications are strongly vocationally or professionally oriented, for example in disciplines such as law and medicine.

Vocational Education and Training in the UK

Vocational education is education within [vocational schools](#) that prepares people for a specific [trade](#). It directly develops expertise in techniques related to [technology](#), [skill](#) and [scientific technique](#) to span all aspects of the trade. Vocational education is classified as using [procedural knowledge](#).

Generally known as career and technical education (CTE) or technical and vocational education and training (TVET) it prepares people for specific trades, crafts and [careers](#) at various levels from a [trade](#), a [craft](#), [technician](#), or a high professional practitioner position in career's such as [engineering](#), [accountancy](#), [nursing](#), [medicine](#), [architecture](#), [law](#) etc. Craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities and are traditionally non-[academic](#) but related to a specific trade or [occupation](#). It is sometimes referred to as *technical education* as the trainee directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques.

Vocational education can be at the [secondary](#), [post-secondary](#) level, [further education](#), and [higher education](#) level and can interact with the [apprenticeship](#) system. Increasingly vocational education can be recognised in terms of [recognition of prior learning](#) and partial [academic credit](#) towards [tertiary education](#) (e.g. at a [university](#)) as credit.

Vocational education is related to the [apprenticeship](#) system of learning.

As the labour market becomes more specialised and require higher levels of skill, governments and businesses are increasingly investing in the future of vocational education through publicly funded training organisations and subsidised apprenticeship or traineeship initiatives for businesses. At the post-secondary level vocational education is typically provided by an [institute of technology/polytechnic](#), [university](#), or by a local [community college](#).

Vocational education has diversified over the 20th century and now exists in [industries](#) such as [retail](#), [tourism](#), [information technology](#), [funeral](#) services and [cosmetics](#), as well as in the traditional crafts and [cottage industries](#).

Current situation regarding work based learning/apprenticeships in Wales/UK

The Welsh economy is going through a considerable transformation both in terms of the types of goods and services that are produced or provided by business, and the nature of employment and job opportunities. The Welsh Government, Policy statement on skills {2014}¹, sets out the need to re-balance the economy and better meet the specific needs of business for a highly skilled workforce in order to be internationally competitive. Wales need to build a stronger STEM {Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics} offer and ensure that apprenticeships have market relevance. The jobs of tomorrow will require higher levels of competence than in the past and the apprenticeships programme needs to meet the challenge and support growth.

The apprenticeship landscape across the UK is also changing. The apprenticeship reform programme in England presents its own set of challenges, leading to uncertainties about apprenticeship framework development in the devolved nations under a model that has, up to now, relied on the strength of shared UK wide systems. Wales is keen to ensure that the apprenticeship system is compatible with other UK systems, so that apprenticeships are portable across the UK. Against this backdrop, Wales has the opportunities to develop a model so that the content of apprenticeships strongly aligns with employer needs.

The future economy is likely to be increasingly characterised by growth in jobs that require higher level qualifications and skills. The Welsh apprenticeship model needs to respond to that need. The *Framework for co-investment*, which sets out the principles for government and employer investment in skills was implemented in April 2015. Raising the level of investment in skills is an essential part of the drive towards a more internationally competitive skills system for Wales. If Wales is to close the gap with other parts of UK in terms of employer investment in skills, it is important that steps are taken to ensure that more employers are investing in the skills of their workforce.

Delivery priorities

Employment patterns for young people have shifted as the economy has moved from production and manufacturing towards service-based industries. The future economy is likely to be increasingly characterised by growth in jobs that require higher level qualifications and skills². Across the UK there is set to be an additional 3.6 million jobs in medium-skilled occupations by 2022³.

Currently, the proportion of apprentices on foundation level 2 programmes is high, accounting for around 50% of all apprenticeship delivery {see table on following page}

Learners pursuing apprenticeships in Wales:

	Foundation Apprenticeships	Apprenticeships {Level 3}	Higher Apprenticeships
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2011/12	18,895	15,785	280
2012/13	23,345	18,755	2,470
2013/14	25,385	20,890	5,345

Source: Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales, 2013/14 {provisional figures}

Meanwhile, those at higher levels {level 4 and above}, which are considered as alternatives to university, make up 10% of apprentices. It is anticipated that businesses will increasingly require skills at level 3, 4 and 5 and the apprenticeship programme offer must reflect this need.

For some time it has been recognised that there has been an increased reluctance by employers to take on school leavers. This, in part, has been due to the large pool of university graduates from which to recruit. Success in improving access to higher education has provided opportunities for many and increased social mobility. However, this has left many others at risk of being left behind. There is a need to ensure there is a stronger level 3 and higher apprenticeship offer in Wales for individuals who choose not to follow the traditional university route. Research has shown that higher apprentices can earn around £150,000 more over their lifetime, comparable to similar returns for the average graduate⁴.

Wales is already investing in the development of higher apprenticeships. Higher apprenticeships at level 4 and above were first introduced in 2011 and enrolments have grown rapidly since. In October 2014, there were 41 published higher apprenticeship frameworks, mainly in Care, Management, Financial and Engineering sectors. However, occupational coverage needs to be extended, for example, to the construction industry and all of the STEM sectors.

Up-skilling existing employees in new job roles

Apprenticeships should equip individuals with the new skills and learning they need for their job roles and future employment and progression. On this basis, apprenticeships should be targeted at people who move into a new job or at individuals in an existing job where significant new knowledge and skills are required and can be acquired through an apprenticeship.

Currently there is no data that states how many apprenticeships are started by individuals who are new to their role. The 2012 Apprenticeship Pay Survey found that over 82% of apprentices in Wales worked for their current employer prior to enrolling on an apprenticeship. Of these apprentices 71% worked for their employer for over a year prior to enrolment⁵.

Changing UK landscape

Employer involvement in the design and delivery of an apprenticeship curriculum is an essential part of any apprenticeship system. In England, the UK Government is reforming its apprenticeship programme and introducing new apprenticeship standards⁶. Apprenticeship standards will replace frameworks and will define the

competent parts of occupationally specific apprenticeships. The standards are being developed by groups of employees who operate in the same sector, the groups are known as 'trailblazers'. Currently there are over 70 trailblazer groups developing apprenticeship standards, covering a range of occupations that are relevant to employers in England.

The key principle underpinning the English reform is that apprenticeship development and review originates and rest with employers. The intention is that employers will continue to develop and maintain apprenticeship standards.

Under current arrangements, apprenticeship frameworks for Wales (and until recently, England) are approved for development through the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) Standards and Commissioning Board, who contract with individual Sector Skills Councils/Organisations (SSC/O's). SSC/Os submit proposals to UKCES to develop and maintain frameworks where they have evidence of need in a particular sector. Welsh Government is a member of the Board along with other devolved nations.

However, apprenticeship reform in England is re-shaping the focus of organisations such as SSC/Os, and leading to some uncertainties about what, up until now, has been a shared UK-wide system. Wales will need to adapt a system to take account of these reforms.

In addition to the changes already outlined, there is an intention to put in place a single, graded assessment at the end of every apprenticeship in England. The expectation is that this will add value to apprenticeships and strengthen the demonstration of occupational competence on completion of an apprenticeship. In this context, end assessment will test the apprentice's ability to put their knowledge and skills to use in solving work place problems.

The two academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17 will be a transition period for these reforms. The aim is for all new apprenticeship starts to follow the new standards from 2017/18. Against this background, the UK Government has ceased providing funding to the UKCES and SSC/O's for the development and maintenance of frameworks in England.

Due to the ongoing divergence between the UK education and skills systems, including proposed changes to the three nation Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), the Welsh Government intends to continue to quality assure the qualifications taken by apprentices in Wales. This will ensure that these qualifications are considered to be of relevance and value to learners and employers within the appropriate sectors. Wales will consider if the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW) guidance will need to be amended so that only vocational qualifications that sit within the Regulated Pillar of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales⁷ are eligible for inclusion within apprenticeship frameworks in Wales.

The developing Welsh landscape

The best apprenticeship systems are designed to reflect the needs of industry through a partnership approach. Involving stakeholders in the design, delivery and assessment of apprenticeships is essential to having a responsive programme where the offer is visible and accessible. Wales expects future growth to come from an increasing demand for, and investment in, priorities which are informed by employers.

Employers need to be able to clearly articulate their skill needs, and be given the opportunity to feed their needs into the design and development of skills programmes. In the Netherlands for example, employers are heavily involved in helping to design and quality-assure training courses; offering work experience, as well as delivering their own apprenticeships and training⁸. In Northern Ireland, the establishment of a strategic advisory forum and sectorial partnerships aim to ensure that the provision and content of apprenticeships meet employer needs⁹.

Currently the allocation of funding for apprenticeship enrolments is based on industry sector data. There is an opportunity for Regional Employment and Skills Plans to replace the current methodology and to influence which apprenticeships Welsh Government supports on a cost neutral basis. It is expected the earliest opportunity to affect any change will be 2016.

Subject to its establishment through the Qualification Wales Bill, there is potential for Qualification Wales to have a future role in a strategic and operational capacity in relation to apprenticeships. The Welsh Government's consultation on proposals to establish Qualifications Wales¹⁰ as the independent regulator and quality assurer of qualifications in Wales, showed strong support for the proposed new body to take on responsibility for apprenticeships and to be the 'gatekeeper' for apprenticeship frameworks in Wales.

If established, Qualification Wales' role could include the provision of independent advice to government on the development of new apprenticeships and the review of existing ones. Under such an approach, there is further potential for Qualifications Wales to be the designated Issuing Authority¹¹ for apprenticeships in Wales. This role is currently undertaken by SSCs, who ensure that frameworks meet the requirements set out in the SASW.

This role is congruous with proposed Qualifications Wales functions because many of the processes and requirements in the proposed functions of approval and qualifications can be applied to the role of issuing authority. However, it is recognised that it could distract from Qualifications Wales' core functions, especially during the early stages of establishing the proposed organisation.

The proposed function of Qualification Wales would allow it to have the expertise to provide expert advice to the Welsh Government on a range of topics. This could

include advice in relation to policy on apprenticeships where it was similar with its proposed areas of expertise such as on qualifications and assessment.

1. Welsh Government, Policy statement on skills {2014}
2. UK Commission for Employment and Skills, Working Future projections for employment change by occupation, 2010-2020.
3. Institute for Public Policy Research, Winning the Global Race? Jobs, Skills and the Importance of Vocational Education {2014}.
4. AAT and CEBR, University Education: Is this the best route into employment? {February 2013}
5. BIS Research Paper Number 121, Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2012: Research Findings {October 2013}
6. The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan, UK Government {October 2013}
7. Welsh Government, The Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales
8. Paul Casey, UK Commission for Employment and Skills, The Vocational Education and Training System in the Netherlands {2013}
9. Department for Education and Learning, Northern Ireland, Securing our success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships {June 2014}
10. Qualifications body for Wales {2013}
11. The issuing Authority is the organisation {s} designated by the Welsh Government to issue Welsh Apprenticeship frameworks.