

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF THE UK AND THE USA

BRITISH SYSTEM OF EDUCATION



SCHOOL SYSTEM

There have been great changes in the educational system in Great Britain since 1988. A few education acts have been issued (from 1988 to 1994) to raise standards at all ability levels, to give parents a wider choice of schools and to make further and higher education more economically available to large numbers of people.

All children and young people between the age of **5 and 16** must get **full-time education**. Over 90 per cent of all school children attend schools maintained from public funds (state schools). Although overall responsibility rests with central government, most of these schools are financed and maintained by Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Education at these schools is free. Every publicly maintained school has a governing body which includes members appointed by LEAs, teachers and parents.

Besides this **state system** of education there are also fee-paying **independent schools** - private and church (for about seven per cent of children). Both types of schools are subject to official inspection.

Boys and girls are taught together at most primary schools and more than 80 per cent of pupils at state secondary schools attend mixed schools (in Northern Ireland it is less, in Scotland almost all secondary schools are coeducational). Most independent schools for younger pupils are mixed but the majority of private secondary schools are single-sex. The tendency, however, is towards more mixed education.

School uniforms are worn in most private schools and at many state secondary schools (especially Grammar schools). Children at some primary schools wear uniforms too, but parents vote about them.

Almost all state schools are day schools which have classes from Monday to Friday. The school day usually begins between 8 and 9 a.m. and ends around 4 p.m. It includes a fairly long morning and afternoon break and about an hour's lunch break.

The school year in England and Wales normally begins in early September and ends in the following July (Scotland varies a bit). The year is divided into three "terms". The first term lasts from September till Christmas, the second one from January till Easter and the last one from April till July. There are some holidays between terms. Students and pupils have usually six weeks holidays in summer.

The state system of education is divided into four stages: pre-school and primary education, secondary education, further education and higher education.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Pre-school education is provided by **nursery schools**. In England over one half of three- and four-year olds attend school and many other children attend pre-school playgroups, mostly organized by parents. (In Wales more than 70 per cent do so, while in Northern Ireland only about 15 per cent, but about 45 per cent start their compulsory schooling at 4).

There are not enough state nursery schools in Britain and people have campaigned for a long time to get more opened. There are private nurseries but these are expensive and a lot of families cannot afford them. Children start at 9 a.m. and finish at 3 p.m., they have their lunch at school and usually a rest in the afternoon. They play, paint, dance and sing and do the same things that all little children do. They do not have proper lessons.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary education is provided by **primary schools**. The working day begins at 9 a.m. and usually finishes at 3.30 p.m.

Compulsory education begins at 5 (at 4 in Northern Ireland), when children go to **infant schools** or departments (5 - 7). The infant school has its own building and playground and is next to the junior school, with its own building and playground. So, although you move up into junior school at 7 you do not have to change completely. There are usually about 35 children in a class and, in the infant school, as well as a teacher, there is usually a teacher's assistant. Also mothers (and occasionally, fathers) often go into the Infant Schools to help with painting, reading and practical lessons. Emphasis in the infant school is on learning through experience, through drawing, painting, musical activities, movement and play. Children learn to read, write a little and do simple counting.

Classrooms are bright and cheerful with children's work displayed on the walls and books, games and a computer in each classroom. The children usually sit in groups at tables and have drawers to keep their work in.

At 7 many children move to **junior school** or departments, where the work is more systematic. Children learn English, maths, science and technology, geography and religious knowledge. A lot of learning is done through project or topic work, with an emphasis on children finding things out for themselves. They also learn about the environment and, of course, do art, music and P.E. Children have the same teacher for one year and she teaches nearly all of the lessons in the class. Perhaps another teacher has them once a week for music or physical training. The government is discussing changing this so that there are more specialist teachers in the Junior Schools. The children would then have different teachers for different lessons. The usual age for transfer from primary school to secondary school is 11 (12 in Scotland).

SECONDARY EDUCATION

At the age of 11 pupils transfer from primary school to **secondary school**. About 90 per cent of state secondary school pupils go to **Comprehensive schools**. These were introduced in 1960s and the word "comprehensive" means all-inclusive. Most of these schools are very large and vary in size, 900 to 1,500 pupils is the most common. They take children of all abilities and provide a wide range of secondary education, both academic and practical, for all or most of the children in a district within the 11- to 18- age range (12 to 18 in Scotland).

About four per cent of children attend **Grammar Schools** which they enter at the age of 11 on the basis of their abilities. Grammar Schools offer a mainly academic education for the 11 to 18 or 19-year age group.

Six per cent of children attend **Secondary Modern Schools** which provide a more general education up to the age of 16, although pupils can stay beyond the minimum leaving age.

At the age of 16 students may leave secondary school and enter some type of training courses. 65 % of all children leave the secondary school.

FURTHER EDUCATION

All 16- and 17-years olds are guaranteed a place in full-time education or training and all suitable qualified people are encouraged to go into higher education. Almost 65 per cent of young people receive some form of further education (after the age of 16). Further education is provided both by the **top two classes of a comprehensive and grammar school** and by independent six-form colleges or tertiary colleges. **Six-form colleges** are schools which provide academic and non-



academic education beyond the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), while tertiary colleges offer a range of full-time and part-time vocational courses as well as more academic ones. Many students attend college part-time, either by day or block release from employment or in the evening.

When students leave secondary school at the age of 18, they can enter either - training courses or universities.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

In order to raise educational standards, the Government has introduced the **National Curriculum** in state schools in England and Wales and has given school education of 14- to 18-years olds a more practical basis. The object is to make the education more relevant to the working environment and to improve skills in science, technology and modern languages. Pupils in their last year of compulsory schooling are encouraged to undertake a period of work experience as part of their education. Previously, many students had tended to specialize too early, dropping important subjects like science, technology and foreign languages.

The National Curriculum defines **four key stages**, and **ten statutory subjects**:

key stage 1	age 5-7 (infants)
key stage 2	age 7-11 (juniors)
key stage 3	age 11-14 (PRE-GCSE)
key stage 4	age 14-16 (preparation for GCSE)

The three "**core**" subjects are English, mathematics and science and there are seven other "**foundation**" subjects - information technology, history, geography, music, art, physical education and modern foreign languages (in Wales Welsh is also a core or foundation subject).

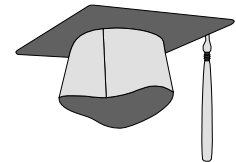
All children in key stages 1 to 3 must study the first nine of these subjects. In key 3 stage they must also study a modern foreign language (pupils in Wales must also study Welsh).

Pupils aged 14 to 16 must currently study the core subjects, technology, a modern foreign language and physical education plus either history or geography or short courses in both.

Parents must be sent an annual report on their child's progress at school, including assessment and examination results.

Also not part of the National Curriculum, religious education for all pupils, and sex education for pupils in the secondary phase are statutory requirements. All schools must hold daily collective worship. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from both religious education and sex education classes, and from collective worship.

The curriculum in Scotland and Northern Ireland is only slightly different.



QUALIFICATION

The main qualification taken by secondary pupils at around the age of 16 is the **General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)**. If the results are good pupils can stay on and prepare other two years for A-examination.

The **General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level** is normally taken after other two years of study in two or three subjects. GCE A level is currently the main standard for entrance to higher education and many forms of professional training. This examination is marked by a board, which is connected with universities. Three good A levels mean that the student has a chance to go to university or some other form of higher education. The Government would like to see more schools offer vocational qualifications; therefore it has introduced a new type of vocational qualification - the **General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ)** which will provide pupils an alternative to the more traditional GCEs and A levels.

The Scottish system is slightly different.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Children with **special educational needs** are educated in ordinary schools, wherever possible. Other children attend day and boarding special schools.

Most children of minority ethnic communities share the same schools as the British children. If they do not speak English well enough, they are given help to improve their English to be able to enter normal schools.

Schools and colleges provide careers education and guidance through careers co-ordinators.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

About seven per cent of children attend independent or private schools not funded by the state. These schools charge high tuition fees of about 4,000 a term for senior boarding pupils, but many offer scholarships. Independent schools range from small kindergartens to large day and boarding schools and from new experimental schools to ancient foundations. Around 550 independent schools for pupils aged 11 to 19 are commonly known as "**public**" schools, although they receive no state funding. Most independent schools for younger pupils are mixed, but the majority of private secondary schools are single-sex. Most schools require school uniforms.

Public schools accept pupils at the age of about 13 and **Preparatory schools** (called "prep" schools) prepare children for entry to the public schools.

Names of some of the most outstanding public schools together with the date of their foundation are: **Eton** (close to Windsor, 1440), **Harrow** (London, 1571), **Winchester** (1382), **Rugby** (1567), **Shrewsbury** (1552), **Westminster** (London, 1560), **St. Paul's** (London, 1509, day-school). These schools are very old but there are others which are even older: **St. Peter's** (York, 627) and **St. Alban's** (Hertfordshire, 948).

Most public schools are boarding schools and they have about 500 pupils but Eton is much larger. Some public schools are called "Colleges" (Eton College, Winchester College).

Although many independent schools follow the National Curriculum, their students do not have to pass tests. The quality of individual schools varies, but very often the most prestigious schools are very good.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Around 30 per cent of all young people in Britain go into full-time higher education. Higher education covers all post-school courses above GCE A level standard. Higher education institutions include universities, teacher training colleges and other colleges of technology, art, and profession allied to medicine. Britain has 89 universities, including the Open University, and 70 other HE institutions. All these institutions enjoy complete academic freedom, which includes appointing their own staff and deciding which students to admit, what and how to teach and which degree to award. British universities can be divided into three groups:

- **Oxford (1167) and Cambridge (1229)** - the oldest and most famous universities. In Scotland there are St. Andrew's (1411), Glasgow (1451), Aberdeen (1494) and Edinburgh (1583)
- "**Redbrick universities**" which were founded in 19th century - London (1836), Manchester (1851), Wales (1893).
- **Universities opened in 20th century**, mostly after 1960 - Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Reading, Nottingham, Exeter, Sussex, York. There are also new universities in Scotland such as Strathclyde in Glasgow, Herriot-Watt in Edinburgh, Dundee and Stirling. There were two waves of opening new universities after World War II. One in the 1960s when such universities as Sussex in Brighton, York (both 1963), Warwick in Coventry, Kent in Canterbury were established. The other wave came in the 1990s when 39 new universities were created.

The **Open University** is Britain's main distance-learning institution for adults (established in 1969). No formal academic qualifications are required to enrol in undergraduate courses, but the standards of its degrees and other qualifications are as high as other universities.

Most **university courses** last between two and four years. Sandwich courses, which include a period of work experience outside the institution, can extend the length of the course by up to a year, and medical and veterinary courses require five or six years. Although most students take degree courses, some are on sub-degree courses such as Higher National Diploma (HND) or Diploma in Higher Education (Dip HE).

Students, who start to study at university, are called "undergraduates". Degree titles vary according to the practice of each university. A **Bachelor's degree** (Bachelor of Arts - B.A., Bachelor of Science - B.Sc.) is given to students who pass examinations at the end of three or four years of study. Bachelors are called "graduates" and they can study further to get Master's Degree. The **Master's degree** (Master of Arts - M.A., Master of Science - M.Sc.) may be obtained by attending a postgraduate course or by writing a paper, or thesis.

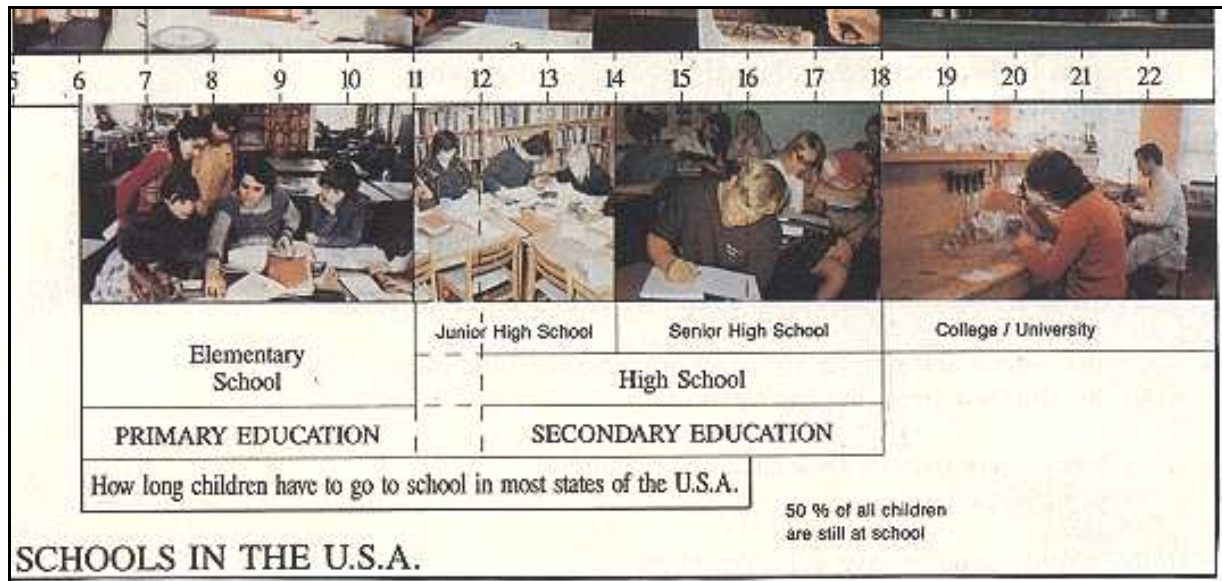
The degree of **Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy)** is given for a thesis both in humanities and science (e. g. Ph.D., in Physics, English, History, etc.). A medical student can either take his whole training in the medical school of a teaching hospital, or complete his training in hospital after taking a degree.

Those who do not want to study at universities can be trained in some training courses (in nursing, secretaries, banking, accountancy, manufacturing or service industry).

STUDENT FINANCES

Over 90 per cent of full-time higher education students are eligible for non-repayable maintenance and tuition grants from public funds. Parents contribute to maintenance costs according to income. Government-funded student loans were introduced in 1990 throughout the UK as a way of sharing student support more fairly between graduates, parents and the taxpayers.

AMERICAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION



SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND TYPES OF SCHOOLS

In the U.S.A. there is not a national system of education; it is mainly the responsibility of the individual states. Although the Federal Government often gives money to schools, it exercises very little control over administration or curriculum. **Each of 50 states has its own school system** and every state wants young people to go to school. The age limits vary 7 to 16 or 6 to 18. Every child gets minimum 13 years of education regardless to child's race, religion, sex, learning problems, physical handicap or ability to speak English. Education is different in various areas of the U.S.A. and there are usually grades 1-12.

All schools are controlled by an elected local body known as the **"school board"** and by the city and state in which the school is located. Therefore there is quite a large difference between schools in different cities and states.

The majority of all schools are **public schools**, i.e. publicly owned schools, financed by state or local governments. These schools are free. (Public schools in the USA never mean private schools as they do in England). Then there are also **private schools** which charge high tuition fees and this is why usually only children from rich families attend these schools. But nearly all private schools offer scholarships. Only those private schools which are financed by various religious groups or organizations are, however, much cheaper.

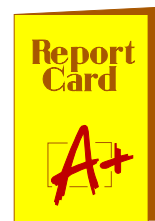
All public schools are **mixed schools** (coeducational - for boys and girls), some private or church schools remain single-sex.

School attendance is compulsory in the United States between 6 and 16 and the system of education is divided into pre-school and elementary, secondary and higher education.

SCHOOL YEAR, EVALUATION

Almost all state schools are day-schools which have classes from Mondays to Fridays. The beginning of the school year varies in each state from mid-August to mid-September and the school year ends in May or June. At some schools the school year is usually divided into three **terms** - fall, spring and summer - similarly as at British schools, at other schools into **quarters**. After each term or quarter children get a **report card** which informs their parents about their results at school, and at the end of the school year they get a **transcript**. Marks in most US schools are:

- A (excellent)
- B (superior, above average)
- C (satisfactory)
- D (passing grade)
- E (completely unsatisfactory).



The school day usually starts between 8 and 9 a.m. and ends at around 3 p.m. It includes a lunch break and sometimes free hours during the day. School **uniforms** are worn only at private schools.

PRE-SCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Pre-school and elementary education includes **nursery schools** and **kindergartens** which are for children at the age of 4-6. Most of them are private. Many public schools have kindergartens attached, for the age group between 5 and 6. These kindergartens do not charge any money.

Compulsory education starts at the age of 6. Both elementary and secondary education is comprehensive in the U.S.A. - it means that there is no selection for various types of schools (every school learns the same subjects). Years are called "Grades" in the U.S.A. **Elementary school** lasts between 6 and 11 years of age. It is from **the first till the fifth grade**. The children at elementary schools learn to read, write, and do arithmetic, elementary science, history, geography, arts and crafts, physical education and music.

The atmosphere at elementary schools is usually friendly. Teachers keep to the idea that children's happiness and interest are the two most important things.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary education is based on the ideal of mass education with equal opportunity for all. Over 90 per cent of students continue in school until the age of 18. Secondary education is provided by **Middle Schools** (from 11 to 14 years of age - sixth, seventh and eighth grade) in the areas where they exist, or by **High Schools** which are often divided into **Junior High School** (at the age 11 to 14 - sixth to eighth grade) and **Senior High School** (at the age of 15 to 18 - ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade). Where the population is very big, Junior and Senior High schools can be separate institutions.

In large towns or communities there may be a wide choice of secondary schools. In some places you may have the opportunity to attend a specialized school, such as a school for science, a school for the performing arts or a high school for the navy, or to go to the central high school in the area. If a student chooses to remain at the central high school, he or she, again, may have an opportunity to choose among a variety of subjects from traditional ones such as English, modern languages, mathematics, science, history, geography, civics, physical education and from many elective subjects (European history, world political issues, Business education, Foreign languages, Music, Driver education, Health, Computer skills, home management, Black history...).

Some schools may also offer **different programs of study**; some give an opportunity to choose a level of academic study which is known as a "track". The entrance to the most difficult programs or tracks, usually academic, depends upon what one would like to study in the future and upon one's marks which are also called in the USA "grades". If one has high grades and is interested in a certain field of study, one may enter the higher class, such as advanced biology or physics. On the other hand it is possible to study all subjects, but the level of instruction will not be as high. Students should take on average 17 subjects during their studies. Those who want to enter university should take over 20 subjects.

High schools generally organize much activity outside the classroom; many of them have football, basketball and baseball teams, an orchestra, a choir or a jazz band, and various clubs and societies.

High schools in the USA are comprehensive, coeducational secondary schools. The secondary school system does not include specialized vocational schools as in the Czech Republic, but some high schools may offer specialized courses or subjects, such as business, computer science, running a shop, or music and film appreciation.

QUALIFICATION

The basic school leaving qualification after successful completion of a broad secondary school curriculum is **High School Diploma** given to students (18) by the individual school or local school district. After passing an examination **General Education Diploma (GED)** is awarded but it is very exceptional. There is no national school-leaving examination in the U.S.A. but there is a national examination used to help to select students for college or university entrance - the **Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)** which is taken in English and Mathematics.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is extremely competitive and selective. About one third of high school graduates go on for some "higher education". The system of higher education consists of following institutions:

A/ THE TWO-YEAR OR COMMUNITY COLLEGES These schools provide continuing general, vocational and semi-professional education for people with a High School Diploma. After two years graduates are awarded Associate of Arts (AA) degree.

B/ VO-TECHS (VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS) They offer vocational and technical education in the courses from 6 months to 2 years. After finishing them people usually take an employment

C/ UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES **Colleges** provide undergraduate education leading to the bachelor's degree while **universities** provide both **undergraduate** and **graduate** education leading to the master's and doctor's degrees. Successful applicants are usually chosen on the basis of their high-school transcripts and recommendation from their high school teachers. But it is not enough to have a high school diploma and an interview to be admitted to some universities and colleges. There are two tests which are used by universities as standards for comparison: the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), which measures aptitudes in verbal and mathematical fields and the American College Testing program (ACT), which measures skills in English, mathematics, and the social and natural sciences. Foreign applicants must pass the TOEFL test (Test Of English as a Foreign Language).

Most universities and colleges offer **courses of 4 years** for undergraduates (the first-year student = Freshman, the second-year = Sophomore, the third-year = Junior, the fourth-year = Senior). **Bachelor's Degree** (Bachelor of Arts - B.A., Bachelor of Science - B.Sc.) is given to students after successful completion of four years' study. Some universities and post-graduate colleges award also **Master's Degrees** usually after other one to three years of study (Master of Arts - M.A., Master of Science - M.Sc.) and **Doctoral Degrees** after two to five years of study. Every university has its own curriculum. On the average, only about half of the bachelor degree students complete full four-year courses. Undergraduate students must select their "major", the field in which they want to get their degree, plus a certain number of "electives" or one "minor" subject.

The U.S.A. has both state universities funded by the individual states, and private universities (25%). The oldest and the most respected universities are usually private: **Harvard** (1636, Cambridge - near Boston, MA, founded by John Harvard, who was born in London and whose parents came from Stratford-upon-Avon in England), **College of William and Mary** (1693, Williamsburg, VA), **Yale University** (1701, New Haven, CT), **University of Pennsylvania** (1740, Philadelphia, PA), **Princeton University** (1746, Princeton, NJ), **College of Columbia** (1754, New York). **The Massachusetts Institute of Technology - MIT** (1861, Cambridge, MA) has acquired an outstanding reputation, too. On the West Coast, the **University of California at Berkeley** and the **University of California at Los Angeles** (UCLA) are held in high esteem, along with **Stanford University** in Palo Alto, California, near San Francisco. Harvard, Yale and Princeton - the best universities - form so-called "**Ivy League**".

Tuition fees are rather high at American universities, especially at private ones, and federal loans are not very big. That is why a majority of the students take on part-time jobs. In addition, there exist special schools, courses or programmes, both for children and adults with special needs all over the country such as for the physically or developmentally disabled, for single mothers, for old people or for the people who just need a slower pace. It is possible to say that within the US educational system anyone can study anything at any age.