Schooling

Great Britain does not have a written constitution, so there are no constitutional provisions for education. The system of education is determined by the National Education Acts.

Schools in England are supported from public funds paid to the local educational authorities. These local educational authorities are responsible for organizing the schools in their areas.

Let’s outline the basic features of public education in Britain. Firstly, there are wide variations between one part of the country and another. For most educational purposes England and Wales are treated as one unit, though the system in Wales is a little different from that of England. Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own educational systems.

Secondly, education in Britain mirrors the country’s social system: it is class divided and selective. The first division is between those who pay and those who do not pay. The majority of schools in Britain are supported by public funds and the education provided is free. They are maintained schools, but there is also a considerable number of public schools. Parents have to pay fees to send their children to these schools. The fees are high. As a matter of fact, only very rich families can send their children to public schools. In some parts of Britain they still keep the old system of grammar schools, which are selective. But most secondary schools in Britain which are collected comprehensive schools are not selective – you don’t have to pass exams to go there.

Another important feature of schooling in Britain is the variety of opportunities offered to schoolhildren. The English school syllabus is divided into Arts (or Humanities) and Sciences, which determine the division of secondary school pupils into study groups: a Science pupil will study Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics (Maths), Economics, Technical Drawing, Biology, Geography: an Art pupil will do English Language and Literature, History, foreign language, Music, Art, Drama. Besides these subjects they must do some general subjects like Physical Education, Home Economics for girls, and Technical subjects for boys, General Science. Computers play an important part in education. The system of options exists in all kinds of secondary schools.

The National Educational Act of 1944 provided three stages of education: primary, secondary and further education. Compulsory schooling in England and Wales lasts 11 years, from the age of 5 to 16. British schools usually have prayers and religious instruction.

The National Curriculum which was introduced in 1988 sets out in detail the subjects that children should study and the levels of achievement they should reach by the age of 7, 11, 14 and 16 when they are tested. Until that year headmasters and headmistresses of schools were given a great deal of freedom in deciding what subjects to teach and how to do in their schools so that there was really no central, control at all over individual schools. The National Curriculum does not apply in Scotland where each school decides what subjects it will teach.

After the age of 16 a growing number of school students are staying on at school, some until 18 or 19, the age of entry into higher education in universities, Polytechnics or colleges. Schools in Britain provide careers guidance. A specially trained person called careers advisor, or careers officer helps school students to decide what job they want to do and how they can achieve it.

British University courses are rather short, generally lasting for 3 years. The cost of education depends on the college or university and specialty which one chooses.

Education in Britain

|  |
| --- |
| Class school age |
| Nursery school playground 3  Or kindergarten 4 |
| Reception class 5  Year 1 infant school 6 |
| Year 2 7  Year 3  Year 4 primary school (junior school) 8  Year 5 9  Year 6 10  11 |
| Year 7 12  Year 8 13  Year 9 secondary school 14  Year 10 15  Year 11 16 |
| Year 12 17  Year 13 six form college 18 |
| First year (fresher) University or Polytechnic 19  Third\ final year 20  21 |
| Postgraduate University |