



National system overview on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms

2011 Edition



UNITED KINGDOM – SCOTLAND

October 2011

1. Education population and language of instruction

The total population of Scotland is 5.22 million as at 30 June 2010. In September 2010, there were 673 140 pupils in 2 634 publicly-funded schools: 365 326 pupils in 2 099 primary schools, 301 014 pupils in 372 secondary schools, and 6 800 pupils in 163 special schools.

Although the main language of instruction is English, Gaelic-medium education (GME) is also available in a number of Scottish primary and secondary schools.

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

The First Minister for Scotland is responsible for the overall supervision and development of the education system. Day-to-day responsibility for education is delegated to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. He is supported by 2 Ministers – the Minister for Children and Young People and the Minister for Learning and Skills. They are served by the Scottish Government's Directorate General Learning and Justice. Ministers are advised by Education Scotland which was created in July 2011 from merging Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) and Learning Teaching Scotland (LTS) the national body dealing with the development of the curriculum. The public examination body is the Scottish Qualifications Authority. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is responsible for the funding of teaching and some research in the 42 publicly-funded colleges, and the 20 Scottish higher education institutions.

Approximately 95 % of the school age population is educated in a publicly funded school. 'Private' school education is defined as schools that are independent of local authority control and therefore receive no public money.

The provision of publicly funded pre-primary and school education is the responsibility of the 32 unitary councils, known as Local Authorities (LAs). They have direct responsibility for schools, the employment of educational staff, the provision and financing of most educational services and the implementation of Scottish Government policies in education. Under the Concordat signed by Ministers and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) on 14 November 2007 they also have a shared role with Ministers in policy making and joint responsibility for the new National Performance Framework. Head teachers in schools are responsible for at least 80 % of the funding allocated to schools by LAs, often in reality nearer 90 %. They are responsible for a wide range of aspects of the day to day running of the school, including providing leadership, good management and strategic direction of the school, staff management, development of the school curriculum and behaviour management. From August 2007, Parent Councils replaced School Boards, as the official forum for contact between parents and individual schools.

Further and higher education institutions are almost entirely autonomous. Although they receive substantial public funds from the SFC, they also generate their own income. Public funding varies between institutions but this does not affect their autonomous status. Each institution is therefore responsible for all aspects of administrative control, subject to legislative requirements and conditions of grant.

Education Scotland is responsible for external evaluation of the authority education services by operating independently and impartially whilst remaining directly accountable to Scottish Ministers for the standards of its work.

Local authorities also carry out their own quality assessment of the various aspects of the educational provision which they make.

At institutional level schools and further education colleges are responsible themselves for monitoring and evaluating their performance and progress and they are required to produce both an annual Standards and Quality or self-evaluation report on their own work and a development plan, setting out the results of an internal audit and their plans and objectives for the future.

3. Pre-primary education

Funded pre-primary education is provided by local authorities and their voluntary and private partners. They work with [Education Scotland](#) and [Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland](#) to promote high quality provision. Under [The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000](#) local authorities are under a duty to secure a part-time pre-primary education place for all three and four year olds whose parents want one. Attendance is not compulsory. The statutory minimum number of hours for free pre-primary education is 475 hours per annum. Provision is usually delivered over five sessions a week, each of around 2.5 hours, over the school year (38 weeks).

Pre-school education is fully integrated with school education through the 3-18 curriculum in Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence. In September 2010, there were 28 620 registrations for the ante-pre-primary year and 55 250 registrations for the pre-primary year of pre-primary education. This equates to c. 97 % of eligible 3 and 4 year olds respectively ⁽¹⁾.

There were 2 760 registered pre-primary education providers in Scotland in September 2010, including local authority and partnership providers; 52 centres reported providing pre-primary education in Gaelic. The majority of provision is in local authority run nursery classes or schools.

⁽¹⁾ However, these figures are based on a series of estimations and some children may be counted more than once if they are registered to receive local authority funded pre-school education at more than one centre.

There were 2 940 nationally registered teachers in posts providing pre-school education under a regular arrangement in September 2010.

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

Primary schools (stages P1 – P7) –primary secondary education – ISCED 1	5-11 years of age
Secondary schools (stages S1 – S4) – lower secondary education – ISCED 2	12-16 years of age

All children between the ages of 5 and 16 receive compulsory education.

(ii) Admissions criteria

Children are normally admitted to school at the beginning of the academic session in mid-August after their fifth birthday. Local authorities can set a date each year (normally 1 March) so that children born before that date can start school the August before their fifth birthday. In practice this generally means children born between the day term starts in August and the 28/29 February can start school before they are five. There are no restrictions on entrance e.g. entrance examinations.

Most education authorities allocate children to schools in their area by defining catchment areas for each school. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as amended in 1981 and 2000, allows parents to express a preference for the particular school they want their child to attend, even if they do not live within the catchment area for that school. If parents express a preference for a particular school (through a 'placing request'), the education authority has a duty to grant the request wherever possible. Parents have a right to appeal against an education authority's decision not to grant their placing request, first to the authority itself and then to a court. Pupils are admitted to secondary education from primary schools when they have completed seven years of primary education.

(iii) Length of school day/week/year

Schools are open for 190 days a year. The local authority determines the actual dates of terms. The school year usually starts in mid-August and finishes around the end of June. Local authorities operate very closely to a standard norm for the number of weekly taught hours: 25 hours for primary schools (with reduced hours for infants) and 27.5 hours for secondary schools. The length of a lesson is usually between 40 and 50 minutes, and is decided by the school head.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

Since August 2001, classes in the first three years of primary school have had a maximum of 30 pupils. In mixed-age classes, local authorities try to maintain a limit of 25. The average class size in primary schools in September 2010 was 23 pupils. Composite classes had an average of 20 pupils. P1 classes had the smallest average size of single stage classes at 21 pupils. The 2010 pupil teacher ratio was 15.8 in primary schools and 12.0 in secondary schools. The 2009 pupil: teacher ratio in special schools was 3.6. The Scottish Government made legislation in 2010 to limit the number of pupils in primary one classes to 25 from August 2011.

Pupils are generally taught in mixed ability classes at primary level by a generalist teacher. At secondary level, there is usually a combination of some mixed ability and some setting by ability depending on the subject and at the discretion of the school and the local authority. They may be taught as a whole class or in groups within the same class in order to differentiate teaching. Pupils have different specialist teachers for each subject.

(v) Curriculum control and content

The curriculum in Scotland is not prescribed in statute; by law there are only two subjects which must be taught by Scottish schools: religious education and religious observance and Gaelic in Gaelic speaking areas.

The curriculum has been reviewed and revised in Scotland under Curriculum for Excellence (<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/>). The Curriculum for Excellence seeks to create a single, coherent curriculum for all children and young people from the ages of 3 to 18. It aims to ensure a better balance between knowledge, understanding and skills development in order to equip young people with the skills for learning, life and work they will need for the modern world. The framework includes a broad general education from ages 3 to 15 and then more specialisation in working towards taking National Qualifications in the senior phase (ages 16-18).

The framework places literacy, numeracy and health and well-being at the centre of all learning, in all curriculum areas, It emphasizes the important contribution to learning of the ethos and life of the school as a community, of the ways in which learning is organized, and of inter-disciplinary work. It also encourages recognition of young people's personal achievements within and beyond school, through partnerships which support learning with e.g. business, arts and community organisations, in addition to school-based learning.

Pre-school establishments and schools have been implementing the Curriculum for Excellence in full since August 2010.

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Children and young people's progress is continuously assessed, discussed with parents and used in planning the next steps in their learning and development. Curriculum for Excellence, *Experiences and Outcomes*, has been designed to provide a basis for tracking progression within the new curriculum. The levels are staging posts for charting progress, for reporting to parents and to assist planning. They also indicate national expectations of attainment. They are designed to embody the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors) – and to promote the key cross curricular skills of literacy, numeracy, health and well being.

Assessment for Curriculum for Excellence from 3-18 years puts the learner at the centre of the assessment process and emphasizes assessment as part of learning and teaching. The aim is to ensure that assessment and qualifications policy and practice is fully aligned with the intentions of the curriculum.

A key element of assessment for Curriculum for Excellence is the quality assurance and moderation approaches which support expertise in sharing, understanding and applying standards and expectations and build trust and confidence in teachers' judgments. An on-line National Assessment Resource (NAR) has been developed to support teachers' assessment. The NAR is an online resource for teaching staff which provides quality assured materials in a range of assessment approaches. Support structures at national level are being developed to ensure that quality assurance and moderation is fair and consistent and that local and national practices are aligned.

Under Curriculum for Excellence, all young people are entitled to a senior phase of education, which takes place broadly between the ages of 15-18 (S4-S6). The Senior Phase builds firmly on the Experiences and Outcomes a young person will have experienced through the broad general education to age 15 and the Curriculum for Excellence principles should continue to underpin the experience of all young people in their senior phase. This phase offers young people the

opportunity to extend and deepen their learning as they build a portfolio of qualifications which recognises their learning, enables them to continue to develop their skills and offers pathways to the next stage.

Qualifications in Scotland are based on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) brings together all mainstream Scottish Qualifications. The SCQF is the responsibility of a partnership involving the Scottish Government, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (Scotland) and Universities Scotland. The framework currently incorporates all the mainstream Scottish qualifications from Access to Doctorate level.

There are 12 levels on the Framework, SCQF levels 1 to 7 are covered by school education. Currently, Access 3, Standard Grades and Intermediates make up SCQF levels 3-5, Highers make up level 6 and Advanced Highers make up level 7. Usually levels 3-5 are taken in S3/S4, Highers in S5/S6 and Advanced Highers in S6. For most young people S4 is the last year of compulsory education but many will choose to stay on and complete S5 and S6 and do Highers and Advanced Highers which are the qualifications that are usually used to gain entry into Higher Education. These qualifications are managed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

There are no compulsory subjects/qualifications that a pupil must take within the Scottish education system. The precise number and range of qualifications on offer to pupils is a decision for individual schools and local authorities.

Forms of assessment depend on the qualification, but may include one or more of written, oral and practical examinations or continuous assessment. Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are generally not assessed through examinations but require candidates to demonstrate their competence in specified tasks.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) will introduce new qualifications from 2013/14 onwards as part of the implementation timetable of Curriculum for Excellence. The structure of qualifications will be: Access 1; Access 2; Access 3; National 4; National 5; Higher and Advanced Higher. National 4 and 5 will replace the current qualifications – Standard Grade General and Credit, and Intermediate 1 and 2. Foundation level Standard Grades will be replaced by the new Access 3. Revisions will also be made to the current Access 1, Access 2, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications. The National 4 and National 5 and the revised Access qualifications will be introduced from 2013/14, followed by the new Higher qualifications in 2014/15 and the new Advanced Higher qualifications in 2015/16.

There will be more flexibility as to when learners take these new qualifications under Curriculum for Excellence. Schools may well take the opportunity this provides to offer National Courses over 2 years. Bypassing qualifications at National 4 and moving straight to National 5 or Higher is likely to become increasingly common, although this may be a gradual process.

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

(i) Types of education

Secondary schools (S5 – S6) – general upper secondary education (ISCED 3)	16-18 years of age
Further Education Colleges – general and vocational upper secondary education and post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED 3 and 4)	16+ years of age

Please see section 4 for further information on the structure of the Senior Phase which overlaps the compulsory education with post-compulsory education.

(ii) Admissions criteria

There are no admissions criteria for continuing to ISCED 3 in a secondary school. However, in order to take some courses, the school may impose specific requirements. Admission to colleges is at the discretion of each college.

(iii) Curriculum control and content

Students choose courses of study leading to nationally recognised Scottish Qualification Authority National Qualifications from the range offered by the school or colleges (see section 4 above). Schools and local authorities decide on what and how to teach at this level, as with lower secondary. Colleges are entirely free to decide on curricular content.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

The structure of the Senior Phase overlaps the compulsory education with post-compulsory education. Please see section 4.

6. Higher education

(i) Structure

There are 19 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), comprising 16 universities and three other institutions⁽²⁾. HEIs offer university and non-university level programmes (degree and sub-degree).

Courses at higher education level are also offered by further education colleges (mainly Higher National Certificate –HNC- and Higher National Diploma – HND) and there are close collaborative links between the two sectors.

(ii) Access

All HEIs are autonomous bodies and each determines its own admissions policy and requirements for each course. In most cases, applicants require ISCED level 3 qualifications although other routes are offered to attract applications from people returning to study after a gap. In recent years greater provision for these students has led to the development of special access courses with guaranteed places for successful participants.

Since autumn 2000, tuition fees have been abolished for Scottish domiciled students and EU students who undertake full-time non-advanced degree courses. Some part-time students in receipt of state benefits may also be eligible to have their fees waived. In addition, a Part-Time Fee Grant is available (formerly known as ILA 500 and now administered by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland) this scheme provides up to £500 a year towards the cost of tuition fees. To qualify for this funding students should have an individual income of £22 000 a year or less. They must also be studying a part-time education Higher Education course, Professional Development Award (PDA) or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at levels 7-11 of the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) and complete between 40-90 SCQF credits per year. They must also be studying at a Scottish Institution. The Part-Time Fee Grant is administered by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS).

From autumn 2007, children of asylum seeker families, and young asylum seekers enjoyed the same access as all children to full time further and higher education as long as they meet certain criteria, including age and time resident in Scotland, which are laid out in the Amendment of the Students' Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2007.

⁽²⁾ The 16 universities include the Open University and the three other institutions are a School of Art, a Conservatoire (for music and drama) and an Agricultural College.

(iii) Qualifications

Within the three cycle system, students can study a range of courses at Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate level, including short cycle qualifications within the first cycle – a generally one year Higher National Certificate (HNC) and two year Higher National Diploma (HND). Bachelor level qualifications comprise a three year ordinary degree and four year Honours degree, although there is flexibility depending on the subject and/or institution concerned.

The Framework for Qualifications of higher Education Institutions in Scotland has been self-certified as compatible with A Framework for Qualifications of The European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Higher National Qualifications such as HNC and HND are administered by SQA – Scottish Qualifications Authority. Degrees are awarded by HEIs with degree-awarding powers.

7. Special needs

Pupils with special needs, or 'additional support needs' as these are known in Scotland, are educated within mainstream schools wherever possible, with targeted support, where this meets the best interests of the child. For pupils with very significant additional support needs, there is a variety of provision, including day or residential special schools or units and special classes.

Local authorities determine what special needs provision to make for their pupils, but for most pupils the provision is co-ordinated by specialist learning support teaching staff. The 2009 pupil: teacher ratio in special schools was 3.6. Approximately 99 % of pupils with additional support needs are educated in mainstream schools.

8. Teachers

In publicly funded schools, the total number of teachers in primary schools at September 2010 was 23 160, 92 % of whom were female and 15 % part-time. In secondary schools there were 24 849 teachers, 61 % female and 10 % part-time. In special schools there were 1 913: 80 % female and 14 % part-time.

School teachers in the public sector in Scotland are appointed and employed by local authorities, and do not have civil servant status. Their conditions of service are negotiated at the national level by the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), a tripartite body comprising membership from the local authority employers, representatives from the teacher organisations and the Scottish Government.

All who wish to teach in publicly funded primary and secondary schools in Scotland are required to have undergone initial training and to hold a Teaching Qualification (TQ) in order to be registered as teachers with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). Teachers who have achieved a Teaching Qualification (TQ) are provisionally registered with the GTCS. Through the Teacher Induction Scheme, all newly-qualified teachers in Scotland can gain access to a teaching post for one year immediately following qualification. Full registration then follows a period of probation and assessment (which generally lasts for one year). To become fully GTCS registered, probationers have to meet the standards set out in the Standard for Full Registration (SFR).

Most secondary teachers, after gaining a degree in the subject they wish to teach (e.g. Chemistry, English, and Physical Education etc) enter the teaching profession through undertaking a Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) course. A few enter through the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree route which is offered in a limited number of secondary subjects and a

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few through combined degrees which include subject study, study of education and school experience.

Teachers for primary schools and pre-primary education centres enter the profession through either a 4-year course leading to a B.Ed qualification or through a one-year PGDE (Primary) course. Graduates undertaking the PGDE (Primary) route are required to satisfy the entry requirements to courses of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland. All degree qualifications are acceptable for entry to the PGDE (Primary) course.

Information provided by the Eurydice Unit in Scotland – United Kingdom.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult EURYPEDIA which provides descriptions of educational systems and policies in the Eurydice network countries: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurypedia>