

## **THE UK EDUCATION CURRICULUM:**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The United Kingdom or UK (essentially Britain) includes England, Scotland and Wales, and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there has been, in recent years, some independent government. And that independence affects the education systems (but not 'important' departments like defence!). So Scotland runs a slightly separate education system. Wales does too, in some respects. And so does Northern Ireland. But this document should give you a very clear and reliable overview of how the system operates in England, and much of it is still relevant elsewhere within the UK.

### **The PRIMARY YEARS (YEAR 1 – YEAR 6):**

There are three 'core' subjects in the National Curriculum – English, Maths and Science. Maths & English are tested at Key Stage 1, with Science being added at Key Stage 2 at the end of the Primary cycle. In addition children are taught History, Geography, Technology, Art, Music and Physical Education.

### **SECONDARY EDUCATION (YEAR 7 – YEAR 13):**

#### **YEARS 7 – 9:**

Children continue to be taught the same subjects as in the Primary years, with the addition of at least one foreign language. In Britain this is normally French (though by no means always). Welsh is taught in some British schools. German is popular. Science may be taught as an integrated subject or as three subjects (Chemistry, Physics, Biology) depending upon the school's policy.

#### **YEARS 10 – 11:**

This is a two-year cycle in which students prepare for the GCSE (general Certificate in Secondary Education) examinations. These are important for university entrance as well as for employment. Success in at least 5 subjects is usually required for eventual entrance to a British university and also for universities in other countries, since the British system is recognised in most countries throughout the world. The level of achievement in GCSE is the normal indicator of a student's capacity to study at A (Advanced) Level. Many international schools take IGCSE (International GCSE) rather than the normal British GCSE. This is administered by the Cambridge University board (UCLES) and is fully recognised as equal to the standard GCSE.

At this stage students will normally study up to 9 subjects, although in international schools the number of subjects taken may depend, for example, on a student's ability in English or a lack of background in certain subjects. This means that students have a limited amount of choice of which subjects they will continue to study; they may often be able to start a new subject as well e.g. another foreign language. The results of these examinations are graded, from A-G. The 'pass grades', acceptable to universities and employers, are A\*, A, B and C.

#### **YEARS 12-13:**

Following successful results in the (I)GCSE examinations, students wishing to go on to university or other institutions of higher education will take A Levels (or, in a number of international schools, the International

Baccalaureate (IB) – see below). This is another two-year cycle and is highly specialised, which is why first degree university courses in the UK are of only 3 or 4 years' duration. Students will normally study 3 subjects for A Level, though they may study for a fourth A Level, or perhaps an additional subsidiary level course (known as AS). The choice of subjects depends upon a student's likely course at university, and likely future career. For example, a student wishing to study Engineering will have to study Physics and Maths and one other subject; for Medicine, Chemistry is obligatory, normally with two other subjects out of Biology, Maths and Physics. A number of other courses, however, have wide flexibility in subject choices – for example, Law, Economics, and Business Studies. The school's Counsellor/Careers Advisor will usually help students and parents with the best choice of subjects and procedures for university entrance.

Acceptance at a British university will depend upon the results gained at A Level (and also take into account success at GCSE). Pass grades at A Level are A, B, C, D and E. Fail grades are N and U. The level of pass grades required will depend upon the demand for places at different faculties and universities. The most difficult universities to enter are normally Oxford and Cambridge, while the most difficult faculties will usually be Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry and Law. Because of the effect of supply and demand, some students may well fail to gain entrance with pass grades in 3 subjects of B, C and C, whilst others applying for lower demand subjects will easily be accepted with such grades.

International students transferring at a late stage to a British school (for example at the A Level stage, but not having taken the GCSE exams) should not be too concerned. British universities are flexible in their demands, especially with international students, and will offer places on the school's recommendation and likely results in their A Level or IB examinations.

Universities in other countries are normally acquainted with the British system, and will apply similar criteria to universities in the UK.

### **The INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE (IB):**

IB is similar to A Levels in that it is a final two-year course for entry to university. It is administered by the International Baccalaureate Office based in Geneva. There are currently something like 70 state and private schools and (sixth form) colleges in the UK which offer the IB. It is well established and is acceptable for UK university entrance as is A Level. It is also recognised by most countries throughout the world. Indeed, Education Ministries in some countries prefer it to the A Level system since, although similar in the level of achievement required, it is broader based, requiring six academic subjects to be studied.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The above description is by no means comprehensive in detail, but is intended to be a basic guide to the British educational system for those not familiar with it. It should also be added that changes in the A Level system are envisaged for the future: for example, a new style of advance course which complements or which can replace A Level, known by the letter GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification), is becoming popular. However, parents seeking a place at a British international school for their children will understand the essential structure from the description given above. They will always be able to find out more details from the schools which they visit or which their children are currently attending.

## A BROAD GUIDE to the EXAMINATION YEAR:

Year in School	Key Stage	Tests Taken	Time Taken	Purpose
1 – 3	1	S.A.T (Standard Attainment Test) English, Maths & Science only	Mid May Year 3	To assess student progress against national set of norms. Average anticipated grade level
4 – 6	2	S.A.T English, Maths & Science only	Mid May Year 6	As above Average anticipated grade level
7 – 9	3	S.A.T English, Maths & Science only	Mid May Year 9	As above Average anticipated grade level 6
10 – 11	4	G.C.S.E	Mid May – End June	To demonstrate final cumulative level of attainment in subject chosen to be studied in depth during year 10 & 11. Can be taken in year 10 by able students. Up to 12 studied. Marked A-G A-C considered 'good' passes. D-G considered a pass. U ungraded – fail. Assessment – coursework & exam.
		G.N.V.Q General National Vocational Qualification	"	Can only be taken in subjects that have an alliance to a vocational activity e.g. Leisure & Tourism, Sports & Recreation, Catering & Hospitality, Health & Social Care. Marking as above.
2 – 13	5	A.S. Level	"	Half way between G.C.S.E and 'A' level. Number studied 4/5/6. Anticipate dropping. 1 & 2 (depending on start number) to concentrate on completing smaller number at higher 'A' level.
		'A' Level		Highest school based qualification. Entry into Higher Education depends on grades and overall points score. Number studied 3 & 4.
11		G.N.V.Q		As in Year 10 & 11.
		N.V.Q		Seen as the vocational equivalent to 3 'A' levels. Again as for G.N.V.Q available only in selected vocational areas.