

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF GREAT BRITAIN

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In this article, we explain the structure of education in the UK at all levels — from kindergarten to doctorate studies. Read about higher education and admission to British universities in separate articles.

The educational system in the UK is considered to be among the best in the world. The U.S. News Report placed it in second place after the USA in its rating. Many decisions — especially concerning curriculum design and grading systems — are made by schools and universities at the local level. Thanks to this, studies are suitable for students with completely different needs.

Features of education in the UK

Comprehensive education. Already in the first grade, children study 10 compulsory subjects. Many schools also introduce additional classes. The range of disciplines covers all spheres of human life: natural and human sciences, art, technology, and sports. This broadens the horizons of the students and allows them to discover a variety of talents.

Early A few years before entering a university, it is advisable for students to already decide on the **specialization**. By high school, the number of subjects, on the contrary, is reduced. direction in which they plan to study. During the last two years of study — in grades 12 and 13 — students choose 3-5 subjects and focus solely on them.

Encouragement of independence. The educational system in the UK is aimed at developing the skills of critical thinking, initiative, and independent search for information at all levels. Even in primary school, students write essays and create their own research projects.

Good conditions for teachers. English teachers earn a higher wage than teachers in other developed countries, such as France, Italy and Sweden. In addition, they are sponsored by state grants and scholarships. This makes the teaching profession truly prestigious, attracting the most talented teachers to schools and universities.

Long term education. In Britain, compulsory secondary education lasts from grades 1 to 11 or from 5 to 16 years of age. In fact, most children study even longer: from 3 to 18 years of age, then moving on to university.

Conditions for foreigners. While education at public English schools is free, it is available only to citizens of the country. Children of foreigners enter private institutions, where the cost of education is 15,000-30,000 USD per year. At universities, the situation is the same: foreigners have to pay several times more than local residents. For example, at Oxford, the tuition is at least 35,465 USD per year (instead of 11,784 USD).

Equality in access to education. The UK government is trying to ensure access to education for all people, regardless of their social status. To do this, free public schools attract the best teachers, and universities pay scholarships to students from families in need

Preschool education in the UK

Usually, preschool education (known as Early Years) begins at the age of 2-3 years and ends at 5 years old. This stage is optional, but most parents prefer to send their children to kindergartens, which in England are called preschools or playschools. The state finances preschool education in the form of vouchers, with which parents can fully pay for their child's education in a public institution or cover part of the costs at a private kindergarten.

The main goal of preschools is to help kids learn to communicate and understand other people. There, they receive basic knowledge about society and the world around them, as well as develop literacy and mathematical abilities. Under the guidance of teachers, children play, draw, sculpt from clay, learn songs, and do exercises. Classes occur 15 hours per week, and the study load per year is 570 hours.

School education in the UK

Primary education

School education in the UK is divided into primary education and secondary education.

These stages are further divided into key steps. For primary education, these are:

- **Key stage 1** — ages 5 to 7, grades 1-2
- **Key stage 2** — ages 7 to 11, grades 3-6

In primary school, children learn English, mathematics, science, art and design, geography, history, music, and physical education. Students begin learning a foreign language in third grade. The school day lasts from 8:30 to 15:30 with a lunch break and additional 15 minute breaks.

The grading system in English primary schools is based on the expectation of how a child should develop at his age (expected standard). In total, four levels are distinguished:

- The student works at the expected level.
- The student strives for the expected level.
- The student performs below the expected level.

- The student performs above the expected level.

Each school sets its own specific criteria for evaluation. This makes the system more flexible.

At the end of their second and sixth years, students take standardized SATs. After second grade, children take tests in reading and mathematics, and after sixth — in reading, mathematics, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Secondary education

After graduating from primary school, students move on to secondary education. They are automatically transferred to state institutions, and for admission to private institutions, they have to pass specialized Common Entrance exams.

Education in secondary school is divided into two stages:

- **Key stage 3** — ages 11 to 14, grades 7-9
- **Key stage 4** — ages 14 to 16, grades 10-11

At Key stage 3, several new subjects are added to the basic subjects: the basics of social responsibility (citizenship), sex education, and career guidance. The whole program is divided into three main blocks:

- **Compulsory subjects** (core curriculum) — mathematics, English, biology, chemistry, and physics.

- **Optional subjects** (optional curriculum) — geography, humanities, art and design, dance, music, theater, and technology-related subjects.

- **Extended program** (extension curriculum) — these are additional subjects that are unique to each school. They often involve the creation of an individual or group interdisciplinary project.

High school education is divided into trimesters. At the end of each trimester, credit weeks are held, where students are assessed for how well they have learned the material. Knowledge is evaluated on a nine-point scale.

At the age of 14, students begin to prepare for the final exam — General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). It tests all of the subjects studied by the student and officially confirms graduation from high school.

This concludes compulsory secondary education. Those who wish to pursue university studies continue their high school education through the Sixth Form program.

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