



Researchers in Schools

An Overview of The Education System in England

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What are the stages of education?

Education is compulsory from the ages of 5 to 16, and from the ages of 16 to 18 young people must either be in full-time education or in formal training e.g. an apprenticeship.

The phases of education at different ages are outlined in the table below. You will be working in secondary education.

Early Years	up to 5 years old
Primary Education (Key Stages 1-2)	5 – 11 years old (School Years 1 – 6)
Secondary Education (Key Stages 3 – 5)	11 – 16 years old (School Years 7 – 11), or up to 18 years old (School Years 12 - 13) if the school has a Sixth Form
Further Education (FE)	16 – 19 years old, adult students
Higher Education (HE)	18 years old onwards (foundation degrees, bachelors degrees, masters and PhDs)

What are Key Stages?

Primary and secondary education is divided into blocks of years called Key Stages. As a RIS participant you will undertake initial teacher training to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in secondary education, covering at least two of the Key Stages 3 – 5.

- Key Stage 3 was originally developed as a three-year curriculum of study in 12 mandatory subjects, culminating in "SATs exams" at the end of Year 9. SATs exams no longer exist, and many schools have therefore chosen to deliver a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum, beginning Key Stage 4 studies in Year 9.
- Key Stage 4 is when Level 2 qualifications are taught, most commonly GCSEs. There are six mandatory subjects which schools must include in their curriculum offer. Key Stage 4 is a crucial stage of education and assessment for young people, and therefore schools focus heavily on securing the best possible outcomes for pupils at this point in their education.
- Key Stage 5 is when Level 3 qualifications (most commonly A Levels) are taught. Years 12 and 13 in secondary education are normally referred to as Sixth Form. Not all secondary schools have a Sixth Form and often pupils will move to a specific Sixth Form college to undertake Key Stage 5 study.

What is the National Curriculum?

The National Curriculum was introduced in England in the late 1980s. It provides all schools with a framework for which subjects must be taught, what the subject content should be and when subjects should be taught. For each subject, a programme of study detailing the topics that are to be covered can be found on the Department for Education's (DfE) website: <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum>

In addition, children in all key stages must be provided with a curriculum of religious education and, at Key Stages 3 and 4, a curriculum of sex and relationship education.

What subjects are studied at GCSE level?

Students must study English, Maths and Science at Key Stage 4. In addition, they will choose from a range of other subjects offered by the school to give a total of typically 8-12 subjects studied. Provision must be made to allow all students to access the arts (art, music, drama, dance and media arts, design and technology), the humanities (geography and history) and a modern foreign language.

What are EBacc subjects?

EBacc stands for English Baccalaureate. This is not a qualification itself, but a particular group of GCSE subjects identified by the government as facilitating progression to further study.

The EBacc is:

- Mathematics
- English Language and Literature
- The Sciences
- Geography or History
- A Language

You can read more about the EBacc here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc>

What are A Levels?

A Levels are academic qualifications offered at Key Stage 5. A Level exams are taken at the end of a two-year curriculum of study (instead of taking modular exams throughout the course). Most courses are assessed entirely through the final exams at the end of Year 13. Some subjects have a small (up to 20%) coursework component. Students decide which of the subjects offered by their school they will study. Students typically study three to five subjects.

What are AS Levels?

AS Levels are academic qualifications offered at Key Stage 5 which are equivalent to 40% of an A Level qualification. AS exams are taken at the end of Year 12 after a year-long curriculum of study. Until recently AS Level exams contributed towards achieving an A-Level qualification, but this is no longer the case. Schools decide whether they wish to offer AS qualifications as part of their Key Stage 5 curriculum.

Who sets the exams?

GCSEs and A Levels are written and examined by a number of different approved exam boards and schools can choose which exam board they use. The main exam boards in England are Pearson/Edexcel, AQA, OCR and WJEC. For each examination, the exam board creates a 'specification' that identifies the different units and content that make up the qualification. These are available on the exam boards' websites. Your school will be able to tell you the exam board they use for your subject, so you can become familiar with the material you will be teaching.

How are GCSEs and A Levels graded?

For GCSEs, a grade 1-9 (with 9 being the highest) is awarded. A Levels are graded A*-E.

Additional grading information can be found here:

<https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/03/02/gcse-9-to-1-grades-a-brief-guide-for-parents/>

How do schools measure pupil progress?

All pupils in all subjects will have target grades in Key Stages 3 -5. These grades will be based on their prior attainment in previous key stages. Schools will all have slightly different ways of calculating and using these grades.

How are state schools monitored?

Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) is a department of the government which was established in 1992 to inspect and monitor school performance. There are four possible grades a school can receive in an Ofsted inspection:

- Grade 1: Outstanding
- Grade 2: Good
- Grade 3: Requires improvement
- Grade 4: Inadequate

All schools aim to achieve at least a Grade 2. If they are awarded a Grade 3 or 4 then they will receive more frequent inspections to ensure the school is making the required progress. Ofsted reports are posted on the Ofsted website and the school's website. Often, the school's development plan will use the inspection report to guide the improvements to be made.

What is an academy?

Academies are state-funded independent schools that receive their funding directly from the government, unlike other state-funded schools, which are normally funded through their local authority. Academies are not required to follow the national curriculum and may set their own term times. However, they still have to follow the same rules as other state schools regarding admissions, special educational needs and exclusions.

They are run by an academy trust that employs the staff. Academy trusts are charitable trusts and therefore cannot make a profit. Some academies have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups. Sponsors are responsible for improving the performance of their schools.

You can find out more about different types of schools here: <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school>

What do teachers wear in schools?

In general, teachers are required to wear business smart dress. This usually means a suit and tie for men and women are expected to wear smart clothes, often including a jacket. Each school will have their own dress code that staff must adhere to.

What are teachers called?

In almost all secondary schools, teachers are either called 'Sir' or 'Miss' or their title and surname (Mr Smith or Mrs Jones). In most schools, this is not an option.

What do teachers do in addition to teaching their subject?

Duties – teachers are required to monitor a particular area of the school (e.g. the dining hall, the playground) at break, lunch or before or after school to ensure that pupils are behaving themselves

PSHE – Personal, Social and Health Education is taught to all pupils in England. In some schools this is done through other subjects but, in many schools, it is taught as a discrete lesson, often by form tutors. This includes citizenship and sex and relationship education.

Form Tutors – sometimes called tutor groups or mentor groups. This is a time, either once or twice a day, where a tutor/form group come together. It is used as a pastoral group to ensure that pupils are doing well.

Parents' Evenings – this is when teachers meet with the parents of all the students in a year group to discuss their children's progress. In most schools each year group will have one parents' evening a year.

Open Evenings – most schools have open evenings for prospective pupils and their families to look around the school. These are usually for Year 6 pupils who will be moving to secondary education the following year and for those progressing to Sixth Form.

What is the length of the school day?

The school day usually commences at 08:30 and finishes at 15:30. Some schools may start later, and some may not finish lessons until later. Staff will usually need to be in school after the day finishes for meetings, revision sessions etc. Most teachers will be expected to be in school at least 30 minutes before the school day begins.

How is the school year structured?

Term dates in England are formalised, with only slight variations. Most schools operate a three-term school year, each of which has a half-term break in the middle:

- The Autumn term is September to December.
- The Easter term is from January to just before Easter.
- The Summer term is from after Easter to the end of July.

Teachers cannot take holiday during term time for any reason.