This chapter covers the organisation and structure of educational provision for young people aged 11 to 18/19 years.

For the purpose of this description, secondary education is divided into:

- **general lower secondary education** [1] (for 11- to 16-year-olds)

- **general upper secondary education** [2] (for 16- to 18/19-year-olds)


In terms of International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) [4] categorisation, lower secondary (ISCED 2) refers to 11- to 14-year-olds and upper secondary (ISCED 3) refers to 14- to 18/19-year-olds.

In upper secondary education, there is a well-established tradition of subject specialization. Students may also combine the study of single subject general (academic) and vocational (applied) qualifications. For this reason, the introduction to this chapter provides a combined description of general and vocational upper secondary education.

There are no programmes categorised as post-secondary, non-tertiary education (ISCED 4) in Wales.

**General lower secondary education ages 11-16**

Young people enter secondary education at the age of 11 and, under Section 8 of the **Education Act 1996** [5], full-time education is then compulsory up until the last Friday in June of the school year in which they reach the age of 16. Secondary schools cater for pupils from age 11 to either 16 or to 18/19.

**Study programmes**

Under the **Education Act 2002** [6], the **national curriculum** [7] (Curriculum for Wales) for lower secondary education is divided into two key stages:

- Key Stage 3 - for pupils aged 11 to 14 (ISCED 2)

- Key Stage 4 - for pupils aged 14 to 16 (ISCED 3).
In Key Stage 4, pupils work towards external qualifications. In most cases, these are single subject GCSEs [8] taken at age 16.

There is no distinct vocational branch in compulsory secondary education. However, the ‘Learning Pathways Framework’ for 14- to 19-year-olds aims to ensure that young people aged 14+ have access to a range of subject choices/study programmes to meet their individual needs. These may include vocational courses and qualifications. Government guidance [9] sets out in greater detail how the Learning Pathways Framework works. The Framework was introduced in 2010 by the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 [10].

Under the Qualifications Wales Act 2015 [11], schools may offer any qualifications approved for teaching to the particular age group. However, only certain qualifications and combinations of qualifications are recognised in the National School Categorisation System [12]. This, along with the statutory requirements for the curriculum and assessment, is an important influence on the curriculum and study programmes offered by schools.

**Types of provider**

Publicly funded schools in Wales are known as maintained schools [13]. Different types of maintained secondary schools provide this phase of education. The differences reflect different legal frameworks and governance, rather than different study pathways for students. All schools enjoy a high level of autonomy. Further information on the different legal categories of maintained secondary school is provided in the article ‘Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level’ [14].

All or nearly all secondary schools are comprehensive schools, that is, they are not academically selective, and most are mixed sex. Some schools, commonly referred to as faith schools [15], are designated as having a religious character.

Pupils aged 11-16 not attending maintained secondary schools may attend fee-paying independent schools [16]. Parents may also choose to educate their children at home.

Of a total of 1568 schools in Wales in 2019, 1492 were maintained schools and 187 of these schools were maintained secondary schools. In addition, there were 19 maintained middle schools, catering for children aged 3 or 4 to 16 or 19.

Maintained secondary schools can be English-medium, Welsh-medium or bilingual schools. Of the 187 maintained secondary schools in Wales in 2019, 47 were Welsh-medium or bilingual schools.

Source for statistics: Tables 2 and 4 of the Address List of Schools in Wales [17], August 2019.

**General and vocational upper secondary education ages 16-18/19**

Young people over the age of 16 are not required by law to be in education.

Depending on the local offer and their own preferences, they may choose at this stage to:

- continue in full-time education in the same school in the sixth form [18]
- transfer to another school sixth form
- transfer to a further education college [19] to follow a full-time programme of study
• join the workforce and/or follow a government-supported vocational training and work programme such as an apprenticeship.

The Welsh Government collects information on participation in post-16 education. It has pledged, in its Employability Plan [20], to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Local authorities [21] are also aiming to reduce the number of young people who are NEET under the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework [22].

In 2018, provisional rates for participation in post-16 education and the labour market were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of age 16-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full- or part-time employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEET (not in employment, education or training)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although most post-16 programmes in schools and further education colleges are intended to be of a maximum two years’ duration, the funding framework applies up to age 19. For this reason, the age range 16–18/19 is adopted throughout this description.

Study programmes/learning pathways

There is no national curriculum in this phase of education, which is characterised by individual subject choice. Education and training at this level is qualification-led, rather than curriculum-led. The qualifications most commonly taken are:


• vocational qualifications (see the article on ‘Teaching and Learning in Vocational Upper Secondary Education [27]’).

Under the ‘Learning Pathways’ approach (which became statutory under the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 [28]), young people aged 16 to 18/19 in post-compulsory education in schools or colleges must have access to a minimum number of courses of study within the ‘local curriculum’. The Education (Local Curriculum for Pupils Aged 16 to 18) (Wales) Regulations 2011 [29] set the minimum number of courses to 30, of which at least five must be vocational. Courses must be available across five learning domains:

• mathematics, science and technology

• business, administration and law
services for people

arts, media, culture and languages

humanities, social sciences and preparation for life and work.

Further information on the local curriculum for 16- to 18/19-year-olds is available in Government guidance [9] (2014).

Legal framework

The National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) [30] has the power to legislate in devolved areas of responsibility, including nearly all aspects of education and skills. This power was devolved by the Government of Wales Act 1998 [31] and extended by subsequent legislation, including the Wales Act 2017 [32].

Overall responsibility for the education service in Wales rests with the Welsh Government, but much of the legal framework for education is shared with England, reflecting a common history. Although the age groups catered for and the programmes provided overlap, schools and further education colleges operate under different legal frameworks, described below.

Schools

There is no single framework Act for secondary education and most legislation for schools applies to both primary and secondary schools.

The following brief list of Acts of Parliament covers key aspects of school structures, curriculum and assessment..

The Education Act 1996 [5] consolidated schools legislation from the Education Act 1944 [33] onwards. Section 2 of the 1996 Act defines secondary education, while Section 7 sets the requirement for full-time compulsory education, by placing the following duty on parents:

>'The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable—

to his age, ability and aptitude, and

to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.'

Under Section 8 of the Act, full-time education is compulsory up until the last Friday in June of the school year in which a pupil reaches the age of 16.

The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 [34] introduced a national curriculum for Wales. This was with the aim of giving pupils an entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, and with a view to setting standards for pupil attainment and to support school accountability.

schools, categorising them as community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled or foundation schools. It also placed local authorities under a duty to promote high standards of education; extended their power to intervene in failing schools; and set out their duties in relation to the provision of childcare and nursery education.

The Education Act 2002 re-enacted the curriculum requirements of the ERA; introduced a modernised framework for teachers’ pay and conditions, appraisal, qualifications and provision about misconduct; and introduced new arrangements for school governance along with a new regulatory regime for independent schools.

Following the Wales Act 2017, in September 2018, the Welsh Government acquired responsibility for setting pay and conditions of service for teachers in Wales. Previously, the UK Secretary of State had the power to make provision for the determination of the pay and conditions for teachers in both England and Wales.

Where post-compulsory, post-16 education in Wales is provided full-time in the sixth form of a school, it is considered to be secondary education and is subject to schools regulations.

Further education colleges

Most further education colleges are statutory corporations set up under the Further and Higher Education Act (FHEA) 1992. This took further education institutions out of local authority control and is the principal piece of legislation governing further education in England and Wales.

The core of the legislative framework set out in the FHEA 1992 remains in place. In addition:

- The Further Education and Training Act 2007 gave the National Assembly for Wales the power to make measures in the field of further education and training.

- The Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 provided the legal framework for the Learning Pathways programme, which aims to ensure that young people aged 14+ have access to a wide choice of study pathways suited to their individual needs.

- The Education (Wales) Measure 2011 made provision for collaboration between local authorities, governing bodies of maintained schools and further education institutions to ensure provision for young people up to the age of 19.

For a fuller list of the legislation that provides the legal framework for education in Wales, see the ‘Legislation’ chapter.

More detailed information on the legal framework for particular aspects of education is provided in the various articles within this chapter.

Policy objectives

The long-term aims, vision and objectives for education are guided by the five-year Programme for Government - Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021 - and by the Government’s overarching education improvement plan – Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-21.

Taking Wales Forward (2016) outlines the Welsh Government’s aims to drive improvement in
the Welsh economy and public services. It includes a vision for a Wales which is ‘prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning, united and connected’ (page 2). The ‘ambitious and learning’ priorities (pages 9-11) include:

- continuing to invest in improving school standards and in closing the attainment gap between the poorest pupils and their peers
- continuing to develop a new curriculum, with the aim of ensuring that young people gain the skills, knowledge and experiences needed to develop creativity and a broader understanding of the world
- supporting the roll-out of digital competence in schools
- supporting teachers to develop their skills.

*Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-21* [49] sets out how the school system will develop as a new school curriculum is implemented across Wales. It includes four enabling objectives, aimed at successfully delivering the new curriculum (page 23):

1. developing a high-quality education profession
2. inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards
3. strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being
4. robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system.

A new *Curriculum for Wales* [50] for children and young people aged 3-16 is to be used throughout Wales by 2022. The new curriculum aims to support children and young people to be:

- ambitious, capable learners
- enterprising, creative contributors
- ethical, informed citizens
- healthy, confident individuals.

It aims to make learning more experience-based and for the assessment of progress to be more developmental. It also looks to give teachers more flexibility to be creative in their teaching in response to their learners. The new curriculum will include six areas of learning and three cross-curricular responsibilities: literacy, numeracy and digital competence, as supported by the *National Literacy and Numeracy Framework* [51] and the *Digital Competence Framework* [52].

set out proposals for legislation on the structure of the new curriculum. It also explained the Welsh Government's wider intentions for pupil assessment and evaluation of schools.

The policy priorities outlined above take account of Wales' underperformance in the PISA 2012 international survey of educational achievement; of Wales' performance in PISA 2015; of the 2014 OECD review of education in Wales; of the 2013 Hill report on the education system; and of the recommendations of the 2015 Donaldson report, Successful Futures, which reviewed the curriculum and assessment arrangements.

The development of the new curriculum, assessment and accountability arrangements also follows on from the 2011/12 Review of Qualifications for 14- to 19-year-olds in Wales and the introduction of the 'Learning Pathways Programme'. Both of these focused on ensuring that young people have access to high quality courses and qualifications, which will enable them to move on from education with the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need for further study or employment. They are supported by an ongoing series of sector reviews which aim to ensure that the vocational qualifications available meet the needs of learners, higher education providers and employers in a wide range of careers. At the same time, the Welsh Government has proposed the establishment of a Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales to oversee the strategic planning and funding of all post-compulsory education and training.

The Welsh Government also has a focus on reducing the number of individuals who are NEET (not in education, employment or training), by supporting them to find employment or enter an apprenticeship. This priority is outlined in its employability plan, while the Apprenticeships Skills Policy Plan focuses on increasing the number of apprentices aged 16-19 and addressing skills shortages.

Policy for Welsh-medium education

Cymraeg 2050: a million Welsh speakers, the Welsh language strategy, sets out the Welsh Government's long-term approach to achieving the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. The principal aim for compulsory education is to increase the number of confident Welsh speakers.

To help achieve this aim, local authorities (LAs) will need to reconfigure school provision to create more Welsh-medium places and, over time, ensure that more bilingual schools introduce a higher proportion of the curriculum in Welsh. In addition, the new Curriculum for Wales intends to embed the acquisition of Welsh language skills across the curriculum and places an emphasis on learning Welsh as a means of communication. The strategy was launched in July 2017.

In addition, in December 2017, the Welsh Government published the Welsh in education: Action plan 2017-21. This establishes the direction for the development of compulsory Welsh-medium and Welsh language education and is aligned with the Cymraeg 2050 strategy. It includes six principles to provide the foundation for future policy developments and enable the vision of all learners being able ‘to develop their Welsh language skills and to use the language confidently in everyday life’ (page 14).

Article last reviewed September 2019.

DID YOU FIND WHAT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR?

YES