**EDUCATION IN THE UK**

The UK does not have a single legal systém, although the systems in individual countries share certain common features:

* full time education is compulsory for all children in the UK until they are 16;
* schools are mostly coeducational;
* much emphasis is placed on improvements in school standards for pupils in the first years of education; and lifelong education.

There is little uniformity or central control over state education as it is administered by the Local Educational Authorities (LEAs): individual schools decide numerous things, including some aspects of the teaching programme

The **main emphasis** is on developing understanding rather than acquiring factual knowledge. Young people are expected to apply their knowledge to specific tasks.

**The school year is divided into three terms**:

* **autumn term** (beginning of September – Christmas) + 2 weeks’ Christmas holiday;
* **spring term** (New Year – Easter) + 2 weeks’ Easter holiday;
* **summer term** + cca.6 weeks’ summer holiday.

**Pre-school education (ages: 2 to 5)**

**Primary education** **(ages: 5 to 11)**

Compulsory education starts in infant schools (5 to 7) or primary school infant departments. At the age of **7**, pupils transfer to junior schools or move to the primary school junior departments. At each stage, the core subjects are English (Welsh in Wales), maths, science, technology, physical education, religious education, history, geography, art and music.

At the age of 7 and 11, pupils take the **National Tests** in English, maths and science.

**Secondary education (ages: 11 to 16/18)**

* Comprehensive schools, attended by nearly 90 per cent of pupils
* Fifteen City Technology Colleges run by private sponsors. Their curriculum focuses on science, maths and technology.
* Specialist state secondary schools: besides providing the full NC, they specialise in science, maths and technology, modern foreign languages, sports or arts.

At the age of **16**, students take the **General Certificate of Secondary Education** (GCSE) in ten subjects.

**Higher education**

Higher education courses are taught in universities, further education colleges and the Open University.

**The private system**

This system is independent of public funds, which means that tuition fees have to be paid. Private schools are attended by cca.7 per cent of British children. They provide education for the same age levels as the state system:

* Private nurseries and nursery schools.
* Pre-preparatory schools (ages: 4 to 8), which provide elementary education.
* Preparatory schools (ages: 8 to 13), which prepare pupils for studies at public schools.
* Public schools (ages: 13-18) are expensive, often boarding schools, many of them highly prestigious. The oldest public schools, such as Winchester (1382) or Eton (1440), were founded in the Middle Ages with the aim to provide education for sons of rich member of the middle classes; at that time, they were really “public”. Public schools are divided into houses. Each is looked after by a housemaster and senior students are prefects. In other respects, these schools have changed considerably in the past few decades:

**Universities**

Universities in Britain enjoy academic freedom: they appoint their own staff, decide which students to admit and award their own degrees. Universities select students on the basis of A-level results and an interview. Most students have to pay fees because there are ever fewer grants. They usually spend 3 years at university to be awarded a Bachelor’s degree (BA = Bachelor of Arts; BSc = Bachelor of Science), but some courses (e.g. medical) require a longer study. Achieving a Master’s degree requires 1 to 2 years of study (MA; MSc), and a doctorate (PhD = Doctor of Philosophy) up to 3 years. There are four types of universities in England and Wales; each group was founded in a different century:

**“Oxbridge”:** Oxford (1167) and Cambridge (1284) are the oldest British universities. They differ from all others by being federations of semi-independent colleges, founded at different times. Each has its own staff (known as Fellows) and all admitted students must first be members of a particular college before becoming students of Oxford or Cambridge. Oxbridge has the lowest student-teacher ratio in Britain (tutorials: one Fellow is a tutor to five to six students).

Universities founds founded in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century (**redbricks,** called so as most of them were built of red brick), mostly in industrial towns and cities, to provide education in technical subjects. They are organised like continental universities, into faculties and departments.

In the 1960s, a number of the so-called campus universities were constructed as compact sets of buildings. They were usually located in the countryside but close to towns (e.g. Sussex, Warwick or East Anglia). They have accommodation for most of their students on campus. They emphasise such academic disciplines as social sciences, as well as teaching in seminars.

**Civic universities** were originally technical colleges that were granted university status between the 1960s and ‘90s. They are flexible with regard to studying arrangements (e.g. they offer sandwich courses, i.e. studies interrupted by periods of practice outside education).

**Higher education colleges**

These institutions are maintained by local councils. Some of them are specialised, such as art and design or agriculture colleges. Others offer a wider range of courses in different fields. They also vary in size, from under500 to more than 10,000 students. Some award their own degrees and qualifications, while degrees and qualifications granted by others have to be validated by a university.

**The Open University**

This non-residential university was started in 1969. It offers degrees and other courses for adult students of all ages. Teaching is through a combination of TV and radio programmes, audio and video cassettes and distance-learning methods. Some courses require short residential courses in the summer. There is a network of tutorial centres in Britain for contact with part-time tutors and with fellow students. Students do not need formal academic qualification to register for most courses. OU degrees are comparable with those granted by residential universities.

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