

NATIONAL REPORT OF UNITED KINGDOM (ENGLAND AND WALES)

Structure of the education system and parental participation

In terms of policy and administration, the United Kingdom is divided into four nations: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Since education is the responsibility of each individual nation, they have the power to legislate on all matters regarding education in their jurisdiction. Thus, in each nation, education comes under ministerial departments: in England, the Department for Education; in Wales, the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills; in Scotland, the Education and Lifelong Learning Department; and in Northern Ireland the Department of Education. We chose to study the current systems in England and Wales.

Since the early Eighties, many laws have permitted an increase in the level of parental participation in the management of schools. The 1980 Education Act also introduced the role of governor and the 1988 Act allowed parents to decide on a change in status for their children's school (*grant-maintained schools*). The classic distinction between private and state schools does not really apply in the United Kingdom. The education system tends to be a form of partnership between the State, Civil Society and the private sector. Schools are nevertheless required to follow the same core curriculum. There is a large variety of schools in the United Kingdom: 13 different types in England, and 4 different types in Wales.

There are a limited number of strictly private schools that do not receive state funding. Students pay their tuition fees, although scholarships are readily granted. No national programme is imposed, and schools may decide the length of their terms.

Parliamentary decentralisation in terms of education was implemented in Wales in 2007 following the 2006 Act of the Welsh Assembly Government, which allowed the country's National Assembly to legislate in a certain numbers of devolved areas, among them education. The structure of the school system is still very similar in England and Wales, due to the still relatively limited number of laws from the Assembly.

Local authorities have the duty to allow parents to express their preferences regarding the school of their choice.

In addition, it must be pointed out that there are several parent bodies, namely:

- **The Parent Teacher Association (PTA)** This association - whose goal is to improve the relationship between parents and schools – is a forum for exchange between parents and teachers, as well as a fundraising body for the school. Note that schools are not legally obliged to have a PTA.

- **Parental advisors** These advisors are on the school's board of directors, which is responsible for all major decisions regarding the school and its future.
- **Parental advisor representatives** These representatives are elected from the parental advisors to assert the views of all parents before local authorities in charge of managing educational affairs.
- **Parent council** In England, Foundation Schools and Foundation Special Schools must have a parent council, which the administrative council consults on the management of the school. It is also worth noting that in England the Ministry of Education encourages all schools to create a parent council. In Wales, on the other hand, the establishment of a parent council is not imperative.

Results

Regarding the indicators relative to international and regional instruments in the field at hand, England has ratified:

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
- The Convention against Discrimination in Education
- European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
- Protocol of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

However, it has not ratified:

- The United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers

	England	Wales	United Kingdom
Right to information	90	100	95
Right to choose	100	100	100
Right of appeal	100	100	100
Right of participation	72.5	72.5	72.5
Overall indicator	91	93	92

Right to information

The results obtained clearly show that the legal framework established in England and Wales guarantees that parents have all the necessary information.

Right to choose

School admission systems are based on geographical distribution and catchment areas, therefore the choice of schools available to parents is not as large as one might think. Moreover, the law stipulates that parents who enrol their children in state schools can state their preferences, but they do not have the final word on the choice of school.

Right of appeal

There is a significant variety of laws allowing parents to exercise the right of appeal with precise deadlines for each matter.

Right of participation

Due to the political structure of the United Kingdom, participation only exists at two levels: school and local. It should be added that given the variety of schools, types of parental representation vary greatly.

Conclusions

Many schools go beyond their legal obligations as far as information provided to parents is concerned. They are anxious to provide them with the appropriate information, especially information regarding admission (through collective prospectuses as well as school prospectuses).

As for the right of appeal, sufficient good quality information is provided, especially in terms of child referrals.

It should be noted however that currently schools have removed parental representation from the Administrative Board.

On the other hand, the skills of councillors do not currently meet expectations. On the one hand, training is not compulsory and on the other, the length of training varies depending on location.

Generally speaking, we must state that the legal framework in the United Kingdom has very favourable provisions for parental participation. We might even say that parents are at the very centre of the British education system.

