

EDUCATION SYSTEM UNITED KINGDOM



TIAME



The United Kingdom is home to some of the world's top universities, which attract thousands of students, faculty and researchers every year, including many from the United States. Employers in the US and around the world recognize the value of a UK degree.

Our work in education at the British Council in the US focuses on higher education opportunities for students and institutions. We promote study in the UK for university students interested in completing a degree or studying abroad in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. We support UK higher education institutions in their international outreach, and we also build international higher education partnerships and host policy dialogues for higher education professionals.



- Explore the sections below to learn more about how we can help you, whether you are a student or higher education professional.
- **Education in Wales** differs in certain respects from education elsewhere in the [United Kingdom](#). For example, a small number of students all over [Wales](#) are educated either wholly or largely through the medium of [Welsh](#): in 2008/09, 22 per cent of classes in maintained primary schools used Welsh as the sole or main medium of instruction.^[2] [Welsh medium education](#) is available to all age groups through nurseries, schools, colleges and universities and in adult education; lessons in the language itself are compulsory for all pupils until the age of 16.



- Since [devolution](#), education policy in the four constituent countries of the UK has diverged: for example, [England](#) has pursued reforms based on diversity of school types and parental choice; Wales (and [Scotland](#)) remain more committed to the concept of the community-based [comprehensive school](#). Systems of governance and regulation - the arrangements for planning, funding, quality-assuring and regulating learning, and for its local administration - are becoming increasingly differentiated across the four [home countries](#).^[3] Education researcher David Reynolds claims that policy in Wales is driven by a "producerist" [paradigm](#) emphasising collaboration between educational partners. He also alludes to lower funding in Welsh schools compared to England, echoing similar concerns at university level.





The Structure of the Welsh Educational System

Compulsory Schooling

A child's age on the 1 September determines the point of entry into the relevant stage of education. Education is compulsory beginning with the term following the child's fifth (third in Wales) birthday, but may take place at either home or school. Most parents choosing to educate through school-based provision, however, enrol their children in the reception year in September of that school year, with most children thus beginning school at age four or four and a half.



- **Primary Education**

In 2008/09 there were 1,478 primary schools in Wales with 258,314 pupils and 12,343 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers. The pupil/teacher ratio was 20 and the average class size was 24.4 pupils.





- In 2008 a unique new curriculum - the Foundation phase - was rolled out to all schools in Wales. It began for 3- to 4-year-olds and by 2011 is in place for 3- to 7-year-olds. It is based on experiential learning, in small groups, with a teacher ratio of 1:8 for the youngest ages. It has been acclaimed as 'one of the most significant acts of the Welsh government since it was formed' and has been almost universally welcomed.
- From Welsh government
- The Foundation Phase places great emphasis on children learning by doing. Young children will be given more opportunities to gain first hand experiences through play and active involvement rather than by completing exercises in books. They will be given time to develop their speaking and listening skills and to become confident in their reading and writing abilities.

- Mathematics will be more practical so that children can see how problems are solved and how important mathematics is in their everyday lives. There will be more emphasis on children understanding how things work and on finding different ways to solve problems.
- The curriculum will focus on experiential learning, active involvement and developing each child's:
 - Skills and understanding;
 - Personal, social, emotional, physical and intellectual well being so as to develop the whole child;
 - Positive attitudes to learning so that they enjoy it and want to continue;
 - Self-esteem and self-confidence to experiment, investigate, learn new things and form new relationships;
 - Creative, expressive and observational skills to encourage their development as individuals with different ways of responding to experiences;
 - Activities in the outdoors where they have first-hand experience of solving real-life problems and learn about conservation and sustainability.



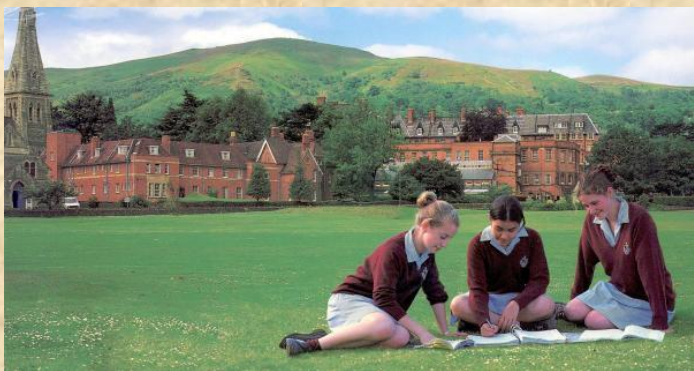


Secondary Education

Pupils in [secondary school](#) take part in the compulsory [GCSE](#) and the non-compulsory [A-level](#) qualifications at age 16 and 18 respectively. Since 2007 the [Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification](#) has also been available as an option although it is ungraded. In 2008/09 there were 223 secondary schools in Wales with 205,421 pupils and 12,535 FTE teachers. The pupil/teacher ratio was 16.4.^[5]



GCSE and A-level GCE results for 2011.^[6] At GCSE, 66.5% of Welsh domiciled students gained grades A* to C, compared with 69.8% in England. At A-level, 23.9% of Welsh-based students gained A* or A grades, compared with 26.8% in England and the trend is consistent, with Wales have fallen back compared to England over the previous decade.



PISA results, by which the performance of Welsh pupils is compared to that of other countries, is also of concern, with Wales lagging behind all other countries in the UK, leading to Minister Leighton Andrews to describe the performance as "unacceptable".^[7]