

UK Education System

The UK academic year is from the beginning of September to the middle of July. Summer vacation is 6 weeks, from the middle of July to the end of August.

1. Nursery School

Between the ages of 2 and 5, children can (optionally) attend Nursery School/Kindergarten. There is no formal education given, but kids are encouraged to read.

2. Primary School

Between the ages of 5 and 11, children must attend Primary School. It is a legal obligation for all children. Here, they study, principally, the three Rs - Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic. In the latter years, they also study history, geography, English, French or German and basic science. Religious Education is taught in religious-orientated schools. All text books are provided by the government. Children must give the books back to the schools at the end of each school year.

3. Secondary School

Between 12 and 16, children must attend Secondary School (5 years of education). Here the students study around 15 subjects. Typically:

English, Literature, Geography, History, Mathematics, French or German, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Philosophy, Sociology, Art, Religious studies, Media studies, Combined science
(most of these subjects are obligatory but some are optional)

All text books are provided by the government. Students must give the books back to the schools at the end of each school year. At the end of the five years, students take GCSE tests (General Certificate of Secondary Education) - one for each subject. Grades are from 1 to 9, where 1 is the lowest, and 9 is the highest. Less than 4 is considered a fail. If students wish to stay in school, they must attain good grades.

4. Upper Secondary School

Students aged 17 and 18 can study for another two years, if their GCSE grades are good. In these two years, students select 3 or 4 subjects to study/specialize (from the list above). At the end of the two years, the students take A-level tests (Advanced-Level). Grades are: A*, A, B, C, D and E. These two years are preparation for university and the grades achieved will determine at which university students can study. All public schools are free and most provide a very good education. Private schools exist, but they are VERY expensive.

5. University

After the age of 18, students can apply to study at a university (minimum 3 years of education). Public universities used to be free, but today, students are expected to pay up to 50% of the course fees (depending on the family income). University quality varies a lot. The best ones are Cambridge, Oxford and London. Private universities exist, but they are VERY expensive. Students can ask the government for a low-interest student loan, which they must pay back from their salaries when they start work, over many years.