



Structures of Education and Training Systems in Europe

United Kingdom - Wales

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UNITED KINGDOM – WALES

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If you wish to obtain more details on education systems in Europe, please consult the EURYBASE database (<http://www.eurydice.org>), the Cedefop database (http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/NationalVet/Thematic/) and the website of the European Training Foundation (<http://www.etf.europa.eu/>)

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INTRODUCTION: GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

Wales is a constituent part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It consists of 13 counties and shares a border with England. In 2008, the population of Wales was estimated at 2 993 400. The population of the UK as a whole was estimated at 61 383 200.

Wales has a devolved government within the United Kingdom. It was granted devolved powers in 1998, and in 1999 elected its own National Assembly. The National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) assumed responsibility for the policies and public services formerly exercised by the Welsh Office (WO). These include economic development, agriculture, industry and training, education, local government, health, social services, housing, environment, transport and the Welsh language.

The Government of Wales Act was passed in 2006 with the aim of making it easier for further powers to be granted to the National Assembly for Wales. In 2007, the Act separated the power of the Welsh Assembly Government between a legislative body – the National Assembly for Wales (comprising 60 Assembly members), and an executive body – the Welsh Assembly Government (comprising the First Minister, Welsh Ministers, Deputy Welsh Ministers and the Counsel General or chief legal adviser to the Government). The role of the executive (the Welsh Assembly Government) is to make decisions; develop and implement policy; exercise executive functions; and make statutory instruments. The 60 Assembly members in the National Assembly scrutinise the Assembly Government's decisions and policies; hold Ministers to account; approve budgets for the Welsh Assembly Government's programmes; and have the power to enact Assembly Measures on certain matters (see below).

Until the Government of Wales Act 2006 came into effect, most primary legislation-making powers lay with the UK Parliament in London. The Act created a new power for the National Assembly for Wales to make laws in devolved areas. Such laws, known as 'Assembly Measures', are classed as primary legislation, although they are in a category lower than an Act of Parliament.

The United Kingdom does not have a written constitution setting out the fundamental principles on which the rights and responsibilities of citizens are based. However, the Human Rights Act (1998), which applies to all parts of the UK, incorporates into law nearly all the rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and gives citizens a clear legal statement of their basic rights and fundamental freedoms. With regard to education, the Act states that nobody should be denied the right to education. Parents also have the right to ensure that their religious or philosophical beliefs are respected when public bodies provide education or teaching to their children.

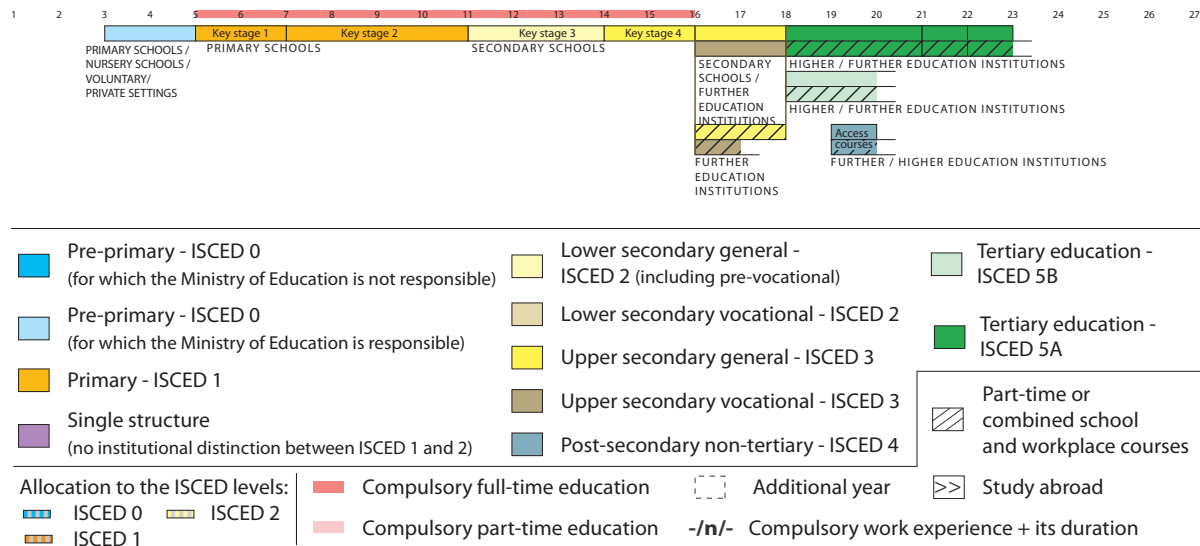
In addition, the Equality Act 2006 introduced a number of measures to promote equality across a broad range of areas in England, Wales and Scotland. It established the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), which aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights. The Commission enforces equality legislation on age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender status, and encourages compliance with the Human Rights Act.

The framework for the education system in Wales is set out in a number of Acts of Parliament which also apply to England. For the school system, the framework Acts are the Education Act 1996 which defines primary, secondary and further education and outlines the principles underlying compulsory education and the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 which established a new legal framework for maintained primary and secondary schools. The framework for further education is set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Higher education is defined by the Education Reform Act 1988, but higher education institutions (HEIs) are diverse and there is no single legal framework setting out the legal basis on which they run their affairs. The Government controls the right of HEIs to award their own degrees under the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

The United Kingdom has no statutorily defined official languages. In Wales, both English and Welsh are treated on a basis of equality for official purposes. Welsh is a statutory part of the National Curriculum at key stages 1 to 4 (ages five to 16) as either a first or second language. The Welsh Language Board is a statutory body whose main function is to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. The Board is responsible for Welsh language schemes prepared by local authorities, school and college governing bodies and other public bodies involved in education in Wales. In 2003, the Welsh Assembly Government published *Iaith Pawb: a National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales* ⁽ⁱ⁾ which includes measures aimed at extending access to Welsh-medium education.

1. INITIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ORGANISATION, FUNDING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1.1 Organisation of the initial education and training system



ISCED 0 covers pre-primary education. Participation at this level is not compulsory, but publicly-funded provision is available for all three- and four-year-olds. It can be provided in schools or by funded providers in the private and voluntary sectors. Between September 2008 and September 2011, the Welsh Assembly Government is implementing a new statutory 'foundation phase', with a curriculum extending from the age of three to seven years (ISCED 0 and the first two years of ISCED 1, see below). It aims to provide a more informal system of learning based on well-structured play, practical activity and investigation.

ISCED 1 covers primary education for children aged between five and 11. Primary education covers key stage 1 (ages five to seven) and key stage 2 (ages seven to 11). Children follow a general programme of education as set out in the National Curriculum. Once fully implemented in September 2011, the 'foundation phase' (see above) will wholly replace key stage 1.

ISCED 2 covers secondary education for students aged between 11 and 14. During this phase, known as key stage 3, students follow a general programme of education as set out in the National Curriculum.

ISCED 3 covers secondary education for students aged between 14 and 16. This phase is known as key stage 4 and is generally provided in the same school as key stage 3. At key stage 4, students select specific programmes of study which lead to a number of nationally recognised qualifications normally taken at 16. These can be in vocational subjects, or, more commonly, in general subjects. Compulsory school ends at 16.

ISCED 3 also covers post-compulsory advanced level programmes. When taken by school leavers, they typically last for two years (ages 16 to 18). Students at this stage are also assessed by means of external qualifications. They may choose between general (academic) and vocational subjects or courses, or take a mixture of the two. Where students follow post-compulsory advanced level programmes in schools, the sixth form is the term used to describe this school phase. Students are usually in Years 12 and 13 of school education. Sixth forms tend to offer more general programmes,

although vocational programmes are also available. Another option is for students to transfer to a further education (FE) college (see introduction to chapter 4).

A wide range of general and vocational qualifications at ISCED 3 are also available to learners of all ages. FE colleges are major providers to both 16- to 19-year-olds and older learners. Programmes for older learners at ISCED 3 vary in their duration.

ISCED 4 applies to one very specific programme – the access course. Access courses are provided by further education colleges and are aimed at mature students wishing to gain entry to higher education. They are designed and taught to meet the needs of adult learners.

ISCED 5 and 6 cover higher education programmes, which include bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctorates as well as a number of shorter vocationally oriented programmes. Higher education is provided in 12 higher education institutions (HEIs), including three universities. It is also provided in some further education colleges.

1.2 Distribution of responsibilities

Education in Wales is administered at both national and local level. The education system is characterised by its decentralised nature. Responsibility for different aspects of the system is shared between central government, local government, churches and other voluntary bodies, the governing bodies of educational institutions and the teaching profession.

For more detailed information on the distribution of responsibilities in different sectors of education, see sub-sections below.

Distribution of responsibilities for education in schools

Education in schools includes: the reception class for four- to five-year-olds in primary schools, classified as ISCED 0; ISCED 1 covering primary education for children aged five to 11; ISCED 2 covering secondary education for 11- to 14-year-olds and ISCED 3 covering secondary education for 14- to 18-year-olds.

The Welsh Assembly Government's **Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS)** is responsible for administering education across all phases. The Department's aim is to improve children's services, education and training provision to secure better outcomes for learners, business and employers. The Department operates through four groups, which are responsible for policy, planning, funding, and monitoring services in their respective areas.

One of the groups with responsibilities for education in schools is the **Children, Young People and School Effectiveness Group**. It has a wide range of responsibilities including school effectiveness; school management; partnership working with local authorities and their partners; additional learning needs; minority ethnic support; tackling disaffection; attendance and behaviour; and nutrition in schools.

The **Qualifications, Curriculum and Learning Improvement Group** also has responsibilities for education in schools. They include:

- Advising the Welsh Assembly Government on matters relating to the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in schools.
- Ensuring quality and standards in external general and vocational qualifications.
- Keeping under review all aspects of the school curriculum and statutory assessment arrangements for maintained schools.

- Commissioning classroom materials to support the teaching of Welsh, other subjects through the medium of Welsh and Wales-specific aspects of the curriculum.

Wales shares a common system of external qualifications with England and Northern Ireland (for full details, see section 4.4). These qualifications are normally taken between the ages of 16 and 18 (at ISCED 3) and are provided by independent organisations known as **awarding bodies** or **awarding organisations**. These organisations are funded by examination fees. Awarding organisations are subject to statutory regulation and their role involves: developing qualifications; assessing and quality assuring qualifications; awarding qualifications; and providing customer service to centres (including schools, further education colleges, and adult education centres) offering courses leading to their qualifications.

The five principal awarding bodies for general qualifications taken in schools are: the WJEC, the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA); Edexcel; OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations); and the CCEA⁽¹⁾. These main awarding bodies offer both general and vocational qualifications. They offer the same type of qualifications, which must be centrally approved, but schools are free to choose examination specifications from any one of the five providers across England, Wales and Northern Ireland (although the WJEC offers qualifications which are tailored to the Welsh context).

DCELLS is kept informed of the quality of education and training by **Estyn**. Estyn is the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. It is independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales. See 1.4 for further information.

There are also many bodies which, in addition to their other functions, provide advice to government or represent the interests of particular groups or sectors. They include the **General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW)**, an independent professional body for teaching. All teachers wishing to teach in maintained schools (schools funded through their local authority) are required to register with the Council. The Council maintains a register of teachers and a Code of Practice for the profession.

At local level, responsibility for the management and administration of education lies with 22 **local authorities (LAs)**. LAs have a statutory duty to secure the provision of primary and compulsory secondary education (pupils aged five to 16). Other key responsibilities regarding schools include: school admissions; financial administration; promoting high standards and the fulfilment of potential; staffing and staff development; ensuring regular school attendance; support for inclusion, special educational needs and behaviour support; dealing with complaints; school meals; grants and allowances and transport to school.

At school level, **governing bodies** are responsible and accountable for all major decisions about the school and its future. They normally comprise between nine and 20 members. Governors have a legal responsibility to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement. The school governing body decides the general direction of the school and its curriculum, subject to the requirements of the National Curriculum. It must ensure that the National Curriculum is implemented and that religious education is taught. It also decides how the budget will be spent, determines the number and composition of the staff, and is responsible for selecting the headteacher. The headteacher and staff report to the governing body on the school's overall performance, and in its turn the governing body should ensure accountability to parents and the wider local community. It is a legal requirement for the governing body to produce an annual report.

⁽¹⁾ There are also a very large number of smaller awarding bodies which offer mainly vocational and professional qualifications. These qualifications, which are accredited by the regulatory body, Ofqual (the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator in England) should have support from the relevant sector skills council or similar organisation, and they should conform to national occupational standards (see 7.2).

All schools have a **headteacher**, who is responsible for the internal organisation, management and control of the school. Headteachers have a wide range of professional duties, including formulating the overall aims and objectives of the school; appointment and management of staff; evaluating the standards of teaching and learning at the school; determining and implementing an appropriate curriculum for the school; reviewing staff performance; ensuring that the performance of pupils is monitored and recorded; ensuring an acceptable standard of pupil behaviour; and promoting good relations between the school and parents.

A school's staffing structure typically includes the **Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**. Depending on the size of the school, the SLT might include one or more deputy headteachers and one or more assistant headteacher in addition to the headteacher. A small primary school might have just one deputy head who would combine management duties with classroom teaching, while a large secondary school might have up to half a dozen deputies and assistant heads who would spend only a small proportion of their time in the classroom. Sometimes, the SLT may also include staff who are not teachers, for example a bursar or school business manager.

The staffing structure usually also includes a **middle leadership** layer. Middle managers might include heads of department or curriculum areas (in a secondary school), responsible for managing subject teaching in their areas, and also heads of year or key stage ⁽²⁾ managers, responsible for students' pastoral care.

Parents have a responsibility to ensure that children of compulsory school age receive an efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, and to any special educational needs (SEN) they may have. In addition, parents may put themselves forward to serve as school governors and vote in elections for parent governors.

Under the School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005, all maintained schools (schools funded through the Local Authority) are required to have a school council. The purpose of school councils is to allow **pupils** to discuss matters relating to their school and education and to give their views on these to the school governing body and headteacher.

Distribution of responsibilities in the further education sector

The further education sector focused initially on technical education, but has since grown to encompass a much wider range of provision. It now provides education to school leavers from age 16 at ISCED 3 (see section 4), to adults who may be undertaking basic skills courses at ISCED 1 or general and vocational qualifications at ISCED 3 (see section 7 and 4); and to adult learners undertaking access to higher education courses at ISCED 4 (see section 5).

The **Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Group** within the **Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS)** is responsible for all post-16 education and training, including both further and higher education (see below). The Group produces strategies, policies, frameworks, criteria and priorities with the aim of ensuring that the current and future knowledge and skills needs of individuals, employers, communities, the economy and Welsh Assembly Government are identified and met by sixth form, further education, higher education and work-based learning providers.

Further education (FE) colleges are public corporations and are therefore subject to company law. They each have a governing body or corporation, usually comprising between 10 and 20 members, which fulfils a role similar to the board of directors of a company. They are responsible, within the

⁽²⁾ The statutory National Curriculum for compulsory education is currently divided into four key stages: key stage 1 (ages five to seven); key stage 2 (ages seven to 11); key stage 3 (ages 11 to 14) and key stage 4 (ages 14 to 16). The new 'foundation phase' for three- to seven- year-olds (see 2.3) will replace key stage 1 once fully implemented in August 2011.

limits imposed by their statutory obligations, for all decisions affecting the institution. Their main tasks are to set the strategic direction, mission and educational character of the institution; ensure accountability; and monitor and evaluate performance.

Day-to-day management, organisation and direction are the responsibility of the principal and the management team, working within the broad framework of policies and priorities determined by the governing body. The principal is directly accountable to the governing body/corporation for the performance of the institution, in terms of both academic and financial matters.

In FE institutions other than sixth-form colleges, an academic board must be created to advise the principal on the standards, planning, coordination, development and oversight of the academic work of the institution.

There is no nationally recommended internal organisational structure for further education colleges, and institutions are free to adapt their structures to meet changing circumstances. Most are organised into departments according to area of study.

Distribution of responsibilities for higher education

The Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Group within the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) is responsible for higher education in Wales. Although the UK Government, advised by the Welsh Assembly Government, controls the right to award degrees and to use the title 'university', in other matters, such as degree structure, degree titles, programme development and quality assurance, the sector has a long tradition of autonomy. Each institution has a governing body or council responsible for ensuring effective management and for planning future development. The representative bodies are Higher Education Wales (HEW), a National Council of Universities UK (UUK) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) (see 1.3). Another representative body is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which works with the sector on a UK-wide basis (see 1.4).

1.3 Financing

Overview

All central government funding for education in Wales is provided through the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), which decides the sums to be spent on its various areas of activity, including education, and distributes resources to local authorities, and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

Financing of pre-school education

Pre-school education is classified as ISCED 0.

For information on the financing of pre-school education which is provided by a school, see section below on primary and secondary schools.

The Government is expanding and developing publicly-funded early years education by cooperation with the private and voluntary sectors (see 2.1). Voluntary and private providers of early years education in these sectors may be paid a grant for educating three- and four-year-olds.

Financing of primary and secondary schools

Primary schools (children aged five to 11) provide education at ISCED 1. Secondary schools provide education at ISCED 2 (students aged 11 to 14) and ISCED 3 (students aged 14 to 18).

Individual local authorities receive allocations in the form of grants from central government, which they are free to 'top up' with money from other sources, and which they then allocate to the maintained schools in their area.

Local authorities receive their funding in two principal ways:

- The Welsh Assembly Government provides around 80 per cent of funding to local authorities in the form of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and redistributed national non-domestic rates (NNDR).
- The other 20 per cent of local authority funding is raised locally in the form of council tax which is set by each authority as part of its annual budget setting process.

The RSG and locally raised funding cover all local authority services including education.

Local authorities in Wales allocate their individual school budgets in the form of budget shares for each school and use pupil numbers as a common basis to determine funding allocations. Other components vary from authority to authority to reflect local needs and priorities. Additional factors or criteria which may be taken into account in the calculation of an individual school's budget share may include for example, the special educational needs of pupils; pupils for whom English or Welsh is not their first language and the turnover of pupils other than as part of the general admissions process at a school.

Grants are also available to schools through the 'Better Schools Fund', which is administered by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). The programme's overarching aim is to improve school performance and raise standards by providing grants to be spent on specific educational priority areas. The grant rate is 60 per cent, with LAs being required to make the remaining contribution. Priorities for the 2009/10 'Better Schools Fund' grant allocations include raising standards and achievement through effective whole school strategies; supporting the development of high quality services for pupils with additional educational needs; and making the most effective use of technology to enhance teaching and learning.

Annual capital funding allocations are not broken down into individual service sectors, and it is the responsibility of each local authority to determine how its available resources are allocated between services, taking account of its statutory responsibilities and its perception of local needs and priorities. The education element of the annual capital funding allocations provided to local authorities is known as General Capital Funding.

In addition to General Capital Funding, there is also the School Buildings Improvement Grant, a 'ring-fenced' capital grant available to local authorities for capital investment in school buildings. Local authorities are able to propose works for use of their grant allocations within fairly broad criteria which are specified in regulations. It is for local authorities to decide which individual schools and projects should benefit in light of competing needs and local priorities.

Financing of further education colleges

The further education sector provides education to school leavers from age 16 at ISCED 3 (see section 4), to adults who may be undertaking basic skills courses at ISCED 1 or general and vocational qualifications at ISCED 3 (see section 7 and 4); and to adult learners undertaking access to higher education courses at ISCED 4 (see section 5).

The 'National Planning and Funding System' (NPFS) is used to allocate funding to all post-16 learning, excluding higher education. The system uses a single formula to fund all post-16 learning in all parts of Wales, with weightings added for rural or Welsh-medium schools, learning in disadvantaged areas, special needs learning or other factors which tend to increase the cost of delivering education and

training. The overarching aim is to create a unified method of planning and funding post-16 education and training, which gives equal recognition and status to different types of provision.

Education and training is provided free of charge to 16- to 19-year-olds, but is not usually free for adults. Bodies which provide post-16 education and training must set fees, make awards and recover costs from students, employers etc. in accordance with criteria set by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). However, adults who are retired, or who receive unemployment or certain other state benefits, may have part or all of their fees waived.

DCELLS also provides capital funding for further education colleges in Wales. Criteria for capital spending include widening participation in further education and supporting the skills (shortage) agenda; providing access for disabled students; improving ICT infrastructure and equipment; and improving and updating buildings and equipment.

Financing of higher education

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) receive their funding from a variety of public and private sources, including student tuition fees, with the largest proportion provided by Government. The Welsh Assembly Government provides funding for teaching and research infrastructure through an 'arms length' body, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), which determines the methodology within an overall policy environment set by the Welsh Assembly Government. Funding for teaching is allocated according to formulae which take account of factors including: the number of students, their subject, level and mode of study, and whether they are from a deprived area, disabled and/or studying through the medium of Welsh. Recurrent research funding is distributed by reference to quality, as assessed by performance in the most recent Research Assessment Exercise, and volume of activity. Funding for teaching and research infrastructure are combined into a block grant which institutions are free to spend according to their own priorities. The direct costs of specific research projects are funded not by HEFCW but by the seven Research Councils, operating on a UK-wide basis. Research Council funds are awarded on the basis of applications made by individual researchers, which are subject to independent, expert peer review. HEFCW also funds certain higher education courses delivered at further education (FE) colleges.

1.4 Quality assurance

The education service operates within a strong framework of accountability to parents, to the community and to the Government and its agencies. External inspection plays an important role, as does the publication of performance data and other information on individual institutions and on wider aspects of the education system. Institutional self-evaluation is both an increasingly important part of the quality improvement process and a key input to external evaluation. Another important element in the accountability framework is the role of governing bodies – publicly-funded schools, colleges and universities are accountable for their own performance through a governing body which includes representatives of key stakeholders, such as, in the case of schools, parents, staff and representatives of the local community.

Inspection arrangements for education and skills

Estyn is the non-ministerial government department responsible for the inspection and regulation of schools; colleges; further education; adult education; youth services; local authorities; initial teacher training; and work-based learning. It covers education at ISCED levels 0 to 4 and in the case of teacher training, ISCED 5.

All inspections are conducted in accordance with Estyn's *Common Inspection Framework for Education and Training in Wales*ⁱⁱ. The framework places an emphasis on self-evaluation as the starting point for inspection. It focuses on the achievements of learners; the quality of education and

training provided; and the effectiveness and efficiency of leadership and management. It centres on seven key questions that apply to the provider as a whole, as well as to aspects of its work such as areas of learning, subjects, courses, programmes and occupational areas. All providers are inspected at least once every six years. Inspectors use grades to summarise inspection judgements and use a scale ranging from one (highest) to five (lowest) to communicate results to schools. Where provision is found to have serious shortcomings, special procedures apply. For example, when a further education college receives a grade 4 or 5 for a particular area of learning, Estyn will undertake reinspection within 12 to 20 months.

Inspection of independent schools

Independent, or as they are commonly known, private schools receive no public funding and are largely financed by fees paid by parents.

Providers of independent schools must register with the Welsh Assembly Government. Independent schools which are found not to be providing satisfactory education can be closed down by removal from the register. Schools must meet standards covering the quality of education; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils; welfare, health and safety of pupils; suitability of the people running the school; standards of premises; provision of information and handling complaints. The registration authorities also have the power to require a registered independent school to be inspected. Like maintained schools, independent schools are inspected at least once every six years. Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework for Education and Training in Wales* (see above).

Local authorities' responsibilities for school quality

Local authorities (LAs) are responsible for quality assurance in the schools which they maintain and for taking initial action in failing schools. They are expected to monitor schools' performance through the analysis of information about standards and other aspects of school performance already available to them, and through the examination of school development plans and post-inspection action plans.

LAs also collect information through judgments made by schools' own self-evaluation and through direct observation of schools' activity through visits by their own inspection and advisory services. These services provide advice and consultancy to help schools analyse their current standards, identify effective ways of improving, set targets and keep in touch with good practice.

Quality assurance of the education system as a whole

There is no single process for the overall evaluation of the education systems in Wales.

Performance information on individual schools is no longer presented in the form of comparative tables. Information on individual schools is, however, still available to parents in school prospectuses and governors' annual reports. In addition, National Curriculum assessment and public examination results are published online, by local authority, and for the whole of Wales.

Estyn inspects local authority education services at least once every six years. It also conducts area inspections, which examine education and training provided for learners over the age of 14 in a specified area of the country.

The Wales Audit Office is an independent audit and inspection body which monitors the spending of taxpayers' money to ensure that public services are well-managed, accountable and offer the best possible value for money.

In addition, Wales takes part in international studies of student attainment such as those organised by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Wales participated fully in PISA

for the first time in 2006. It has not participated in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), nor in the IEA Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

Quality assurance of higher education

Academic standards for programmes at ISCED 5 and ISCED 6 are established and maintained by higher education institutions themselves using shared quality assurance approaches and structures. These include the universal use of external examiners, a standard set of indicators and other reports, and by the activities of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The QAA is an independent body, funded by subscriptions from all UK higher education institutions and through contracts with the higher education funding bodies. The QAA conducts peer-review based audits and reviews of higher education institutions with the opportunity for subject-based review as the need arises. Reviews are carried out using a variety of methods depending on the country and type of institution. The accuracy and adequacy of quality-related information published by the higher education institutions is also reviewed. Standards in professional areas are assured by the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The QAA also reviews higher education programmes delivered in further education colleges using a process known as developmental review.

2. PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Education at ISCED 0 is known by a variety of terms – ‘early years’, ‘nursery’, ‘pre-school’ or ‘pre-primary’ education.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 defines nursery education as full-time or part-time education suitable for children who have not attained compulsory school age (the term after a child's fifth birthday), whether provided at schools or elsewhere. The Act also placed a statutory duty on local authorities (LAs) to ensure the provision of pre-primary education in their area. Under the Childcare Act 2006, from April 2008, LAs have also had a duty to secure provision of sufficient childcare in their area.

Participation in pre-school education is voluntary. Over recent years, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has set targets to expand and develop government-funded pre-school education and childcare and all three- and four-year-olds are now entitled to free part-time pre-school places. Free part-time places are also available for some two-year-olds in deprived areas.

Maintained schools, both primary schools and nursery schools, are major providers of pre-school education places. These places can either be provided in standalone nursery schools, or in nursery classes (children aged three to four) and reception classes (children aged four to five) within primary schools. They are also provided in integrated children's centres, which offer early years education, childcare, open access play and community education and training. The WAG is working towards the target of establishing one integrated children's centre in each LA. The recent expansion of pre-school education has also involved the private and voluntary sectors, which are supported by government funding to provide free places.

Between September 2008 and September 2011, the Welsh Assembly Government is implementing a new statutory ‘foundation phase’, with a curriculum extending from the age of three to seven years (ISCED 0 and the first two years of ISCED 1, see below). It aims to provide a more informal system of learning based on well-structured play, practical activity and investigation. See 2.3 for further information.

There is no general entitlement to free pre-school education and care for children under the age of three. Parents can choose to pay for early education and care in the private and voluntary sector.

2.1 Admission

Parents have a right to express a preference for a particular pre-school institution for their child but, in cases where the demand for places exceeds availability, the institution will follow its published admissions policy to allocate places. The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) recommends that, in deciding on their admissions policies, local authorities give priority to children with special educational needs (SEN) and to children from socially and economically deprived families. Other admissions criteria may include the proximity to the school of the child's home, and whether the child has any brothers or sisters already attending the school/institution.

Institutions in the private and voluntary sectors set their own admissions policies.

2.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

Early years providers receiving government funding for free part-time, pre-school places for three- and four-year-olds should offer all eligible children a minimum of five sessions per week, each lasting a minimum of two-and-a-half hours.

Providers in the maintained sector (standalone nursery schools and nursery and reception classes within primary schools) tend to follow the same terms as primary schools, and are therefore open for 38 weeks of the year, Monday to Friday. Typically, the year runs from September to July and is usually divided into three terms. Many private providers, for example day nurseries are open all day from 8am until 6pm. Parents (especially those in employment) may choose to pay fees in addition, so that their child can stay for longer than the 12.5 hours each week offered through government funding.

Children aged between four and five are often in the reception class of a primary school. Many of these children will have attained compulsory school age during this year (see introduction to chapter 3).

There are no legal requirements concerning the number of adults per child needed in a nursery class in a maintained school. However, existing guidelines recommend a minimum of two staff members for every 26 children in nursery classes of maintained schools or in nursery schools, and a minimum of two staff members for every 20 children where the teacher has other administrative duties to perform (e.g. where he/she is also the headteacher). In both cases, one member of staff should be a qualified teacher and the other a qualified nursery/childcare assistant. Similar guidance applies to private nursery schools.

For day nurseries and playgroups, the recommended staffing ratios are: one adult per four children in the two- to three-year-old age group and one adult per eight children in the three- to five-year-old age range.

2.3 Curriculum

Between September 2008 and September 2011, the Welsh Assembly Government is implementing a new statutory 'foundation phase', with a curriculum extending from the age of three to seven years (ISCED 0 and the first two years of ISCED 1, see below). The holistic development of children and their skills across the curriculum is central to the curriculum framework for this new phase. It aims to provide a more informal system of learning based on well-structured play, practical activity and investigation.

The curriculum for the foundation phase contains seven 'Areas of Learning' (AOLs). These are:

- Personal and social development and well-being
- Language, literacy and communication
- Mathematical development
- Bilingualism and multicultural understanding
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development.

In all pre-school settings which receive government funding, the headteacher and staff are free to decide on teaching methods and on teaching materials, which they purchase from their budget. Local authorities (LAs) may give advice about the organisation of teaching and the teaching programme, but have no powers to impose teaching methods.

2.4 Assessment

The 'foundation phase' for three- to seven-year-olds, which is being implemented by the Welsh Assembly Government between September 2008 and September 2011 (see 2.3 for further information), assesses children through a system of continuous assessment, based on observation. Foundation phase outcomes have been developed to support statutory assessment at the end of this phase. See 3.4 for further information.

2.5 Teachers

All **teachers** employed in maintained schools, including nursery schools must have qualified teacher status (QTS) in order to be authorised to teach. The Welsh Assembly Government stipulates the criteria which trainee teachers must meet in order to achieve QTS. Providers of initial teacher training (ITT) must also meet approved criteria to be able to offer programmes leading to QTS, although they are responsible for course planning, content and management. Most ITT providers are higher education institutions (HEIs).

Routes into teaching can be concurrent or consecutive. Trainee teachers choosing the concurrent route follow a three or four-year programme in which general education is combined with professional training, leading to a bachelor's degree with QTS. Intending teachers who wish to take the consecutive route must first take a bachelor's degree, which can be in any subject, and then apply to take a one-year programme of professional training, the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) with QTS. The bachelor's degree with QTS and the PGCE both combine academic study with periods of teaching practice in a school.

Participation in continuing professional development (CPD) is part of the contractual professional duties of a teacher. For further information about CPD, see section 3.6.

Qualified **nursery assistants** usually need to hold a relevant child care qualification such as: CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Child Care and Education; a BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development; or an NVQ Level 3 in Children's Care, Learning and Development (for general information on these qualifications see section 4.4).

In 2005 the Welsh Assembly Government charged the Care Council for Wales with taking forward the development of a Children and Young People Workforce Development Network for Wales. The Network's tasks were: to bring forward a children and young people workforce development strategy; to develop a common core of skills, knowledge and understanding for the Children's and Young People's workforce in Wales; and to develop a qualification framework for the workforce. The common core and the development strategy are currently subject to internal consultation.

3. PRIMARY EDUCATION

Education at ISCED 1 is known as primary education. It is defined in the Education Act 1996 as catering for pupils between the ages of five and 11 years. Education is compulsory from the age of five. Children reach compulsory school age on a prescribed day following their fifth birthday. The actual prescribed dates are set by the National Assembly for Wales and are normally: 31 August, 31 December and 31 March.

The Education Act 1996 also divided the period of compulsory education (ages five to 16) into four key stages. Primary education covers key stages 1 and 2; key stage 1 caters for pupils aged five to seven years and key stage 2 for those aged seven to 11 years. However, the introduction of the new 'foundation phase' for three- to seven-year-olds (see 2.3) will change the organisation of key stages at primary level. Once fully implemented in August 2011, the foundation phase will wholly replace key stage 1 and this will cover all of ISCED 0 and part of ISCED 1.

School organisation is determined locally, and although many primary schools are for pupils aged five to 11, in some areas, there are separate 'infant' schools for pupils in key stage 1 (aged five to seven), and 'junior' schools for pupils in key stage 2 (aged seven to 11).

The general aims of primary education are defined in terms of the curriculum. See 3.3 for further information.

Although education is compulsory from the age of five to 16, school is not. Under the Education Act 1996, the responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents. For children not educated at school, the most common alternative is education at home.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 defined a new legal framework for maintained primary and secondary schools, which divides them into community, voluntary and foundation schools. The majority of schools are community schools which are established and fully funded by local authorities (LAs). Foundation schools are also funded by LAs, but are owned by the school governing body or a charitable foundation. Voluntary schools were originally established by voluntary bodies, mainly churches, which retain some control over their management. They are now largely funded by LAs. All categories of maintained schools enjoy a high level of autonomy.

There are also independent schools, commonly known as private schools. Independent schools receive no public funding and are largely financed by fees paid by parents.

All maintained primary schools in Wales are mixed sex.

No charge may be made for education provided wholly or mainly within school hours (excluding midday breaks) for pupils in maintained primary schools. Education which takes place wholly or mainly outside school hours, which is part of the National Curriculum, must also be provided free of charge. In addition, charges may not be made for the cost of materials, books, instruments or any other equipment.

Primary schools may however, charge for activities that fall outside the above categories. They are required to have a policy setting out the cases in which they charge for activities. They may also ask parents for voluntary contributions towards any activity which takes place during school hours, school equipment and school funds generally.

All schools provide morning and afternoon sessions with a lunch break between them. Children whose parents receive certain social security benefits must be provided with free school meals. Supervised facilities for pupils to eat packed lunches brought from home must also be provided, as well as paid lunches where parents request them.

Local authorities (LAs) must also provide transport free of charge for primary school pupils who live two miles or further from the nearest suitable school.

3.1 Admission

Children must start primary school once they have reached compulsory school age, that is, at the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday. Many start earlier, at some point after their fourth birthday, depending on the policy of the local education authority and the school. The class for children aged four to five is known as the reception class (ISCED 0, see section 2). It forms part of the primary school in that, once admitted to the reception class, a child progresses through the school without any further admission procedures. This is not the case for children in the nursery class of a primary school, who are subject to separate admissions arrangements to enter the reception class.

Children must start primary school once they have reached compulsory school age, that is, at the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday. Some schools admit children once a year in September, while others prefer to phase the intake of new students, for example, by admitting a second intake in January and/or one after Easter. Where schools phase the admission of students, children's dates of birth normally determine whether they are admitted in September or later in the year. A very large number of schools admit children to the reception class (age four to five) before they reach compulsory school age. Policies on early admission vary between local authorities (LAs) and between individual schools.

Parents are able to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend. They also have a legal right of appeal if a place is not offered at the school of their choice.

A school's admissions policy is established by the relevant admissions authority, which is either the LA or the school governing body, depending on the legal category of school and the arrangements between the LA and the school. This policy must comply with the mandatory provisions of the Code of Practice on school admissions ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾.

The admissions policy must describe the application procedure and explain how places will be allocated if there are more applications than places at the school. Priority must be given to looked-after children (children in care). Priority may also be given to children who live closest to the school, or to children who already have brothers or sisters at the school.

Schools designated as having a religious character may give preference in their admissions arrangements to members of a particular faith or denomination, providing this does not conflict with other legal requirements.

3.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

Schools must be open for 190 days a year. Term and holiday dates are determined by the local authority (LA) or the school governing body, depending on the legal category of school.

The school year generally runs from early September to the latter part of July. It is divided into three terms with a long summer break of around six weeks in July and August, shorter breaks of around two weeks at Christmas and Easter, and one week in the middle of each term, known as the half-term holiday.

Schools normally operate five days a week (Monday to Friday). They are generally open between 9.00 a.m. and 3.30/4.00 p.m. with approximately one hour for lunch. A break of around 15 minutes may punctuate the morning and/or afternoon sessions. The organisation of time within the school day is determined by the school.

There are minimum weekly lesson times for children at primary level. These are 21 hours for pupils aged five to seven years and 23.5 hours for pupils aged eight to 11 years. Most schools provide more hours of lessons than the recommended minimum.

The Education Act 2002 enabled schools to directly provide a range of community services and activities often out of traditional school hours. Schools across Wales are now developing as 'community-focused schools', which offer a varied menu of activities, such as homework clubs; sport; citizenship activities; play schemes; outdoor education and activities; adult and family learning classes; and family support.

Most children at primary level are taught in mixed-ability classes with children of the same age, with one teacher in charge of the class. Many schools employ teaching assistants, who work alongside teachers in the classroom supporting pupils on an individual or group basis (see 3.6 for further information).

Some schools teach some subjects, eg maths, in groups organised on the basis of ability. Smaller or rural schools may have mixed-age classes.

All maintained primary schools are required to ensure that all five-, six- and seven-year-olds (in key stage 1) are taught in classes of not more than 30 pupils per single teacher.

3.3 Curriculum

The Qualifications, Curriculum and Learning Improvement Group within the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) is responsible for matters pertaining to the curriculum in Wales. See 1.2 for further information.

Under the Education Act 2002, the basic principle underlying school education is that it should provide a balanced and broadly based curriculum which is suitable to a child's age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs that he/she may have. The Act defines a balanced and broadly based curriculum as one which:

- Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society.
- Prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

A revised curriculum began to be introduced for three- to 19-year-olds in September 2008, with full implementation due in September 2011.

The revised arrangements include a new 'foundation phase' covering pre-primary education (ages three to five) and what is currently key stage 1 of primary education (ages five to seven). Once fully implemented in 2011, the foundation phase will wholly replace key stage 1. For further information about the foundation phase, see section 2.3.

Under the revised arrangements, the National Curriculum covers key stages 2, 3 and 4 (ages seven to 16). It includes programmes of study setting out the minimum statutory entitlement to knowledge, understanding and skills for each subject at each key stage. It is not intended to constitute the whole school curriculum – schools have considerable freedom to determine the character and distinctive nature of their curriculum.

Compulsory subjects at key stage 2 (ages seven to 11) include: English; Welsh (as a first language in Welsh-speaking schools or classes or as a second language in schools or classes which are not Welsh-speaking); mathematics; science; design and technology; information and communication

technology (ICT), history, geography, art and design, music, physical education (PE) and personal and social education (PSE).

Modern foreign languages are not compulsory at key stage 2, although there is a non-statutory framework offering guidance to schools on incorporating a modern foreign language into their curriculum.

The revised curriculum is intended to provide opportunities across the curriculum for learning and skills development in areas including bilingualism, Curriculum Cymreig (the Wales-specific aspects of the curriculum), equal opportunities, food and fitness, and sustainable development and global citizenship.

Religious education (RE) is also a statutory subject throughout compulsory education, although parents have the right to withdraw their children from this subject if they wish. All local authorities (LAs) are required to adopt a locally agreed syllabus for RE, which must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'. It is also a statutory requirement for all LAs to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), which advises the LA on matters concerning the teaching of RE and acts of collective worship.

Sex education is not compulsory during primary education. School governing bodies must decide whether and at what stage sex education should be introduced in the curriculum. They must keep an up-to-date written statement of the policy they choose to adopt. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from sex education lessons, if they wish.

A focus on skills development underpins the revised curriculum and, to reinforce this, a non-statutory framework, has been developed. The framework aims to provide guidance about continuity and progression in thinking, communication, information and communication technology (ICT), and number for learners aged three to 19 and beyond. These skills are considered essential to enable learners of any age to become successful, whether in school, the workplace, at home or elsewhere.

Under the Education Act 1996, the amount of time to be devoted to each curriculum subject cannot be prescribed. The allocation of time per subject is a matter for individual schools.

Teaching methods and learning materials are usually decided by the class teacher, in consultation with the headteacher and subject leaders (or subject coordinators), who are classroom teachers with additional responsibility for a particular subject area and who give help and guidance to their colleagues within the school. As schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils, there is a need for differentiated teaching methods and learning materials to cater for pupils' individual needs. Although particular teaching methods and learning materials are not prescribed, teacher guidance documents for the teaching of specific curriculum subjects are often provided by DCELLS.

Textbooks are produced by commercial publishers and do not require government approval. All schools have computers available for use by pupils.

3.4 Assessment, progression and certification

The Qualifications, Curriculum and Learning Improvement Group within the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) is responsible for matters pertaining to assessment in Wales. See 1.2 for further information.

Between September 2008 and September 2011, DCELLS is implementing a new 'foundation phase' covering pre-primary education (ages three to five) and Years 1 and 2 of primary education (ages five to seven). Children are to be assessed through a system of continuous assessment, based on

observation. Foundation phase outcomes have been developed to support statutory assessment at the end of the phase. Six outcomes have been developed for each Area of Learning. Outcomes 3, 4 and 5 relate to levels 1, 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum level descriptions (see below). At the end of the foundation phase, teachers are required to assess and report outcomes attained by each child through teacher assessment in the following Areas of Learning: personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity; language, literacy and communication skills in English or Welsh; and mathematical development.

For National Curriculum subjects at key stages 2 and 3 (pupils aged seven to 11 and 11 to 14 respectively), there are attainment targets, which set out the expected standards of student performance in terms of level descriptions or end of key stage descriptions. They provide the basis for judging students' attainment in particular aspects of a subject at the end of each key stage.

There are eight level descriptions per attainment target. Level descriptions indicate the types and range of performance that a student working at a particular level should characteristically demonstrate over a period of time. They have been designed so that a typical student will move up one level approximately every two years. By the end of key stage 2 (age 11), the performance of the great majority of pupils should be within the range of levels 2 – 5.

Until 2005, it was a statutory requirement for pupils to take National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of key stage 2. However, the tests became non-statutory from the 2004/05 school year and teacher assessment became the sole means of statutory assessment.

Schools must send parents at least one written report every school year. During the course of the year, parents must be sent a required minimum of information about:

- Their child's progress in all National Curriculum subjects studied.
- Progress in all other subjects and activities.
- General progress and an attendance record.
- For all children at the end of key stage 2 (age 11), teacher assessment results in English, Welsh (as either a first or second language), mathematics and science. Parents must also receive information on how these compare with results of students of the same age in the school, and also national comparative information about students of the same age.
- Arrangements to discuss the report with the school.

New skills-based assessments to support teacher assessment in Years 5 and 6 (children aged nine to 11, the final two years of primary school) were approved in March 2007. These will comprise:

- A range of skills-based assessments to support teacher assessment from Year 5 to Year 6, and transition to secondary school. The focus will be on skills relating to 'developing communication', 'developing number' and 'developing thinking'.
- A skills profile for all Year 5 pupils (ages nine to 10) from 2009/10.

It is intended that the new arrangements will be fully implemented by 2010.

Progression to the next year or key stage is automatic and does not depend on the results of assessment. There is an expectation that low attainment of individual pupils should be addressed through differentiated teaching and the provision of additional support, rather than by repetition of a year.

There is no certificate awarded at the end of primary education.

3.5 Guidance and counselling

There are no external services offering vocational guidance to pupils at primary level.

Learning about employment opportunities is part of the Personal and Social Education (PSE) Framework, which applies to pupils in key stage 2 (ages seven to 11) and also pupils in secondary education (ages 11 to 19). The Framework states that learners should develop ‘an understanding of the opportunities available in education, training and employment’ and also ‘the skills of self-analysis, identifying personal strengths and setting targets for improvement, recognising the importance of acquiring new skills needed for the world of work.’^(iv)

3.6 Teachers

All **teachers** must have qualified teacher status (QTS) in order to teach in a maintained primary or secondary school. The Welsh Assembly Government stipulates the criteria which trainee teachers must meet in order to achieve QTS. Providers of initial teacher training (ITT) must also meet approved criteria to be able to offer programmes leading to QTS, although they are responsible for course planning, content and management. Most ITT providers are higher education institutions (HEIs).

Routes into teaching for intending primary teachers can be concurrent or consecutive. Trainee teachers choosing the concurrent route follow a three or four-year programme in which general education is combined with professional training, leading to a bachelor's degree with QTS. Intending teachers who wish to take the consecutive route must first take a bachelor's degree, which can be in any subject, and then apply to take a one-year programme of professional training, the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) with QTS. The bachelor's degree with QTS and the PGCE both combine academic study with periods of teaching practice in a school.

Programmes for intending primary teachers train teachers to teach across the curriculum as a generalist teacher. However, there are options for studying the teaching of one or more curriculum subjects in greater depth, which would provide preparation for the role of subject leader/co-ordinator of these subjects.

Participation in continuing professional development (CPD) is part of the contractual professional duties of a teacher. There is no legal minimum requirement stated for the length of time to be spent on CPD. Participation depends on the professional needs of the teacher concerned and the availability of the resources in the school to meet them. The statutory conditions of service do, however, require teachers to be available for work under the direction of the head teacher for 195 days per year, of which only 190 are teaching days. The five days when school sessions are not required were introduced to support a number of non-teaching activities, including in-service training (INSET).

Responsibility and funding for CPD is devolved to schools. Each school determines its own CPD needs depending on the requirements of the school development plan.

Continuing professional development (CPD) covers a wide range of staff development activities both formal and informal designed to improve teachers' practice. These activities might include:

- within-school activities such as coaching, mentoring, support for individual members of staff arising from performance management interviews, team teaching, sharing good practice, lesson observation and feedback, and whole school development activities.
- school networks such as cross school or virtual networks, for example to share good practice.
- external activities such as training courses, postgraduate study, conferences, industrial placements or work shadowing, international study visits and exchanges and sabbaticals for certain experienced teachers.

In 2007, the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) began the Chartered Teacher Pilot Programme. It aims to offer quality assured, professional development to classroom teachers, middle leaders (for example, heads of year) or those who perform both roles and to allow the profession, and the wider community to recognise those teachers who are performing at high standards. Teachers must have a minimum of five years' teaching experience to be eligible. An underlying principle of the scheme is that 'Chartered Teacher' status has no connection to pay.

The degree to which school subjects are shared among teachers depends on several factors, including how far individual teachers have specialised. For example, although primary school teachers are trained to teach all subjects in the curriculum, the deployment of staff is a matter for the school. Many schools use their staff flexibly, providing for some exchange of staff between classes for particular activities, and/or employ specialists for some subjects, allowing the class teacher time for other tasks such as planning and preparation.

Following the *National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload* (') in 2003, which aimed to tackle teacher workload and enhance the role of support staff, the number of such staff working in schools has expanded significantly. For example, many schools employ **teaching assistants**, who work alongside teachers in the classroom, helping pupils with their learning on an individual or group basis. Some specialise in areas such as literacy, numeracy, special educational needs, music or English as an additional language. The workload agreement also created the new role of **higher level teaching assistant (HLTAs)**. HLTAs are experienced teaching assistants who plan and deliver learning activities under the direction of a teacher and assess, record and report on pupils' progress. They may also manage other classroom-based staff or may supervise a class in a teacher's absence.

4. SECONDARY EDUCATION

Overview

ISCED 2 covers lower secondary education at key stage 3 (ages 11 to 14, school years 7, 8 and 9), and ISCED 3 covers upper secondary education at key stage 4 (ages 14 to 16, school years 10 and 11). Compulsory education ends at age 16. ISCED 3 also covers post-compulsory advanced programmes, whether offered by secondary schools (many of which cater for students aged 16 to 19) or further education colleges (which cater for students aged 16 to 19 and for older learners). Advanced programmes at ISCED 3 typically last for 2 years when followed full-time by school leavers (age 16), but may be of varied duration when aimed at older learners.

Secondary education and further education are defined in the Education Act 1996. Secondary education is defined as covering education designed for young people from age 11 to 19 at school. Further education is defined as covering the education of people over compulsory school age (16) other than at school. It specifically excludes higher education programmes (ISCED 5 and 6) but includes access programmes, as described in section 5, and the continuing education of adults, as described in section 7.

Secondary education in schools

Some secondary schools only cater for pupils in compulsory secondary education (aged 11 to 16). However, many secondary schools also have a sixth-form providing full-time post-compulsory education (students aged 16 to 19). Full-time post-compulsory programmes are typically two years in duration, but some students complete in three years.

The Education Act 1996 divided the period of compulsory education (ages five to 16) into four key stages. Compulsory secondary education covers key stages 3 and 4; key stage 3 caters for pupils aged 11 to 14 and key stage 4 for those aged 14 to 16. The Education Act 2002 created a legislative distinction between key stages 1 to 3 and key stage 4. This allows for increased flexibility in education for pupils in key stage 4 and provides more opportunities to tailor education to their individual needs.

At key stages 3 and 4, secondary schools offer general/academic education as set out in the National Curriculum (see 4.3); and at key stage 4 and post-16, they provide external qualifications in general subjects along with some courses in vocational/applied subjects (see 4.4).

The general aims of both primary and secondary education are defined in terms of the curriculum. See 3.3 for further information.

Although education is compulsory from the age of five to 16, school is not. Under the Education Act 1996, the responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents. For children not educated at school, the most common alternative is education at home.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 defined a new legal framework for maintained primary and secondary schools, which divides them into community, voluntary and foundation schools. The majority of schools are community schools which are established and fully funded by local authorities (LAs). Foundation schools are also funded by LAs, but are owned by the school governing body or a charitable foundation. Voluntary schools were originally established by voluntary bodies, mainly churches, which retain some control over their management. They are now largely funded by LAs. All categories of maintained schools enjoy a high level of autonomy.

All maintained secondary schools in Wales are non-selective, i.e. they do not select pupils on the basis of ability.

The vast majority of maintained secondary schools are mixed sex.

No charge may be made for education provided wholly or mainly within school hours (excluding midday breaks) for pupils in maintained secondary schools. Education which takes place wholly or mainly outside school hours, which is part of the National Curriculum, must also be provided free of charge. In addition, charges may not be made for the cost of materials, books, instruments or any other equipment.

Secondary schools may however, charge for activities that fall outside the above categories. They are required to have a policy setting out the cases in which they charge for activities. They may also ask parents for voluntary contributions towards any activity which takes place during school hours, school equipment and school funds generally.

Sixth-form students can apply for Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs). These grants are intended to encourage 16- to 19-year-olds to remain in full-time education after the end of compulsory education (age 16). They are means-tested, providing eligible students with a weekly payment of up to £30.

All schools provide morning and afternoon sessions with a lunch break between them. Pupils whose parents receive certain social security benefits must be provided with free school meals. Supervised facilities for pupils to eat packed lunches brought from home must also be provided, as well as paid lunches where parents request them.

Local authorities (LAs) must also provide transport free of charge for pupils in compulsory secondary education (ages 11 to 16) who live three miles or further from the nearest suitable school.

Post-compulsory education in further education colleges

Full- and part-time post-compulsory education (students aged 16 to 19) may also be provided in further education (FE) colleges. FE colleges vary in their size, mission, subject mix and history. They include both general FE colleges, which place a greater emphasis on vocational courses, but also offer general courses; and specialist colleges, which provide courses in a specific area of the curriculum such as art, or in a vocational area such as agriculture.

The purpose of the statutory system of public education, including further education, as originally laid down in the Education Act 1944, now superseded by later legislation, is to contribute to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community. However, the emphasis is also now firmly placed on preparing students for adult and working life and on providing a skilled workforce which meets the needs of the economy.

Further education colleges are autonomous institutions and have a legal status similar to that of public companies. The institution's corporation (usually called the governing body) is responsible, for all decisions affecting the institution.

Education is provided free of charge for students up to the age of 19.

16- to 19-year-olds attending full-time post-compulsory education in further education colleges or schools can apply for Education Maintenance Allowances. See above section on 'Secondary education in schools' for further information.

4.1 Admission

Compulsory education

The majority of pupils transfer from primary to secondary education at the age of 11.

Maintained secondary schools must comply with the Code of Practice on school admissions. Admissions arrangements are largely the same as for primary schools, see section 3.1.

All maintained secondary schools are non-selective (that is, they do not admit pupils on the basis of ability) and are commonly known as comprehensive schools.

Post-compulsory education

Entry requirements to post-compulsory education and training programmes are set by the individual school, college or employer.

All secondary schools must comply with the Code of Practice for all student admissions, including admissions to school sixth forms. For further information, see section 3.1.

Students must apply for admission to specific programmes even if they wish to continue in the sixth form of their secondary school. Schools set their own admissions criteria, but commonly ask for a minimum of five GCSE passes at grades A* – C for admission to A-level courses (see section 4.4). Criteria for admission to A-level courses also often include the achievement of GCSE passes at specified grades in the subjects to be studied at A-level.

Students are free to apply for admission to any further education college. As is the case with schools, FE colleges set the admissions requirements on a programme by programme basis.

4.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

Compulsory education

The organisation of the school year, week and day in maintained secondary schools is largely the same as in primary schools (see section 3.2 for further information). However, the recommended minimum weekly lesson times are higher than for children at primary level. These are 25 hours for pupils at both key stages 3 and 4 (pupils aged 11 to 14 and 14 to 16 respectively). Many schools provide more hours than the minimum.

Pupils are generally taught in classes with pupils of the same age. The organisation of teaching groups is determined by the school.

Pupils may be grouped by general ability (a practice known as 'streaming'), taught in mixed-ability groups or, more commonly, grouped according to ability in a particular subject (a practice known as 'setting'). Most schools use setting for some subjects only, such as mathematics and languages, and teach other subjects in mixed-ability groups. There tends to be more use of setting for pupils in older age groups.

There are no regulations regarding the maximum number of pupils in a class.

Post-compulsory education

Sixth-forms (students aged 16 to 18+) follow the same school calendar as the secondary schools which they are part of. For further information, see section 3.2.

Sixth-form students are taught by specialist subject teachers, usually in smaller groups than younger students. There are no recommended minimum weekly lesson times, nor any regulations covering class sizes.

The full academic year in further education colleges runs from 1 September to 31 August, although the teaching year is generally shorter. Full-time students usually attend for three terms per year, with holidays at Christmas, Easter and in the summer. However, there is considerable variation in the way

in which courses are organised. Colleges increasingly offer courses throughout the year, including during the traditional holiday periods.

Unlike schools, institutions of further education operate three sessions per day: morning, afternoon and evening. They are generally open from around 9.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. The duration of courses varies, as does the mode of study which may be full-time, part-time, day-release or block-release.

4.3 Curriculum

The education of 14- to 19-year-olds is currently an area of reform in Wales. The Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure, passed in March 2009, will create a right for 14- to 19-year olds to follow a course of study from a local area curriculum or 'Options Menu', which will contain a wide range of academic and vocational study options. The Measure will also create a statutory framework for learning pathways for 14- to 19-year-olds consisting of six key elements:

- individual Learning Pathways to meet the needs of each learner;
- wider choice and flexibility of programmes and ways of learning;
- a learning core which runs from age 14 through to 19 wherever young people are learning;
- study support provided by learning coaches;
- access to personal support; and
- impartial careers advice and guidance.

Compulsory secondary education

The national bodies responsible for the secondary curriculum; the curriculum framework; the requirement for schools to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and the situation regarding allocation of time per subject are the same as at primary level. For further information, see section 3.3.

In September 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government began to implement a revised curriculum for three- to 19-year-olds. It will be fully implemented by September 2011.

Under the revised arrangements, the compulsory National Curriculum subjects at key stage 3 (ages 11 to 14) include: English; Welsh; mathematics; science; design and technology; information and communication technology (ICT); history; geography, a modern foreign language; art and design; music and physical education (PE).

There are a smaller number of compulsory National Curriculum subjects at key stage 4 (ages 14 to 16): English, Welsh, mathematics, science and physical education. Other subjects studied depend on the qualifications for which pupils are studying – by far the most common during key stage 4 is the GCSE (see 4.4).

The revised curriculum is intended to provide opportunities across the curriculum for learning and skills development in areas including bilingualism, Wales, Europe and the World, equal opportunities, food and fitness, sustainable development and global citizenship, and the world of work and entrepreneurship.

There are a number of compulsory subjects outside the National Curriculum framework. As at primary level, religious education (RE) is compulsory at key stages 3 and 4, although parents have the right to withdraw their children from RE lessons if they wish. For further information regarding RE, see section 3.3.

Sex and relationship education (SRE) is also compulsory at key stages 3 and 4. It is mainly delivered through personal and social education (PSE). Parents have the right to withdraw their children from SRE, although they do not have the right to withdraw their children from the National Curriculum science programme of study dealing with aspects of human biology and reproduction.

Careers and the world of work is also compulsory at key stages 3 and 4. See 4.5 for further information.

A focus on skills development underpins the revised curriculum and, to reinforce this, a non-statutory framework, has been developed. The framework aims to provide guidance about continuity and progression in thinking, communication, information and communication technology (ICT), and number for learners aged three to 19 and beyond. These skills are considered essential to enable learners of any age to become successful, whether in school, the workplace, at home or elsewhere.

As at primary level, teaching methods and learning materials are usually decided by the class teacher, in consultation with the headteacher and subject leader (or subject coordinators), who are classroom teachers with additional responsibility for a particular subject area and who give help and guidance to their colleagues within the school.

Post-compulsory education

The National Curriculum does not apply to students in post-compulsory education. There are no compulsory subjects at this level. Students choose courses of study from the range offered by the school or further education institution depending on the qualifications they seek. An increasingly wide range of academic and vocational qualifications is available in schools and further education colleges. See section 4.4 for more detailed information.

4.4 Assessment, progression and certification

Compulsory education

Ongoing formative assessment is practised by all teachers throughout compulsory secondary education. There are also some specific assessment requirements which are set out below.

At **key stage 3**, pupils are assessed against the attainment targets, which set out the expected standards of student performance in each National Curriculum subject in terms of level descriptions. They provide the basis for judging students' attainment in particular aspects of a subject. There are eight level descriptions per attainment target. Level descriptions indicate the types and range of performance that a student working at a particular level should characteristically demonstrate over a period of time. They have been designed so that a typical student will move up one level approximately every two years. By the end of key stage 3, the performance of the great majority of students should be in the range 3 to 7. Level 8 is available for very able students and, to help teachers differentiate exceptional performance at key stage 3, a description above level 8 is provided.

Until the 2005/06 school year, statutory assessment at the end of key stage 3 comprised externally set and marked tests in mathematics, science, Welsh and English and teacher assessment in all National Curriculum subjects. However, the external tests have now been abolished and teacher assessment in all National Curriculum remains the sole means of statutory assessment at the end of the key stage. The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) is currently implementing new arrangements to strengthen statutory teacher assessment, which should be fully in place by 2010. The new arrangements include external moderation of sample evidence of teachers' use of the National Curriculum level descriptions (see above) and verification of school-based systems and procedures for teacher assessment.

At the end of compulsory education (age 16), after two years of study in **key stage 4**, the majority of pupils are assessed by means of external qualifications. These qualifications are developed by independent organisations, known as awarding bodies or awarding organisations, which are regulated by DCELLS.

For learners under 19, only courses leading to qualifications that have been approved by the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 are eligible for public funding. A wide range of qualifications is approved. Qualifications are designed for specific groups of learners, allowing schools to tailor their curriculum offer to the needs of their students. Qualifications approved for learners of compulsory school age are not restricted to this age group but can be taken by learners of any age.

For learners at the end of compulsory education (age 16), by far the most common qualification taken is the **GCSE**, a single subject qualification available in more than 40 academic subject areas. The results are reported on an eight-point scale ranging from A* (highest) to G (lowest). Candidates who fail to reach the minimum standard for grade G are recorded as 'U' for 'unclassified' and do not receive a certificate. GCSEs at grades A* to C are considered 'good GCSEs'. Achieving five good GCSEs, which include English and maths is a key Government benchmark for performance at secondary level. Achieving good GCSEs in English and maths is also usually a basic requirement for progression to further study or training and for many jobs.

GCSEs in applied subjects are also available in nine work-related subject areas, for example, engineering or tourism. Results are reported on the same scale as other GCSEs (from A* to G), but with two grades (e.g. 'BB' or 'DD') to reflect the fact that they are equivalent to two standard GCSE qualifications.

Entry level qualifications are aimed at pupils who are not ready for GCSEs at the end of key stage 4. They are available in a range of general/academic subjects, such as art and design and mathematics, as well as in vocational areas such as retail and leisure and tourism. They are pitched at levels 1 to 3 of the National Curriculum eight-level scale (see above) and are intended to offer progression to higher awards.

In compulsory secondary education, pupils progress to the next class at the end of each school year. There are no legal requirements stipulating this; it generally happens by custom and practice. There is an expectation that low attainment of individual pupils should be addressed through differentiated teaching and the provision of additional support, rather than by repetition of a year.

Schools must send parents at least one written report every school year. During the course of the year, parents must be sent a required minimum of information about:

- Their child's progress in all National Curriculum subjects studied.
- Progress in all other subjects and activities.
- General progress and an attendance record.
- For all children assessed under statutory arrangements at the end of key stage 3 (age 14, see above) teacher assessment levels in all National Curriculum subjects and details of how these compare with results of students of the same age in the school, and also national comparative information about students of the same age.
- Public examination results, including any vocational qualifications and/or credits towards these.
- Arrangements to discuss the report with the school.

National Curriculum assessment and public examination results are published online, by local authority, and for the whole of Wales.

Post-compulsory education

Post-compulsory upper secondary education typically lasts for two years, from age 16 to 18. Ongoing formative assessment is practised by all teachers throughout this phase. Students are also assessed by means of external qualifications.

For learners under 19, only courses leading to qualifications that have been approved by the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 are eligible for public funding. A wide range of qualifications is approved. Qualifications are designed for specific groups of learners, allowing schools and FE colleges to tailor their curriculum offer to the needs of their students. Qualifications approved for learners of compulsory school age (see above) are not restricted to this age group but can be taken by learners of any age, including post-compulsory students.

The most common qualifications taken at the end of post-compulsory education (around age 18) are **A-levels**. These are single subject examinations which may be studied in any combination, within the limit of the school's or further education institution's timetable and the range of subjects it offers. Courses usually last two years. A levels are structured as follows:

- **AS** – During the first year of post-compulsory education, students typically take four or five subjects leading to AS-level qualifications. These are standalone qualifications and typically consist of three units.
- **A2** – Taken in the second year of post-compulsory education, this is the second half of the full A-level qualification, consisting of a further three units. The A2 covers more demanding material than at AS level. Students typically pursue three of their four or five AS qualification subjects to A2.

GCEs or A-levels in applied subjects are also available to students in post-compulsory education. These qualifications emphasise knowledge, skills and understanding in broad vocational areas and are intended to offer a comprehensive preparation for employment, as well as a route to higher-level qualifications. Like A-levels, they follow the AS/A2 structure. Double awards are also available.

Passes in both A-levels and A-levels in applied subjects are graded on a scale ranging from A (highest) to E (lowest), with U (unclassified) denoting a fail. Students typically require two or three A-levels for entrance to higher education (HE). Many courses require some or all of the qualifications for entry to be in specific subjects and at specific grades. A-levels in applied subjects are also becoming increasingly acceptable for HE entrance.

DCELLS is currently introducing the **Welsh Baccalaureate** qualification at national level. It is being introduced gradually across Wales at three different levels – at Intermediate and Advanced level for students in post-16 education and at Foundation level for 14- to 19-year-olds. All Welsh Baccalaureate qualifications include a common core comprising key skills; Wales, Europe and the world; work-related education and personal and social education. In addition to the common core, students also choose options which vary according to which level Baccalaureate qualification they are taking. For example, the Advanced level qualification includes options of a minimum of two A-levels or equivalent, whereas the Intermediate level qualification includes options of four GCSEs (grades A* to C) or equivalent.

Key skills qualifications are available in the individual key skills of communication, application of number, and information technology. The qualifications are intended to be taken in tandem with other courses, such as GCSEs, A-levels, the Welsh Baccalaureate or work-based training programmes.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) enable students as well as employees who have left full-time education to gain recognised qualifications for specific occupations. They recognise work-based competences, as well as study with an education or training provider. They are available in 11 occupational areas at five levels, from foundation skills to chartered and professional. They are assessed on practical assignments and a portfolio of evidence and they offer progression routes to further education and training or employment.

The main Government-funded training scheme for young people is the **Apprenticeship** programme. It is available at the following levels:

- **Foundation Modern Apprenticeships** are a work-based training option for young people and employers, and are based on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs, see above). Training frameworks have been developed in over 80 sectors of employment.
- **Modern Apprenticeships** are a partnership initiative between government and industry to provide a high-quality, work-based route to NVQ level 3. They also aim to provide the broader skills and qualifications needed by industry and employers. Modern Apprenticeships are intended largely for school leavers aged 16+, but are also open to more mature trainees. Most modern apprentices have employed status and are paid a salary by their employer.

Introductory certificates and diplomas are vocational qualifications, available alongside GCSEs in applied subjects. They are designed to enable young people and adults to take part in full- or part-time programmes of study, which will enable them to enter employment or further/higher education. They aim to develop the learner's knowledge, skills and understanding in a specialist vocational sector and to encourage learners to develop key skills, personal skills, literacy and numeracy.

BTECs (Business and Technical Education Council) and **OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts) Nationals** are also designed for study in occupational areas, for example, horticulture. They involve a mixture of theoretical and practical work and are available at 3 levels (BTEC Firsts are available for students aged 14 to 16 in compulsory education). They are assessed, either by teachers or an external examiner, through a range of assignments, case studies, a portfolio of evidence and practical activities. They enable progression to employment or higher level vocational courses.

There are a number of qualifications frameworks which incorporate Welsh qualifications. The **National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** is a three-country regulated framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It includes both general academic and vocational qualifications at nine levels as follows:

- Level 8 – e.g. specialist awards
- Level 7 – e.g. BTEC advanced professional diplomas, certificates and awards.
- Level 6 – e.g. BTEC professional diplomas, certificates and awards.
- Level 5 – e.g. NVQ level 5.
- Level 4 – e.g. NVQ level 4.
- Level 3 – e.g. GCE A-levels, A-levels in applied subjects and NVQ level 3.
- Level 2 – e.g. GCSE grades A*–C and NVQ level 2.
- Level 1 – e.g. GCSE grades D–G and NVQ level 1.
- Entry level – e.g. entry level qualifications.

The **Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)** applies solely to Wales. It began to be introduced in 2003 and is gradually bringing all qualifications within a single unifying structure. The CQFW utilises three common principles: expression of achievement as learning outcomes; the demands made by that learning on the learner (level) and the volume of learning achievements (credit). It also includes nine levels indicating the degree of difficulty. They range from 'Entry' (entry level qualifications) to level 8 (doctoral qualifications).

The **QCF** is a new framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland which aims to enable learners to gain qualifications at their own pace along flexible routes by awarding credit for qualifications and units. All vocational qualifications will be placed on the QCF by the end of 2010 and it is expected that academic qualifications will also in the future be placed on the QCF; until that time, the NQF remains the framework for all academic qualifications. The QCF will therefore provide the organising structure for all qualifications available in schools, including general qualifications, but to date the focus has been on vocational qualifications. It is intended that in Wales, the QCF will form part of the existing CQFW (see above).

The aims of the QCF are to simplify the current complicated system by presenting qualifications in a way which is easier to understand, to recognise more learning through the award of qualifications and to instil more flexibility into the system through the use of units (components of qualifications) and credit awarded for achieving those units. Like the NQF, every unit and qualification in the 9-level QCF has a level between Entry level and level 8 which indicates the degree of difficulty. Level 2 is equivalent to GCSEs (grades A* to C), level 3 is equivalent to A levels, and level 8 is equivalent to a doctorate. Every unit and qualification also has a credit value (with one credit representing 10 hours of study). There are three sizes of qualifications in the QCF: Awards (1 to 12 credits); Certificates (13 to 36 credits); Diplomas (37 credits or more). In the framework, it is possible to have an award at level 1 or an award at level 8, because the qualification type ('award, certificate, diploma') represents the size of a qualification, not how difficult it is. It is also of note that the framework allows for the possibility for all units within all qualifications in the QCF to be achieved through recognition of prior learning (see 7.1).

Schools must send parents at least one written report every school year. During the course of the year, parents must be sent a required minimum of information concerning:

- The student's progress in all subjects and activities.
- General progress and an attendance record.
- Public examination results, including any vocational qualifications and/or credits towards these.
- Arrangements to discuss the report with the school.

Public examination results are published online, by local authority, and for the whole of Wales.

4.5 Guidance and counselling

Careers and the world of work (CWW) forms part of the basic curriculum for all registered pupils aged 11 to 16 in maintained schools. It is also part of the requirements of the learning core, one of the key elements of the learning pathways for 14- to 19-year-olds (see above).

The revised curriculum includes a framework setting out the Government's requirements for CWW for 11- to 19-year-olds. It states that CWW should help learners to: 'explore the attitudes and values required for employability and lifelong learning; plan and manage their pathway through the range of opportunities in learning and work; make effective career choices; become entrepreneurial; flourish in

a variety of work settings; become motivated, set long term goals and overcome barriers; see the relevance of their studies to their life and work; develop key skills (see 4.4) and other skills required by employers; and prepare for the challenges, choices and responsibilities of work and adult life.' The framework should be used by schools, further education colleges and other providers to review and develop CWW provision. ^(vi)

Careers Wales was set up in April 2001. Working in partnership with a range of organisations including the Welsh Assembly Government, educational establishments, employers, training providers and youth services, it provides help and support for individuals of all ages, employers and schools and colleges. Its careers advisers work in all secondary schools and further education colleges in Wales, and it provides training and support on careers education and work-related education to staff in schools and colleges across Wales.

4.6 Teachers and trainers

Compulsory education

All teachers must have qualified teacher status (QTS) in order to teach in a maintained primary or secondary school. The Welsh Assembly Government stipulates the criteria which trainee teachers must meet in order to achieve QTS. Providers of initial teacher training (ITT) must also meet approved criteria to be able to offer programmes leading to QTS, although they are responsible for course planning, content and management. Most ITT providers are higher education institutions (HEIs).

Secondary teachers are generally trained as subject specialists for both ISCED 2 and ISCED 3 levels, to work with pupils aged 11 to 16 or 11 to 18. Although there are some concurrent programmes available, most intending secondary teachers follow the consecutive route, in which a bachelor's degree is followed by a one-year programme of professional training, the PGCE with QTS or eligibility to teach. PGCE programmes for secondary teachers are subject-specific. They focus mainly on developing teaching skills in that particular subject, rather than on knowledge of the subject itself, which will have been acquired during the preceding bachelor's degree.

Participation in continuing professional development (CPD) is part of the contractual professional duties of a teacher. For further information about CPD, see section 3.6.

Post-compulsory education

Teachers in the sixth form of secondary schools

There are no initial teacher training (ITT) programmes specifically for those wishing to teach in the sixth form of secondary schools. Secondary school teachers who teach sixth form classes have normally been trained to teach students across the entire secondary age range (age 11 to 18).

Continuing professional development (CPD) requirements for teachers in sixth forms are the same as those for all secondary school teachers.

For further information on ITT and CPD requirements, see section on compulsory education.

Teachers and trainers in further education colleges

The most common qualifications for teachers in the further education (FE) sector are the Professional Graduate/Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and the Certificate in Education (Cert. Ed) for further education/post-compulsory education. In June 2008, new professional standards developed by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the Sector Skills Council responsible for workforce development in FE, were approved as the specified standards for FE teaching qualifications gained for courses commencing from 1 September 2008. The standards describe consistent performance for all teachers,

in terms of knowledge, understanding and professional practice. They have been designed to meet the needs of Wales and allow articulation with the professional standards for FE teachers in England. Standards Verification UK, part of LLUK endorses qualifications against the standards.

The Learning Improvement and Professional Development Division within the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) focuses on promoting and supporting high professional standards and effective teaching and learning for practitioners such as teachers, tutors and other staff working in the schools or FE sector. Its responsibilities include supporting teachers to improve their practice through professional development opportunities.

Most institutions offer courses and programmes to develop the professional skills of staff. The timing, duration and content of such courses and conferences varies. Members of staff are also normally encouraged to attend meetings and other activities to help them fulfil the requirements of their job including, for example, team meetings and course development activities.

Continuing professional development courses may be provided within an FE college, at a higher education institution (HEI) or at an independent training or conference centre in Wales, other parts of the UK or overseas. Senior staff in further education colleges may also provide induction and ongoing professional guidance and development for less experienced colleagues.

5. POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION

ISCED 4 applies to one very specific programme – the access course. Access courses are provided by further education colleges and are aimed at mature students wishing to gain entry to higher education. They are designed and taught to meet the needs of adult learners.

As access courses are part of the government's strategy to widen participation in higher education (HE), they are targeted at under-represented groups such as the unemployed; minority ethnic groups; women returning to education; disabled learners; and those from socio-economic backgrounds which do not commonly participate in higher education

5.1 Admission

Access courses have no formal entry requirements and are aimed at adults aged 19+ who have few, if any, formal qualifications.

5.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

Access courses typically last for one year full-time or between one and two years part-time. One year courses involve up to 16 hours of study per week in college, in addition to private study outside classes.

5.3 Curriculum

There are many different access courses available and they are designed and developed with the support of higher education institutions. Some programmes may be general, but most are discipline-related and cover a range of academic and vocational subjects. Access courses usually include the following elements: subject modules or units; key skills in information technology, numeracy and communication; study skills; and tutorial support.

5.4 Assessment, progression and certification

Assessment is usually by a combination of coursework and examination, and most courses allow students to accumulate credit towards the Access to Higher Education certificate as they progress through the course.

5.5 Guidance and counselling

See section 4.5.

5.6 Teachers and trainers

See section 4.6.

6. TERTIARY EDUCATION

The description of the structure and organisation of higher education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is in section 6 of the national description for England.

7. CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

7.1 Policy and legislative framework

Provision for adults returning to learning forms part of the further education sector, which also includes provision for young people aged 16 to 19, who are not studying in school sixth-forms. Chapters 1 and 4 therefore provide much relevant information.

Further education encompasses learning at different ISCED levels: ISCED 1 for basic skills courses; ISCED 3 for the full range of external qualifications and ISCED 4 for access courses. It specifically excludes learning at ISCED 5 and 6 (even when this is provided by a further education institution).

Facilities for those aged over 19 includes provision for what is now widely referred to as adult and community learning (ACL). This is an umbrella term for the wide range of learning made accessible to adults including language, basic skills, ICT and leisure courses, most of which take place outside the 'formal' further education sector.

Following the UK-wide Leitch Review of Skills which was completed in 2006, there has been an increased emphasis on providing a skilled workforce which meets the needs of the economy. The Review's final report^(vii) stated that the UK must urgently raise its skills levels and recommended increasing adult skills at all levels, and strengthening employers' engagement and investment in skills.

In response to the Leitch Review and a review of further education completed in 2007, the Welsh Assembly Government published a new skills and employment strategy in July 2008^(viii). It outlines a range of priorities including improving the levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills in the workforce; ensuring everyone has the essential skills to take up employment and maintain their employability within the labour market; and addressing skills gaps and shortages in priority sectors and supporting economic development through investment in post-19 skills.

Under the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998, employees aged 16 or 17 may take paid time off during normal working hours, to study or train for a relevant qualification. This applies to those not in full-time secondary or further education and who have not yet achieved a qualification at level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework (which is being replaced by the Qualifications and Credit Framework – see 4.4).

Informal and non-formal learning is acknowledged by NVQs (see also 4.4), formal vocational qualifications which take account of prior experience and learning in their assessment arrangements in a process called recognition of prior learning (RPL). Typically, this is through a portfolio of evidence of prior learning, indicating the level and areas of expertise. Informal and non-formal learning is also acknowledged (but not actually certified) in the selection process for further and higher education, or in order to help unemployed adults back in to work by identifying skills obtained through previous employment.

The possibility of recognising prior learning is also being incorporated into the national qualifications frameworks. As part of the implementation of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), the Welsh Assembly Government is planning to explore a policy and funding model for RPL by 2012.

In addition, the QCF, which applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland intends to allow for wider recognition of learners' achievements. Within the Framework, RPL relates primarily to 'previously uncertificated' learning. All units in the QCF are based on a set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that clearly show to learners the assessment standard required for successful completion of the unit. All units in the QCF exclude any explicit reference to the method of assessment required to achieve credit through a unit. This means that, in principle, all units within all qualifications in the QCF

can be achieved through RPL. The regulatory arrangements for the QCF place obligations on awarding organisations and providers to offer RPL to learners, where appropriate.

See 4.4 for further information about the CQFW and the QCF.

7.2 Distribution of responsibilities

Provision for adults returning to learning forms part of the further education sector, which also includes provision for young people aged 16 to 19, who are not studying in school sixth-forms. Chapters 1 and 4 therefore provide much relevant information.

There are also a number of bodies with specific roles and responsibilities for adult education. See below for further information.

The **Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB)** has been established to drive forward the implementation of the Welsh Assembly Government's skills and employment strategy, published in July 2008 (see 7.1). It aims to strengthen the employer voice on skills in Wales; provide advice to Welsh Ministers; and help Wales to develop a high-skills economy.

The **UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)** was established in April 2008 following the recommendations of the Leitch Review of Skills (see 7.1). Working across the four parts of the UK, the Commission is primarily an advisory body, but has some specific responsibilities which include funding and managing the performance of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs – see below) and assessing progress towards skills targets. An employer-led organisation, UKCES aims to provide advice on the strategies and policies needed to increase employment, skills and productivity.

SSCs are state-sponsored employer-led organisations that cover specific economic sectors across the UK. There are currently twenty five of them and they have four main objectives: to reduce skills gaps and shortages; to improve productivity; to boost the skills of their sector workforces; and to improve learning supply. They do this by contributing to the development of National Occupational Standards, being involved in the design and approval of Apprenticeship Frameworks (see section 4.4) and brokering Sector Skills Agreements (strategic action plans detailing the skills shortages and gaps in each industry, and providing direction on how they can be addressed). They are also playing an increasingly important role in the definition and quality assurance of qualifications. The umbrella organisation, the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, supports the work of the SSCs and builds their performance capacity and profile.

The **National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)** is a non-governmental organisation operating in England and Wales as an advisory body and centre for information, cooperation and consultation in the field of adult continuing education. **NIACE Dysgu Cymru** manages NIACE's operations in Wales. Part funded by the National Assembly for Wales, NIACE Dysgu Cymru generates income through research and development projects and the subscription fees of its members. It promotes adult learning through campaigns, conferences and events and engages in activities to influence policy.

7.3 Financing

Information on the funding of the further education sector is provided in section 1.3.

7.4 Programmes and providers

A very wide range of programmes is available to adults within the further education sector. Providers may offer general, vocational or recreational programmes or a combination of these. See below for further information.

Qualifications designed for young people at school and recent school-leavers are generally approved as suitable for learners of any age. These qualifications are offered to adult learners by **further education colleges** (see section 4.4). For example, they typically offer a range of A levels (single subject qualifications designed for 16- to 18-year-olds studying full-time), to adults who may wish to take just one or two subjects on a part-time basis. Colleges also offer qualifications designed specifically for older learners, such as access courses (see section 5) and qualifications in basic literacy and numeracy.

Further education colleges also offer adults a vast range of **recreational courses**, which do not always lead to a qualification. These may include arts subjects (e.g. painting and photography); crafts (e.g. pottery and jewellery design); health and well-being courses (e.g. physical exercise and stress management); humanities and foreign languages courses; personal development; and ICT.

Adult education centres offer part-time education and training, as well as leisure, recreation or 'for fun' courses, to learners over compulsory school age (16 years). Courses vary in length from those lasting a full academic year to short courses, providing a 'taster'.

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is a voluntary body which aims to encourage adults to undertake continuing education. It has local and regional centres throughout the UK and provides courses for adults in a wide range of subjects, such as art, history, computing, literacy and numeracy. Courses are mainly part-time and of varying lengths, from weekend seminars to three-year courses.

'Learndirect' is an e-teaching organisation, which aims to provide high quality post-16 learning for those with few skills and qualifications who are unlikely to participate in traditional forms of learning and to develop the skills they need for employability. Learndirect is delivered through a network of more than 750 online learning centres in England and Wales. Learndirect access points have been set up in a diverse range of settings such as libraries, sports clubs, shopping centres, churches and railway stations. Particular emphasis is placed on using the Internet for flexible online learning. Several hundred online courses are available in information technology, basic skills, general business skills and management skills, and in some more specialist business areas.

Apprenticeships for adults are available for those over the age of 25. Learning takes place both in the workplace and with a local learning provider.

The **Flexible New Deal** programme, which aims to help those who have been unemployed for 12 months or more to find a job was introduced in October 2009. The programme is delivered for Jobcentre Plus, the government agency responsible for assisting people of working age to find work by professional organisations, which provide individuals with advice and support for finding work. The programme also involves four weeks of work experience.

Another example is **Work-based Learning for Adults**, which provides programmes of work-based training, tailored to meet local needs within a framework set by central government. The aim of Work-based Learning for Adults is to help adults over the age of 25, who have been unemployed for six months or longer, to secure and sustain employment or self-employment through an individually tailored combination of guidance, structured work experience, training and approved qualifications. Several different models of training are offered within the programme, which also offers transitional support to participants immediately following their entry into employment and encourages the use of lifelong learning.

The **Modern Skills Diploma (MSD) for Adults** is a Welsh employment-based programme for adults over the age of 25 who are in employment. It provides opportunities for learners to improve their skills and knowledge at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (see 4.4). Entrants to the programme would normally be expected to already hold technician and/or people management positions.

The **Welsh Workforce Development Programme** provides a service to match employers' needs and training opportunities. It offers opportunities for businesses to access programmes, such as apprenticeships, and potential discretionary funding. A network of advisers work closely with businesses to ascertain their skills needs, source appropriate learning, and secure Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) funding, if available. The WAG intends to expand the scheme between 2009 and 2011 to allow more businesses, particularly those in priority sectors, to benefit.

7.5 Quality assurance

Estyn, the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales is responsible for the inspection and regulation of further education and employment-based training. See section 1.4 for further details.

7.6 Guidance and counselling

Careers Wales offers a free, all-age, integrated advice, information and guidance service, working in partnership with a range of organisations including the Welsh Assembly Government, educational establishments, employers and training providers. Its careers advisers provide information and advice on searching and applying for jobs, finding funding to support any learning, improving interview and presentation skills and for those in employment, on ways to progress.

Guidance and support is offered to the unemployed through programmes such as the Flexible New Deal (see 7.4).

7.7 Teachers and trainers

For information on initial training and continuing professional development for teachers and trainers, see 'Teachers and trainers in further education colleges' in 4.6.

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Websites

Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) – <http://www.aqa.org.uk/index.php>

Care Council for Wales – <http://www.ccwales.org.uk/>

Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) – <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (Northern Ireland) – <http://www.ccea.org.uk/>

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) – <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en>

Edexcel – <http://www.edexcel.com/Pages/home.aspx>

Estyn – <http://www.estyn.gov.uk>

General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) – <http://www.gtcw.org.uk/gtcw/index.php/en>

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) – <http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/>

Learndirect Cymru/Wales – <http://www.learndirect.co.uk/wales-eng/>

Lifelong Learning UK – <http://www.lluk.org/>

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) – <http://www.niace.org.uk>

NIACE Dysgu Cymru – <http://niace.rcthosting.com/en/default.asp>

OCR – <http://www.ocr.org.uk>

Standards Verification UK – <http://www.standardsverificationuk.org/>

UK Commission for Employment and Skills – <http://www.ukces.org.uk>

Wales Audit Office – <http://www.wao.gov.uk/home.asp>

Wales Employment and Skills Board – <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/foremployers/employmentskillsboard/?lang=en>

Welsh Assembly Government – <http://wales.gov.uk>

WJEC – <http://www.wjec.co.uk/>

Workers' Educational Association – <http://www.wea.org.uk/>