



## SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

### ENGLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

#### I. Description of education system

##### 1 Education population and language of instruction

In 1997, approximately 54 per cent of the population in the UK aged between 0 and 29 were in education and 8,260,000 young people were of compulsory education age. The language of instruction throughout the UK is English. In Wales, however, the Welsh language is part of the National Curriculum and in each local authority there is a Welsh-medium school. In Northern Ireland, there are Irish-medium schools.

##### 2 Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In 1997, 93 per cent of pupils in the UK (including Scotland) were in publicly-funded education, with the remaining seven per cent in private non-grant aided institutions (provided and controlled by non-government bodies, but receiving less than 50 per cent of their finance from the public sector).

Administration of education at national level is carried out by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in England, the National Assembly for Wales Education Department and, in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (DHFETE). At municipal level, local education authorities (in England and Wales) and Education and Library Boards (in Northern Ireland) are responsible for organising publicly-funded school education within their area. Governing bodies at school level have a high degree of autonomy; further and higher education institutions are fully autonomous.

National bodies responsible for inspection have been established in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

##### 3 Pre-primary education

Four types of provision exist for children between three months and five years of age (four years of age in Northern Ireland): day nurseries (up to four/five years of age), pre-school groups or playgroups (from two and a half to four/five years), nursery schools or classes (from three to four/five years) and reception classes at primary school (England and Wales only, from age four). The Government is currently expanding and developing publicly-funded early years education by co-operation with the private and voluntary sectors. Since April 1999, in England and Wales, nursery provision has been provided free of charge to all four-year-olds, whose parents want it, in maintained, voluntary and private establishments. Provision for three-year-olds in maintained nursery schools and classes is currently funded at the discretion of the LEA. The Government aims to extend free nursery provision to all three-year-olds by 2004.

1997	Age 3	Age 4
Pre-compulsory education participation rates	48%	94%

These figures provide data for the UK as a whole and so conceal disparities between the different countries.

## 4 Compulsory education

### (a) Phases

<b>Primary school</b>	<b>Age 5–11 (England/Wales)</b> <b>Age 4–11 (Northern Ireland)</b>
<b>Secondary school</b>	<b>Age 11–16</b>

Education is compulsory from age five (four in Northern Ireland) to age 16. In England, some LEAs operate a system of first schools (ages 5–8/9) and middle schools (ages 8/9–12/13). Publicly-funded secondary education is provided in comprehensive schools (providing general education to pupils of all abilities) and grammar schools (providing a more academically-oriented education). Specialist secondary schools (England only) are comprehensive schools which specialise in a particular area of the curriculum, such as technology, while still delivering the full statutory curriculum.

Secondary schools also provide education for post-compulsory students aged 16–18.

### (b) Admissions criteria

The admissions authority for each individual school (either the local authority or the school governing body) establishes an admissions policy. Parents are free to choose any school for their children and schools must meet this request, subject to their admissions policy and to there being sufficient places available. Parents have a legal right of appeal if a place is not provided at the school of their choice. Grammar schools are the only institutions to select pupils on the basis of their ability (as of January 2000, there were 162 grammar schools in England). All publicly-funded compulsory schooling is free of charge.

### (c) Length of school day/week/year

The school year runs from August/September to June/July, depending on the area. Schools must be open for 190 days a year. Schools normally operate five days a week (Monday to Friday). Minimum recommended hours in England and Wales are 21 (for 5–7-year-olds), 23.5 (for 8–11-year-olds) and 24 (for 12–16-year-olds). The school day generally runs from around 09.00 to between 15.00 and 16.00. The length of lesson varies and is determined by each school.

### (d) Class size/student grouping

The Government has introduced measures to limit the size of classes for 5–7-year-olds to 30 pupils by 2001. There are no recommendations for other age groups. Pupils are generally taught in mixed ability classes at primary level. Secondary schools may group pupils by ability for some subjects ('setting') or for all subjects ('streaming').

### (e) Curriculum control and content

The curriculum for compulsory education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is divided into four 'key stages' (KS); KS1 (ages 5–7, or 4–8 in Northern Ireland), KS2 (ages 7–11, or from 8 in Northern Ireland), KS3 (ages 11–14) and KS4 (14–16). There are no prescribed textbooks and teachers select their own teaching methods.

In England and Wales, compulsory subjects for KS1–3 include English (and/or Welsh), mathematics, science, design and technology (technology in Wales, incorporating information technology and design and technology), information and communication technology (England only), religious education, physical education, history, geography, art and design (art in Wales) and music. A foreign language becomes compulsory from KS3, although it is not compulsory in Wales at KS4 and pupils are allowed to drop it at KS4 in England under certain circumstances. There are fewer compulsory subjects at KS4. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) in England (personal and social education (PSE) in Wales) is currently taught as a non-compulsory subject for KS1–4; it will be reviewed in 2002 with a view to making it a compulsory subject. Citizenship will be introduced as a compulsory subject at KS1–4 in England in 2002.

The curriculum in Northern Ireland comprises five compulsory 'areas of study' from KS1–4: English, mathematics, science and technology, environment and society, and creative and expressive studies. In addition, at KS3 and 4, languages are included in the compulsory areas of

study. In Irish-medium primary schools, Irish is compulsory and pupils are exempt from English in Years 1–3 and follow a special programme of study in English in Year 4.

(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment takes place when pupils enter compulsory education and at the end of each key stage. Promotion to the next year or key stage is automatic. At the end of compulsory education, the majority of pupils take General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations (GCSEs) in a range of single subjects, although an increasing number of vocational qualifications are also available.

## 5 Post-compulsory education / upper secondary and post-secondary level

(a) Types of education

<b>Secondary school</b>	<b>Age 16–18</b>
<b>Further education</b> <b>Sixth form college*</b> <b>Further education college</b> <b>Tertiary college*</b>	<b>Age 16 +</b>

\*England and Wales only

Schools and sixth form colleges offer more general education; further education colleges offer largely vocational education; and tertiary colleges offer a combination of general and vocational education. Many secondary schools provide education for pupils from the age of 11–16 or 18 years and thereby cover both lower and upper secondary education.

(b) Admissions criteria

There are no formal qualifications for admission to post-compulsory education, although schools and colleges may set specific requirements relating to GCSE results for admission to individual courses. Students may apply to any institution offering their choice of course. Post-compulsory education is free of charge up to the age of 19.

(c) Curriculum control and content

There are no compulsory subjects at this level. Students choose courses of study from the range offered by the school or further education institution according to the qualification they seek. The body determining curricula and their content varies according to the course chosen. There are no official textbooks and teachers are largely free to decide on appropriate teaching methods.

(d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

A range of qualifications is available to students at post-compulsory level. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the most common are the General Certificate of Education Advanced level/Advanced Subsidiary level (GCE A-level/AS-levels), General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Forms of assessment depend on the qualification and the awarding body, but may include written, oral and practical examinations or continual assessment. NVQs are not assessed through examinations but require candidates to demonstrate their competence in specified tasks.

## 6 Higher education

(a) Types of institution

The higher education structure is common to England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The historical division between polytechnics and universities was ended in 1992 when a single structure of higher education was introduced. However, some differences continue to exist, such as an emphasis on vocational and professional education in the 'new' universities (former polytechnics).

(b) Access

All major higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and each determines its own admissions policy and requirements. Specific requirements are set for each course and vary between institutions. In most cases, applicants require GCE A-levels, GNVQs or equivalent

qualifications.

(c) Qualifications

University students generally work towards a first (usually Bachelor's) degree during their three- or four-year course, but many institutions also offer sub-degree level courses such as BTEC Higher National Diplomas. A new two-year foundation degree was introduced in the year 2000. Qualifications and titles vary between institutions. A new framework for higher education qualifications is currently under development.

## 7 Special needs

Children with special educational needs are educated within mainstream schools wherever possible. If a child needs more help than can reasonably be provided by the resources normally available to the school, the local authority must issue a statement of special educational needs, detailing the needs and the necessary extra provision. In 1997, around one per cent of all primary and secondary pupils with special educational needs were educated in separate schools.

## 8 Teachers

Initial teacher training generally involves a four-year Bachelor of Education degree course, or a Bachelor's degree followed by a one-year post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE). The latter route is more common for secondary teachers. Initial teacher training courses lead to 'Qualified Teacher Status' (England and Wales) and eligibility to teach (Northern Ireland). Teachers are not civil servants; they are employed either by the local authority or by the school governing body, depending on the type of school.

## II. Ongoing Reforms and Topics of Debate in Education

The last three years have seen the introduction of a wide-ranging programme of reform in education. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the National Assembly for Wales Education Department and, in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment (DHFETE) are currently working with other Government Departments and other agencies, to meet two major challenges: to create a more inclusive society and to strengthen a globally competitive economy. To meet these challenges, the DfEE is concentrating on three specific objectives:

- to ensure that all young people reach age 16, the end of compulsory education, with the skills, attitudes and personal qualities to provide a secure foundation for lifelong learning, work and citizenship;
- to develop, in everyone, a commitment to lifelong learning, so as to enhance their lives, improve their employability in a changing labour market and create the skills needed in our economy;
- to help unemployed people into work.

The DfEE's wide-ranging policy, *Learning and Working Together for the Future*, is described in detail on the Department's website at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/lwt>

The Government's education targets cover six main themes: raising standards and attainment; encouraging diversity and new ways of working; promoting inclusion; increasing access and participation; enhancing employability; and developing a community focus.

### *Raising standards and attainment*

Targets for the year 2002 have been set in English and in mathematics for pupils at key stage 2. A maximum of 30 pupils has been imposed for all infant classes (children aged 5, 6 or 7) (Years 1–4 in Northern Ireland). In England, primary schools are encouraged to reserve one hour a day

as the literacy hour. In Northern Ireland, the School Improvement Programme has introduced extra support for literacy, numeracy and pupil behaviour for all schools and a programme of special support for low achieving and underachieving schools. Following the National Year of Reading (1998–1999), the year 2000 was designated Maths Year 2000. As part of this drive to raise standards, since September 1999 all primary and special schools in England are expected to have a daily maths lesson of up to an hour. Strong emphasis is given to oral and mental work. Schools in Wales and Northern Ireland have also participated in Maths Year 2000 (but have not been expected to implement the daily maths lesson). The literacy and numeracy strategies are being expanded in England to encompass key stage 3 secondary school pupils (aged 11–14) in addition.

Reviews of the statutory curriculum have recently been carried out in England and Wales by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) respectively. The revised curricula were introduced in September 2000. Changes include greater flexibility in the curriculum to permit sufficient emphasis on literacy and numeracy and other aspects, such as personal, social and health education, citizenship education and work-related learning. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is currently conducting a curriculum review. It is intended that the revised curriculum will be phased in from 2002.

A new foundation stage was introduced in England and Wales in September 2000 for pre-school children aged three to five (the end of the reception year). Early learning goals have been specified for the foundation stage which set out what most children are expected to achieve by the end of this stage to prepare them for key stage 1 at primary school.

In addition, the Office for Standard in Education (OFSTED) is now responsible for the inspection of the education and day-care elements of pre-school provision in all settings in England and the inspection of post-16 provision in schools and colleges in England.

New legislation made provision for the Learning and Skills Council for England (LSC) and the Welsh equivalent, the National Council for Education and Training in Wales (CETW), to start operating in April 2001. They will assume responsibility for all post-16 education and training (excluding higher education). The LSC will work through a network of 47 local Learning and Skills Councils. The legislation also created the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) which will assess the quality of provision for adults.

General Teaching Councils will become fully operational in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in April 2001. Each Council will be an independent and authoritative voice for the teaching profession, advising Government and others on measures to raise standards. Further training for headteachers has been introduced and a National College for School Leadership has been set up. Since September 1999, all new teachers in England must undertake an induction year. The induction programme in schools must combine support, monitoring and assessment of the new teacher's performance and should be tailored to individual needs. Proposals to introduce a statutory induction year in Wales are currently under consultation. Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) tests in numeracy, literacy and ICT will be introduced from February 2001 for all those seeking to qualify as a teacher. In England and Wales, performance related pay and a new performance management framework, which will replace the existing system of appraisal for teachers, are being phased in from September 2000. In Northern Ireland an early professional development training programme for new teachers has also been introduced. It follows the completion of induction and normally extends over the second and third years of full-time teaching. The delivery of the programme makes considerable use of ICT.

### *Encouraging diversity and new ways of working*

By the year 2002, the Government intends that every school in the UK will be connected to the Internet, to allow schools to be linked to other learning institutions, such as libraries, colleges, other schools, universities, museums and galleries. The National Grid for Learning assists students and teachers to access information, advice and learning resources. Funding is being provided to enhance teachers' ICT skills.

The University for Industry (Ufi) has been launched in the year 2000 and is at the heart of the Government's vision for lifelong learning. Ufi is a new type of public-private partnership which will use modern technologies to make learning available at a time and place to suit the learner – at home, in the workplace and through a national network of learning centres.

### *Promoting inclusion*

The Government is committed to improving the achievements of children with special educational needs (SEN) and to integrating such children into mainstream schools wherever possible. Mainstream schools are encouraged to develop practical links with special schools and adopt proven good practice. During initial teacher training, greater emphasis is being placed on the identification of pupils with SEN. A Special Education Needs and Disability Bill will shortly be placed before Parliament. Similar inclusion measures are being introduced in Northern Ireland.

Social inclusion of all pupils, including those at risk of disaffection, is also a focus of current reforms. New measures in schools in England include the requirement for school discipline arrangements to include anti-bullying strategies and the implementation of new arrangements for school exclusions.

### *Increasing access and participation*

As part of the Government's efforts to prevent social exclusion, raise educational standards, reduce health inequalities and promote opportunity, a cross-departmental strategy, Sure Start, was initiated in England. The aims of local Sure Start programmes are to support good quality play, learning and childcare, to provide primary and community healthcare and advice about child health and development, and to give increased support to those with special needs. Sure Start was introduced in Wales in 1999 and will be introduced in Northern Ireland in 2000/2001.

Since August/September 2000, a number of changes have been made to the curriculum and examination system for 16- to 19-year-olds in order to widen access to further education in England and Wales, as follows:

- The General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary level (GCE AS-level) replaced the old GCE Supplementary examination. This is a one-year course which aims to enable upper secondary pupils (aged 16-18) to study a wider range of curriculum subjects in their first year.
- The Advanced level General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), now known as vocational A levels, have been reformed to be equivalent in size and demand to a single GCE A-level and graded on the same level.
- A new voluntary key skills qualification in the areas of application of number, communication, information technology, working with others (England only), improving one's own learning (England only), and problem solving (England only).

A new framework for higher education qualifications is also currently being developed. The framework is designed to promote public understanding of, and confidence in, academic standards. It will provide clear and accurate information about the purposes and outcomes of higher education; a clear structure to higher education qualifications so that the character, level and intended outcomes can be clearly distinguished; and the consistent use of qualifications titles. As part of this framework, a new two-year foundation degree has been introduced in 2000 at a level below a traditional honours degree.

- The New Targeting Social Need (New TSN) initiative, initially launched in 1991 as the Targeting Social Needs (TSN) initiative, aims to tackle disadvantage and social need. Specifically, it focuses on the problems of unemployment and employability; targets social need and inequality in education, health and housing; and addresses social exclusion. Within the education context, actions are aimed at improving the targeting of funding, raising the quality of early learning for socially disadvantaged pupils and providing additional support for low achieving schools.

### *Enhancing employability*

In order to improve the employability of young people, reforms have been made to the system of work-based training. Advanced Modern Apprenticeships offer work-based training, mainly for 16- and 17-year-old school and college leavers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, leading to a nationally recognised, high-level qualification, the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3. Foundation Modern Apprenticeships work on the same principle as Advanced Modern Apprenticeships but are based on NVQ level 2.

Stronger links have been forged between employers and the higher education sector. The Government has awarded funding to a number of development projects designed to enhance student employability and help graduates onto career ladders.

### *Developing a community focus*

The Adult and Community Learning Fund was established in England in 1998 with the aim of boosting adult learning. Projects include activities to help with basic skills, such as literacy and communication, helping parents from traveller communities to support their children's education, and providing family learning activities for young parents in isolated rural areas.

In June 1998, the Government's Education Action Zones programme was launched in England. The Zones use a partnership approach to raise standards in schools. Schools, local education authorities, local businesses, teachers and parents work together to ensure that young people in deprived areas receive as high a standard of education as their peers in schools elsewhere. The Government also launched the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme which works along the same partnership approach to raise standards in selected inner city areas in England.

### *Local authority funding*

The Government has issued a Green Paper on modernising local government finance, looking at the distribution of general grant, control of capital expenditure and taxes and charges in particular. This includes a section on local education authority financing.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE ( <a href="http://www.eurydice.org">http://www.eurydice.org</a> )
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