



SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

ENGLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

I. Description of education system

1 Education population and language of instruction

In 2000, approximately 59 per cent of the population in the United Kingdom aged between 0 and 29 were in education.

In **England**, the language of instruction is English.

In **Wales**, the language of instruction is either English or Welsh. Parental preferences for the language of instruction can normally, but not always, be met, either by choosing a particular school, or by choosing a particular stream within a bilingual school. Welsh-medium pre-school education is also available, and some further and higher education courses are also taught through the medium of Welsh, although not in all subject areas. All pupils in Wales are required to follow a programme of study in Welsh, either as a first or second language, throughout the years of compulsory education.

In **Northern Ireland**, the language of instruction is English, except for a very small number of Irish-medium schools.

2 Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In 2000, approximately 96 per cent of students in primary, secondary and further education in the UK (including Scotland) were in publicly-funded institutions, with the remaining 4 per cent in private non grant-aided institutions, such as independent schools.

(a) National level

The **responsibility for the education service** lies with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England, with the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Training and Education (DfTE) in Wales, and, in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL).

The **inspection** of schools in England is the responsibility of a separate, non-ministerial government department, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which also has responsibilities for the inspection of pre-school education and care, and for provision for 16- to 19-year-olds. The inspection of further education institutions is the responsibility of a non-departmental public body, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). In Wales, a single body Estyn inspects pre-school education, schools and further education institutions. In Northern Ireland, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is part of the Department of Education (DE); it inspects both schools and further education institutions. At higher education level, a single independent body, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), provides quality assurance services across the UK.

The **planning and funding of further education** is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in England and the National Council for Education and Training for Wales, known as the National Council - ELWa. These are non-departmental public bodies. In Northern Ireland, this is the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

The national level bodies with responsibility for **funding higher education** in England and Wales are the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) (part of ELWa) respectively. In Northern Ireland, this is the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

(b) Local level

The 172 local education authorities (LEAs) in England and Wales, and the five Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland are responsible for organising publicly-funded school education within their area. LEAs also have a responsibility for quality assurance in the schools that they maintain and for promoting high standards of education for pupils of school age in their area.

(c) Institutional level

All institutions have a governing body, responsible for the general direction of the institution, which includes representatives from a range of different stakeholders.

All schools have a high degree of autonomy.

In England and Wales, the legal framework for primary and secondary schools divides them into community, voluntary and foundation schools. The majority of schools are community schools; schools established and fully funded by local education authorities (LEAs). Foundation schools are also funded by LEAs, but are owned by the school governing body or a charitable foundation. Voluntary schools were originally established by voluntary bodies, mainly churches, who retain some control over their management. They are now largely funded by LEAs. There is a separate legal framework in Northern Ireland, where, despite the establishment of a number of integrated schools, the school system remains largely segregated on religious lines.

Further and higher education institutions are fully autonomous.

3 Pre-primary education

For children aged from three months to three years, provision is largely in the private and voluntary sectors, and parents pay fees. For children aged from three to five, publicly-funded early years education and childcare is currently being expanded and developed in co-operation with the private and voluntary sectors. All areas of England and Wales are working towards the Government aim of universal, free nursery provision for three-year-olds by 2004. Government initiatives in Northern Ireland are also working towards provision of a full year of pre-school education for every child whose parents want it. At present, a free half-day place is available for all four-year-olds and many three-year-olds whose parents want it. Places are in state-maintained nursery schools and classes, and in voluntary and private settings. Many four-year-olds are in reception classes at primary school for five full days a week. Overall, virtually all four-year-olds and the majority of three-year-olds participate in some form of pre-compulsory education.

The Education Act 2002 formally established the Foundation Stage of education in England, which caters for children aged three until the end of the reception class (usually aged five). It is now a statutory requirement that children at this stage of education work towards 'early learning goals', which cover six key curricular areas. There are also plans to introduce a Foundation Stage for children aged 3 to 6 in Northern Ireland and a Foundation Phase for children aged 3 to 7 in Wales.

4 Compulsory education

a) Phases

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Primary education | Age 5 to 11 (England/Wales) Age 4 to 11 (Northern Ireland) |
| Secondary education | Age 11 to 16 or 18 |

Education is compulsory from age five (four in Northern Ireland) to age 16.

Many children in England and Wales start in the reception class of primary school at age four.

Most pupils move from a primary school to a secondary school at age 11, although in some areas of England, pupils attend middle school from the age of 8 or 9 to 12 or 13.

Many secondary schools also provide education for post-compulsory students aged 16 to 18.

b) Admissions criteria

No charge may be made for admitting pupils to publicly-funded primary or secondary schools.

Parents may apply to any school for a place for their child.

The local authority or the school governing body (depending on the legal category of school) must establish an admissions policy to explain how places will be allocated if there are more applications than places at the school.

Admissions policies typically give priority to children who live closest to the school, to children who already have brothers or sisters at the school, or to children with special needs which may be best met by the school. Schools supported by religious foundations often give preference to members of a particular faith or denomination. All primary schools accept pupils without regard to ability. Most secondary schools in England and all secondary schools in Wales are comprehensive, accepting pupils without regard to academic ability. However, in Northern Ireland, and in some areas of England, there are selective schools, known as grammar schools. These represent approximately 5 and 30 per cent of all secondary schools in England and Northern Ireland respectively. There are also some secondary schools in England that specialise in a particular subject; these schools are permitted to select up to 10 per cent of children based on their aptitude for the subject concerned. Primary schools and most secondary schools are mixed sex, but some secondary schools are single sex.

c) Length of school day/week/year

Schools must be open for 190 days a year. The actual dates are determined by the local authority or the school governing body, depending on the legal category of school. The school year generally runs from September to July. Schools normally operate five days a week (Monday to Friday). There is currently some movement towards the adoption of a standardised six-term school year which would be consistent year on year from 2003/4. However the decision to adopt this new model remains at the level of the local education authority (LEA) or school governing body.

Minimum recommended weekly lesson times in England and Wales are 21 (for 5- to 7-year-olds), 23.5 (for 8- to 11-year-olds) and 24 (for 12- to 16-year-olds). In Northern Ireland, minimum daily attendance hours are 3 hours for pupils under eight and 4.5 for those over eight. Most schools provide more hours than the suggested minimum. The school day generally runs from around 09.00 to between 15.00 and 16.00. The organisation of time within the school day is determined by the school.

(d) Class size/student grouping

Class sizes for 5- to 7-year-olds (4- to 8-year-olds in Northern Ireland) are limited to 30 pupils. There are no requirements for other age groups. The organisation of teaching groups is a matter for the school. Pupils are most commonly taught in mixed-ability classes at primary level, although many teachers use some form of ability grouping within a mixed-ability class. Secondary schools commonly group pupils for some subjects according to ability in that particular subject (a practice known as 'setting'), whilst teaching other subjects in mixed-ability groups. All teachers are expected to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for differentiated work for pupils of all abilities.

(e) Curriculum control and content

In England, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is advised on all matters affecting the school curriculum by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), a non-departmental public body. The QCA works closely with the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (known by its Welsh acronym ACCAC), which performs similar functions in relation to Wales, and with the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) which performs these functions for Northern Ireland.

All schools are required to provide a balanced and broadly-based curriculum and have discretion to develop the whole curriculum to reflect their particular needs and circumstances. There are also specific statutory requirements for particular subjects. These requirements are the same for all publicly-funded schools, including selective schools.

The curriculum for compulsory education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is divided into four key stages (KS); KS1 (ages 5 to 7, or 4 to 8 in Northern Ireland), KS2 (ages 7 to 11, or from 8 in Northern Ireland), KS3 (ages 11 to 14) and KS4 (14 to 16).

In **England and Wales**, the National Curriculum compulsory subjects for KS1–3 include English (and/or Welsh in Wales), mathematics, science, design and technology, ICT (IT in Wales), physical education, history, geography, art and design (art in Wales) and music. A foreign language is compulsory at KS3. In September 2002, citizenship became a statutory requirement in England from KS3.

Although outside the National Curriculum framework, religious education is also compulsory from KS1, as is sex education from KS3.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is not statutory in England, but schools are expected to provide it. In September 2003, Personal and Social Education (PSE) did however become statutory for all pupils in compulsory education in Wales.

At KS4, there are fewer compulsory subjects.

The **Northern Ireland** Curriculum comprises five compulsory 'areas of study' from KS1–4: English, mathematics, science and technology, environment and society, and creative and expressive studies, and, at secondary level only, modern languages. Within the areas of study, the minimum requirements are: English, mathematics, science and technology, (science is a separate subject at secondary level), history, geography, art and design, music, physical education and religious education. At secondary level, a modern language is an additional requirement. In addition, there are educational themes, to be woven through the main subjects of the curriculum: education for mutual understanding, cultural heritage, health education and information technology. At secondary level, the educational themes also include economic awareness and careers education.

The amount of time to be allocated to each curriculum subject is not prescribed, and there are no general centrally issued recommendations on teaching methods or teaching materials. However, since September 1998, primary schools in England have been encouraged to follow a national framework for the teaching of literacy, and, from September 1999, in numeracy. Similar arrangements for the teaching of mathematics and English have been in effect in secondary schools since September 2001 and were introduced in science and ICT from September 2002. These national frameworks include detailed guidance and also include some recommendations for minimum teaching time. In Northern Ireland, there are recommendations for minimum time for each area of study and for religious education for KS4.

(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Promotion to the next year or key stage is automatic and does not depend on the results of assessment.

There are statutory assessment arrangements on entry to primary school and at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3. These arrangements include teacher assessment and externally set and externally marked or moderated tests. The tests at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3 are commonly known as 'SATS'. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (known by its Welsh acronym ACCAC), and the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) are the statutory advisory bodies responsible for keeping these assessment arrangements under review.

These authorities also serve as regulatory authorities for the qualifications taken at the end of compulsory education. Awarding bodies (independent organisations recognised by the regulatory authorities) offer a range of national qualifications. The majority of pupils take General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations (GCSEs) in a range of single general or vocational subjects. Assessment schemes vary, but always include externally set and externally marked assessment; there may also be internally marked and externally moderated assessment. Assessment may include oral and practical assessment as well as written examinations.

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

(a) Types of education

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|--|---------------------|
| Secondary school | Age 16 to 18 |
| Further education Sixth form college* Further education college Tertiary college* | Age 16 + |

*England and Wales only

Secondary schools and sixth form colleges offer general education; further education colleges offer largely vocational education although many also offer general education; tertiary colleges offer both general and vocational education.

(b) Admissions criteria

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

(c) Curriculum control and content

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

(d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

There are statutory advisory bodies which regulate the external qualifications used in schools and colleges: the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (known by its Welsh acronym ACCAC), and the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). Awarding bodies (independent organisations recognised by the regulatory authorities) offer a range of national qualifications. Common qualifications taken are the General Certificate of Education Advanced level/Advanced Subsidiary level (GCE A-level/AS-levels), vocational A levels (AVCEs), and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Assessment schemes for GCE A-level/AS-levels and AVCEs vary, but always include externally set and externally marked assessment; there may also be internally marked and externally moderated assessment. Assessment may include oral and practical assessment as well as written examinations. NVQs are not assessed through examinations but require candidates to demonstrate their competence in specified tasks.

6 Higher education

(a) Types of institution

Higher education institutions include universities, higher education colleges and a small number of university colleges. The historical division between polytechnics and universities was ended in 1992. Higher education institutions are diverse, ranging widely in size, mission and history.

(b) Access

All major higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and each determines its own admissions policy and requirements. Entry is competitive, and specific requirements are set for each course. In most cases, entry requirements are specified as GCE A-levels or equivalent qualifications. However, most institutions also welcome applications from mature candidates who have had appropriate experience but may lack formal qualifications.

(c) Qualifications

In the UK, academic qualifications are not national awards, but are granted by individual institutions. Universities, university colleges and a small number of higher education colleges have the power to award their own degrees and qualifications. Degrees and other qualifications offered by most higher education colleges are validated by external bodies such as a university or national accrediting body.

Qualifications and titles vary between institutions. Qualifications may include higher education certificates and diplomas, foundation degrees, bachelors degrees, bachelors degrees with honours, and higher (postgraduate) degrees such as masters degrees and doctorates. Undergraduate programmes leading to bachelors degrees with honours (usually known as honours degrees) form the largest group of higher education programmes. Typical courses leading to an honours degree last for three years (if taken full-time) although some courses are longer.

A new five-level framework has recently been developed to provide a clearer structure to higher education qualifications and promote consistent use of qualifications titles.

7 Special needs

Children with special educational needs (SEN) are educated within mainstream schools wherever possible. If a child needs more help than can reasonably be provided by the resources normally available to the school, the local authority must issue a statement of special educational needs, detailing the needs and the necessary extra provision. In 2000/01, around three per cent of all pupils had a statement of special educational needs and around one per cent of all pupils were educated in special schools.

8 Teachers

Teachers are not civil servants. School teachers are employed either by the local authority or by the individual institution, depending on the type of school. Teachers in other phases of education are employees of the individual institution.

Initial training of **school teachers** generally involves a four-year Bachelor of Education degree course, or a bachelors degree followed by a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Both routes are common for primary school teachers; the latter route is more common for secondary teachers. School-based training schemes are also available. Initial teacher training courses lead to 'Qualified Teacher Status' (England and Wales) and eligibility to teach (Northern Ireland).

Until recently, specialist training has not been a statutory requirement for **further education** teachers in England and Wales. However, since 2001 (2002 in Wales), all new entrants to teaching in the further education sector have been required to complete a professional teaching qualification.

In Northern Ireland, teachers in **further education** who do not have an initial teacher training qualification on appointment must hold an approved qualification, such as a university degree or a vocational qualification in the subject they wish to teach. They are contractually required to obtain the Postgraduate Certificate (Further and Higher Education) within three years of appointment.

There is currently no statutory requirement for teaching staff in **higher education** institutions to receive any initial training but institutions increasingly provide training for their staff. However, the recently-published White Paper, the *Future of Higher Education* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2003) proposes the establishment of national professional standards for teaching in higher education by 2004-05.

II. Ongoing Reforms and Topics of Debate in Education

Following the General Election in June 1997, which returned a Labour government, four major pieces of education legislation have been introduced in **England and Wales**. The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 introduced measures to raise standards of school education, and created a new framework of community schools, foundation schools and voluntary schools. The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 made new provisions with respect to teacher training, and to student fees, grants and loans. The Learning and Skills Act 2000 reformed the organisations responsible for funding the further education sector. The Education Act 2002 introduced a broad range of provisions, which are intended to raise standards and promote innovation in schools (see below).

Specific developments over recent years include:

- more children receiving early years education;
- the introduction of a new Foundation Stage curriculum for children aged 3 to 5 (the end of the primary school reception year) in England (In addition, a Foundation Stage is planned for children aged 3 to 6 in Northern Ireland and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) intends to introduce a Foundation Phase for 3- to 7-year-olds);
- smaller class sizes; the size of infant classes for 5- to 7-year-olds taught by a single qualified teacher is now limited to 30 and below in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland there are similar requirements for classes for 4- to 8-year-olds;
- implementation of National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in primary schools in England; other initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy in Wales and Northern Ireland;
- more schools in England with specialist status, (ie specialising in technology, languages, sports, arts, business and enterprise, engineering, science, mathematics, computing and from October 2003, music and the humanities, whilst providing the full National Curriculum);
- implementation of Curriculum 2000, an initiative aimed at promoting curricular breadth whilst maintaining specialisation in the 16-19 curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Changes included the introduction of the GCE advanced subsidiary qualification, based on the first year of study of a GCE A level course, and vocational A levels (AVCEs);
- a new five-level framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Following the General Election in June 2001, which returned the Labour Party to a second term of office, the Department for Education and Employment was restructured to form two new departments:

- the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), responsible for education, training and lifelong learning; and
- the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), responsible for welfare, pensions, employment and disability issues.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) designated the following priority areas:

- raising standards in the middle years of education through implementing a strategy for Key Stage 3 (11- to 14-year-olds);

- developing a coherent 14-19 phase of education through the proposals set out in the Green Paper *14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* and the follow-up document *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* (see below);
- making progress in higher education towards the 50 per cent participation target by 2010;
- improving the basic skills of 750,000 adults by 2004; and
- throughout the education system, pursuing the twin goals of striving for excellence while narrowing the achievement gaps between different social and economic groups.

The Government's spending plans for 2003-06 provide for UK education spending to rise to 5.6 per cent of GDP by 2005-06. However, the Government requires that this investment be matched by reform. Following on from these announcements, the Department for Education and Skills published a strategy document: *Education and Skills: Investment for Reform* (DfES, 2002). This document (which applies to England only) emphasised the need for the reform of secondary education and a rise in standards.

The main educational legislation passed since the 2001 General Election is the Education Act 2002, which legislates for the proposals outlined in the White Paper, *Schools Achieving Success* (GB. Parliament. HoC. 2001). The provisions of the Act are very wide-ranging and include a more flexible curriculum; measures to support a less rigid framework for the staffing of schools; enhanced provisions to tackle poor performance; greater flexibility for school governance; and greater transparency for school finance. The legislation allows schools in England to apply to the Secretary of State to be exempted from specific education laws where such action can be proved to raise standards. Although the Act covers both **England and Wales**, many of the provisions are enabling in character and therefore the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) has discretion as to their application in Wales.

The Government has also published several other strategy documents since the last election, which reflect different priority phases or areas of education. *Excellence and Enjoyment – A Strategy for Primary Schools* (DfES, 2003) is the Government's new strategy document for **primary education**. It includes the development of a new approach to assessment during Key Stage 1 (pupils aged 5 to 7), which places greater emphasis on teacher assessment and less on standard tests. Schools will be able to set their own targets to take account of their pupils' achievement and to enable them to improve the value they add. They will also receive more credit for the performance of lower-ability pupils, many of whom may have special educational needs.

A Green Paper *14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* (DfES, 2002) and the Government's follow-up document *14-19: Opportunity and Excellence* (DfES, 2003) outline current proposals to improve education provision for **14- to 19-year-olds in England**. Proposals include:

- providing work-related learning and enterprise education in all post-14 programmes (beginning in the 2003/04 academic year);
- building parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications, for example, through the introduction of new 'hybrid' General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications, which cross the academic and vocational divide;
- no longer requiring schools from the start of the 2003/04 academic year to provide all pupils at Key Stage 4 (KS4) with a programme of learning which includes modern foreign languages, design and technology, and arts and humanities. All schools will still be expected to make such programmes available to pupils as part of their entitlement.
- greater opportunities for students in this age group to mix school, college and workplace learning;
- encouraging new forms of partnership across school, further and higher education institutions to broaden the range and quality of study available to students; and
- in the long term, providing a more flexible curriculum and qualifications framework for all 14- to 19-year-olds.

The White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2003) sets out the Government's strategy for the reform of **higher education** in England. The strategy focuses on packages of measures in six key areas, which include:

- strengthening research by, for example, supporting emerging and improving research;
 - improving links between higher education and business;
 - promoting excellence in teaching in higher education through the creation of new professional standards and a new national body – the Teaching Quality Academy;
 - continuing to expand higher education and work towards the target of 50 per cent participation;
 - ensuring fair access to higher education for young people from lower-income families through a range of measures; and
 - reforming funding through the introduction of a new Graduate Contribution Scheme.
- Following a consultation period, the Strategy will begin to be implemented from September 2003. Legislation will be introduced during 2003/4.

Other recent strategies include:

- *21st Century Skills. Realising our Potential: Individuals, Employers, Nation* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2003), which is a White Paper setting out the Government's strategy to ensure that employers and individuals have appropriate skills to succeed in the economy of the 21st century;
- *Languages for All: Languages for Life* (DfES, 2002), which outlines the Government's plans to transform **language teaching and learning** and includes the introduction of an entitlement to language learning at primary level by 2010; and
- *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload* (DfES, 2003), which discusses reforms to the school workforce, including the progressive reduction of teachers' overall hours from 2003-2007 and the provision of guaranteed time for planning, preparation and assessment.

In **Wales**, the National Assembly has published *The Learning Country*, which is a comprehensive strategic document on education and lifelong learning in Wales. It outlines the Assembly's current policy directions as follows:

- creation of stronger foundations for learning with major improvements for early years provision;
- overhaul for special educational needs provision;
- new measures to secure better transitional arrangements for pupils as they move from primary to secondary school;
- new scope for schools to make more flexible provision for 14- to 19-year-olds;
- better services for young people;
- measures to promote greater access to lifelong learning (post-16);
- stronger support for practitioners; and
- modernisation of the collaborative efforts of higher education institutions in Wales.

Building on the proposals outlined in *The Learning Country* (NAfW, 2001), the National Assembly published the consultation paper *Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19* (NAfW, 2001), which relates in particular to the future of learning for **14- to 19-year-olds** in Wales. It proposed an ambitious overarching target that 95 per cent of young people should be ready for high skill employment or higher education by 2015. Structured, balanced learning pathways from 14 to 19, to provide flexibility and choice, are proposed in order to meet this target. Specific recommendations include:

- a vocational option for all 14- to 16-year-olds;
- greater emphasis on age 16 as a progress check rather than an exit point; and
- increased importance to be placed on real life experience and essential skills throughout the phase.

Based on responses to the consultation, the National Assembly published an action plan to take the proposals forward in April 2003.

Other recent developments in Wales include:

- introduction of the Assembly Learning Grant (ALG), a new means-tested student support measure, for further and higher education students in Wales;
- publication of a strategy for modern language learning in Wales, which includes measures aimed at improving the take up and standard of foreign language learning, including the introduction of pilot projects for modern foreign languages for pupils aged 7 to 11, and initiatives to promote the take up of languages for pupils aged 14 to 16;
- removal of the requirement for pupils aged 7 to undertake externally set and audited tasks and written tests in mathematics and English (Welsh in Welsh-speaking schools);
- development of proposals to introduce a statutory Foundation Phase with a curriculum extending from age 3 to 7; and
- introduction of Personal and Social Education (PSE) as a statutory subject for all pupils of compulsory school age. Work-related Education (WRE) is also to become statutory for all pupils at Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16) in September 2004.

In **Northern Ireland**, proposals for a radical **restructuring of the curriculum** are currently under consultation. Under the proposals, the statutory curriculum for pupils aged up to 14 would be set out as curriculum areas rather than individual subjects, with an increased emphasis on skills. The statutory curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 16 would consist of key transferable skills, personal, social and health education, citizenship and education for employability. Statutory assessment arrangements for Key Stages 1-3, which take place at ages 8, 11 and 14, would be replaced by standardised annual reports. In addition, a new Foundation Stage would be introduced to cover pre-school and the first two years of primary school.

An independent review body on post-primary (secondary) education in Northern Ireland has recently advocated the **abolition of the transfer tests** taken prior to entry to secondary education and an end to selection on academic grounds. Instead, informed parental preference would replace academic selection. Widespread consultation has taken place, the outcomes of which are currently under consideration by the Department of Education.

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