

Table 4

Recent education reforms

Table 4 provides an overview of the timing of the introduction and review of legislation and key initiatives in six key areas. Dates in blue indicate the current key legislation or initiative. Dates in a normal font imply that the major legislation has been amended without changing the major direction of the legislation/initiative. Dates included in the table only cover legislation/initiatives which are already in force. Pending legislation or initiatives awaiting implementation are covered in footnotes.

	Length of compulsory education	Promote pre-school education	Primary curriculum	Secondary curriculum	Standardised national assessment	Examinations
England	1973 2008	1998, 2006	1988 1995, 96, 97, 98 2000	1988 1995, 96, 97 2000, 02, 2006 , 08	1988 1996, 97 2002, 2004 , 2008	1988 2000 , 2008
Ireland	1937, 1998 2000	1994, 1999	1971 1999	1989 1994 1995	1989 1999 2007	1989 1995
N. Ireland	1973 1989	1998	2004 2006	2006	1989 1996, 98 2006	1989, 1998 2000, 02, 04, 05 2006 , 2008
Scotland	1947 1980	1947 1968	1989 2000 2004	1977, 1987 1999, 2000 2004	1991 2003 2004 , 2005	1980, 1992, 99 2002, 04, 05
Wales	1973	1998 2001 2008	1988 1995, 96, 97 2000, 01, 03 2008	1988 1995, 96, 97 2000, 01, 03, 04 2008	1988 1996, 97, 99 2001 2004 , 06	1988 1996, 97 2000, 01, 2007 , 2008

Continued

	Length of compulsory education	Promote pre-school education	Primary curriculum	Secondary curriculum	Standardised national assessment	Examinations
France	1936 1959	1989	1991, 95 2002, 05 , 06, 2008	1995, 99 2001, 05 , 06, 09	1985, 89	1985, 87 1999 2001, 05
• Germany	n/a	1993, 96	1994	1993, 96	2002	1971 1994, 97, 99 2005
Hungary	1993, 96		1993, 95, 99	1993, 95, 99 2000	1993, 95, 96, 99 2004	1993, 96 2002
Italy	1999 2006	1968 1991	1985 1991 2004, 07	1979 2001 , 04, 07	1977 1996, 97 2007	1979 1992, 97 2004
Netherlands	1981	1981	1993, 95, 98 2003, 06	1993, 98, 99 2003, 06	2006	1998, 99
Spain	1990	1990 2006	1990 2006	1990, 92, 93 2006	1990 2006	1990 2006
Sweden	1985	1991, 98	1965 1994, 98	1965 1994, 98 2000	1995 2000, 09	1969 1995 2000
• Switzerland	1970	n/a	n/a	n/a	1968 1994 2002	1968 1994
• Australia	n/a	n/a	1991	1991	1991, 97 2008	n/a
• Canada	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1989 2003, 07	n/a
Japan	1947 2006	1947 2006	1989 1998	1989 1998	1964 2007	1994
Korea	1949 1997	1969 1982 1999 2007	1992 1997 2007	1992 1997 2007	1987 1995, 99 2000	1974 1991, 95, 97, 98
New Zealand	1993	1989 1996 2002	1991, 93 2007	1991, 93 2007	1995, 97	2002 , 07
Singapore	2000	2000	1997 2001 , 08	1997 2001 , 02	1997 2001	2002 , 03
• South Africa	1996	2002	1998 2002	1998 2002	1998 2005	1995 2001, 08
• USA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1969 2002	n/a

Notes

- England** The Education and Skills Act 2008 introduced a requirement for all young people to participate in (at least part-time) education and training until their 18th birthday. The first cohort to be affected by the changes began secondary education (Year 7, age 11) in September 2008. The minimum age at which young people can leave learning will be raised in two stages – to 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015. In 2006, the weekly free entitlement of 12.5 hours of early education and childcare for 3- and 4-year-olds was extended from 33 weeks per year to 38 weeks. By 2010, all 3- and 4-year-olds will be entitled to 15 hours of free early education and childcare provision. A review of the primary curriculum is underway in 2008/09. In September 2008, a new secondary curriculum came into force and 14- to 19-year-olds began to have access to a range of new specialised diplomas. Also in that month, revised GCE A Levels began to be introduced.
- Ireland** The Education (Welfare) Act of 2000 raised the school leaving age from 15 to 16 or the completion of three full years of second level education. This was implemented in the 2002/03 school year. A White Paper on early childhood education 'Ready to Learn' was published in 1999 and a consultative document 'Towards a Framework for Early Learning' was published in 2004. The framework for early learning is being launched and disseminated in 2009. A review of the primary curriculum has recently been completed. In 2007, all children at the end of Year 1 or the beginning of Year 2 and at the end of Year 4 or the beginning of Year 5 of primary education began to take standardised tests in reading (English) and mathematics.
- Northern Ireland** Under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, revised statutory curriculum and assessment arrangements for primary and secondary education are being implemented gradually from September 2007. Revised GCE A Levels also began to be introduced from September 2008.
- Scotland** The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 empowered local authority social work departments to set up day nurseries to care for children across the whole pre-school age group and to provide pre-school education for the older child. A new curriculum for 3- to 18-year-olds was proposed in the 2004 document 'A Curriculum for Excellence'. The framework for teaching and learning for Curriculum for Excellence was formally launched in spring 2009. The Scottish Government is currently consulting on the next generation of National Qualifications.
- Wales** A new 'foundation phase' of education for three- to seven-year-olds began to be introduced in September 2008. At that time, a revised curriculum for 3- to 19-year-olds also began to be introduced. Changes to the national assessment system in Wales mean that statutory assessment at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3 (ages 7, 11 and 14 respectively) is by teacher assessment only. Following a successful pilot, the new Welsh Baccalaureate (16+) qualification has been being introduced in a staged rollout since September 2007, and revised GCE A Levels began to be introduced in September 2008.
- France** Compulsory schooling was extended to 14 in 1936 and 16 in 1959. Following extensive revisions, a new primary programme of study began to be introduced from the beginning of the 2008 school year. Similar new programmes of study were introduced to lower secondary education at the start of the 2009 school year.
- **Germany** National tests to assess performance against common standards in primary and lower secondary education are being introduced gradually. The process began in the 2004/05 school year, based on an agreement of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Culture of the 16 German Länder first signed in 2002.

Hungary	The school leaving age was raised to 16, as a result of 1993 legislation, and to 18 in 1996. As a result, those children commencing compulsory education from September 1998 had to remain in education until the age of 18.
Italy	New legislation makes provision for compulsory education to last 10 years, from age 6 to 16. It is scheduled to come into effect from the 2009/10 academic year. In 2004, the 'primo ciclo' (first cycle of education, consisting of five years of primary education and three years of lower secondary) was introduced. Schools are currently required to apply the 2007 Guidelines for the Curriculum, whilst bearing in mind some aspects of the 2004 guidelines. Reform of the upper secondary curriculum is also imminent.
Netherlands	The Primary Education Act 1981, which lowered the starting age of compulsory education from 6 to 5 years, abolished separate nursery schools and brought provision for 4- and 5-year-olds into primary education, came into effect in 1985.
Sweden	Compulsory education normally begins at age 7 and lasts nine years. However, since 1991, 6-year-olds have been able to enrol in Year 1 of compulsory education if places are available. Since 1998 it has also been possible to postpone a child's entry to Year 1 of compulsory education until the age of 8. National tests for children in Year 3 (aged 9-10) were introduced in the spring term of 2009. The Ministry of Education and Research plans to introduce new syllabuses in all subjects in compulsory education in the 2011/12 school year and is planning a new Education Act in 2011.
• Switzerland	A draft national agreement on the objectives and content of education, including the introduction of curricular standards during compulsory education, is in the process of deliberation and ratification by the cantons.
• Australia	Education is the responsibility of individual States and Territories. There is collaboration through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). In May 2008, students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 (ages 8/9, 10/11, 12/13 and 14/15 respectively) took the first (NAPLAN) national tests in literacy and numeracy. NAPLAN is the National Assessment Programme in Literacy and Numeracy. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority has been charged with developing a national curriculum to be introduced in 2011. Aligned to this will be a national assessment and reporting programme.
• Canada	Provinces and territories control education; there is some national influence through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) which is responsible for national-level communication. The CMEC-developed national School Achievement Indicators Programme (SAIP) (standardised lower secondary tests) has been replaced by the Pan-Canadian Assessment Programme (PCAP). The first PCAP tests in reading, maths and science took place in spring 2007.
Japan	In 2006, the Fundamental Law of Education was revised for the first time in sixty years. Following a review in 1998, revised courses of study were introduced at primary and lower secondary level in 2002. In 2009, these are again being reviewed. New national standardised tests in Japanese and mathematics took place for all pupils in Year 6 (ages 11 to 12) and Year 9 (ages 14 to 15) in April 2007. The Education Ministry plans to fully implement new curriculum guidelines in elementary schools (6- to 12-year-olds) in the 2011 school year, in junior high schools (12- to 15-year-olds) in 2012, and in high schools (15- to 18-year-olds) in 2013.
Korea	The curriculum was revised in 2007.

- New Zealand** A new curriculum was released in November 2007 and is being implemented in schools between 2007 and 2010. The National Education Monitoring Project, for small samples of primary age children and children at the primary-secondary transition stage, began in 1995. Voluntary assessment on school entry was initiated nationally in 1997. A National Assessment Strategy (for compulsory education) was introduced in 1999. A modular/cumulative National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) (15+) began to be introduced in 2002/3 although it was launched initially in 1998. National standards, which set out descriptions of what students should know and be able to do in reading, writing and mathematics at different points in their schooling from years 1 to 8 (aged 5 to 13) were introduced in 2010.
- Singapore** Following legislation passed in 2000, six years of primary education became compulsory for children starting primary school in the 2003/4 school year. A new pre-school curriculum framework, drawn up in 2000, was launched in January 2003. Following a review of upper secondary education in 2002, a revised curriculum and more flexible educational pathways began to be introduced in junior colleges (ages 16 to 18) from 2006. In 2008, the Ministry of Education conducted a review of primary education, changes arising from the review are in the process of implementation.
- **USA** The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has been assessing students' knowledge nationally in reading, writing, mathematics, science and other subjects since its introduction in 1969. President Bush's 2002 national education reform strategy - 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) - signed into law statutory testing in reading, maths and science throughout the USA. In 2009/10, the Obama administration will be reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as part of the reforms being implemented under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

Sources/further information

The tables above indicate recent major reforms in specific policy areas. Where available, the date of the legislation or regulation which introduced the reform is given. A blank on the table means that the information received does not indicate that there has been a reform in the relevant policy area.

For further information on each of the headings used, see the following sections and their subsections of the full archive.

Length of compulsory education

Education Structure (ages 3–19) ⇒ 3.1 Compulsory education and 3.2 Educational phases (ages 3–19)

Promote pre-school education

Education Structure (ages 3-19) ⇒ 3.1 Compulsory education and 3.2 Educational phases (ages 3–19)

Primary curriculum

Curricula (age 3–19) ⇒ 5.2 Second phase: Primary

Secondary curriculum

Curricula (age 3–19) ⇒ 5.3. Third phase: Lower secondary or 5.4. Fourth phase: Upper secondary

National assessment

Assessment arrangements (information may be available on the introductory page to a chapter).

Examinations

Assessment arrangements ⇒ 6.3. Third phase: Lower secondary or 6.4. Fourth phase: Upper secondary, age