

# NL

Netherlands



# The UK Education Sector

A Brief Overview

## **What can I find in this booklet?**

This booklet aims to provide you with a better understanding of the British education system. This information is aimed towards Dutch interested parties, with references and comparisons made to the Dutch education system.

The guiding principle is that mutual understanding of the education system will foster better conversation, the ability to ask targeted questions and improve collaboration. The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands works to strengthen sustainable relationships between the UK and the Netherlands in the fields of Education and EdTech.

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# Chapter 1. An overview of the British Education Sector

Education is compulsory for all children aged 5 (4 in Northern Ireland) to 18. Children start school (Reception or Foundation year) in September of the year they are age 4. Until they are 16 years old, children must attend a traditional school. After this age, they can stay in school or follow education via vocational, academic, and recreational options.

Across the UK, there are five stages of education: early years, primary, secondary, Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE).

## Types of Schools

In the UK, there are generally two types of schools:

State-funded schools: these schools receive funding through their local authority or directly from the government.

Private schools: charge fees and are not funded by the government.

Both private and state schools must be registered with the government and are regularly inspected by Ofsted. 93% of schoolchildren in England attend state schools, and 7% attend private schools.

# Overview of Education types per age

Age	Key Stage	Year in UK	Equivalent in NL	State school including community schools, foundation schools, Faith Schools, Free Schools Grammar schools and Academies	Private schools
4-5		Reception	Groep 1	Primary	Pre-Preparatory
5-6	KS1	Year 1	Groep 2		
6-7		Year 2	Groep 3		
7-8	KS2	Year 3	Groep 4		Preparatory or Junior
8-9		Year 4	Groep 5		
9-10		Year 5	Groep 6		
10-11		Year 6	Groep 7		
National Curriculum assessments				Comprehensive or Secondary or Senior	Senior (Public School)
11-12	KS3	Year 7	Groep 8		
12-13		Year 8	1 <sup>st</sup> Klas		
13-14		Year 9	2 <sup>nd</sup> Klas		
14-15	KS4	Year 10	3 <sup>rd</sup> Klas		University technical College or Further Education College
15-16		Year 11	4 <sup>th</sup> Klas		
GCSE Exams				Sixth form College	
16-17	KS5	Year 12	5 <sup>th</sup> Klas		
17-18		Year 13	6 <sup>th</sup> Klas		
A-Levels, T-Levels, BTEC, IB, ect.				University (Undergraduate)	Incl. Apprenticeships, Adult Education, specialist colleges etc.
18+	MBO / HBO / WO				
First degrees (with honours), Bachelors, SVQ, NVQ, Level 5, Diploma HNC or HNC etc.					
			WO	University (Postgraduate)	
PhD, Masters, Postgraduate Diploma's etc.					

## Chapter 2. Primary and Secondary Education (till age 16)

### Primary Education

Primary Education is divided into two stages:

Key Stage 1: from age 4/5 to age 7

Key Stage 2: up to age 11

Most state primary schools take boys and girls in mixed, co-ed classes. There were 20.772 primary schools with 5.480.508 pupils in the United Kingdom in the 2022/2023 school year.

It is usual to transfer straight to secondary school at age 11 or 12, but some children transition via schools catering for ages 8 to 14.

### Secondary Education

Secondary Education is divided into two stages:

Key stage 3: from age 11 to age 14

Key stage 4: from age 14 to age 16

Secondary Education offers mixed classes as well as single-sex classes. There were 4,172 secondary schools with 3.199.125 pupils in England in the 2022/2023 school year.

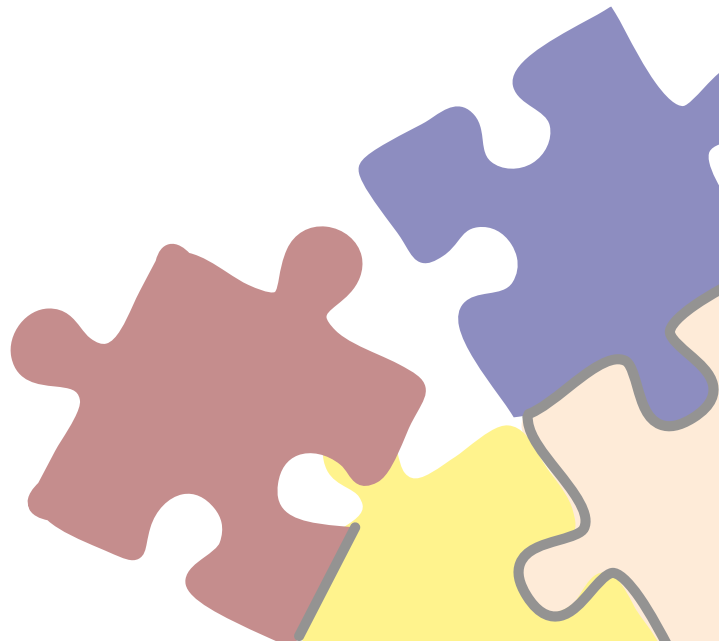
# The National Curriculum

The major goals of Primary and Secondary Education are achieving basic literacy and numeracy amongst all pupils, and establishing foundations in science, mathematics, and other subjects. State-funded schools in England are obliged to teach thirteen subjects:

	English	Mathematics	Science	Art & Design	Citizenship	Computing	Design & Technology	Languages	Geography	History	Music	Physical Education	Religious Education
KS1	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
KS2	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
KS3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
KS4	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓							✓

Secondary schools are also required to provide sex and relationship education. In addition to the compulsory subjects, KS4 students must be able to study at least one subject from the arts, design and technology, business and enterprise, and a modern language.

Private Schools are not required to follow the national curriculum.



## Testing

Children in England and Northern Ireland are assessed at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 through teacher assessments. These assessments do not determine admission to secondary school but inform parents about pupils' progress and give a picture of school performance. At the end of primary school, pupils do not receive a diploma.

Private secondary schools do their own assessments for admission to the school.

At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils sit for external examinations. Most frequently, these are GCSE in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and Standard Grades in Scotland, although other qualifications are available.

## Funding

The national budget in England for State-funded schools is almost £60 billion for the 2024/2025 school year. Schools will receive their highest-ever funding in real terms. These increases form part of the additional £9.8 billion investment in the school's core budget by 2024/2025, compared to 2021/2022.

This means that for 2024/2025, every state-funded school will attract at least £4,655 per pupil for primary schools and at least £6,050 per pupil for secondary schools. Local authorities distribute the budget to schools, and only a small portion of the budget can be spent freely.

Private or independent schools do not receive any public funding. In 2022–23, average private school fees across the UK were £15,200 per pupil.







## Chapter 3. Further Education

Further Education (FE) in the United Kingdom includes any study after Secondary Education (age 16 onwards) that is not part of Higher Education (i.e. not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree). It may be at any level, from basic skills training to higher vocational education such as City and Guilds or Foundation Degree.

Ages 16 to 18 years have to commit to one of the following:

- Stay in full-time education, e.g. at a college
- Start an apprenticeship or traineeship
- Spend 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering, while in part-time education or training

Colleges in England regarded as part of the FE sector include General FE (GFE) and tertiary colleges, Sixth Form colleges (for A-levels), specialist colleges such as colleges of agriculture and horticulture and colleges of drama and dance) and adult education institutes. In England, FE is often seen as part of a wider learning and skills sector, alongside workplace education, prison education, and other non-school, non-university education and training.

### Academic landscape for ages 16 to 18 years

Students who want to progress onto and achieve high-quality Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) academic courses build their study program on A-levels (Advanced Level qualifications).

A-Levels are a subject-based qualification. They are usually studied over two years, leading to qualifications recognized for entrance to HE institutes in the UK and many others worldwide. Most HE institutes require a minimum of 3 subjects.

Small qualifications can be taken along with A-levels for progression to an aligned HE subject or offer additional (often practical) skills. Examples are qualifications in Health, Performing Arts, or STEM subjects, such as engineering.

## Vocational landscape for ages 16 to 19 years

There are multiple options for students to receive a qualification that provides them with the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to progress to skilled employment or a higher technical study.

T-Levels are classroom-based technical qualifications developed in collaboration with businesses and education providers and introduced in 2020. T-Levels are a prestigious technical alternative to A-levels, providing direct entry into skilled occupations and progression to further and higher education. Every T-Level includes an industry placement with an employer focused on developing the practical and technical skills required for an occupation.

Occupational-entry qualifications support entry to occupations not covered by T-levels, as a more workplace experience is required to develop competence.

Specialist qualifications will cover recognizably specialist areas of skill and knowledge beyond those available in other technical qualifications, e.g. qualifications in low-carbon construction design, Surveying and Planning for construction.

The National Apprenticeship Service helps people aged 16 and older enter apprenticeships in order to learn a skilled trade. Traineeships are also overseen by the National Apprenticeship Service. These are education and training programmes that are combined with work experience to give trainees the skills needed to get an apprenticeship.

## Funding

In private Sixth Forms colleges, average annual student fees in 2022-23 were over £16,000 (after deducting an assumed level of bursaries and discounts). This is nearly three times more than state funded Sixth Form funding per pupil aged 16–18 in the same year (£5,600 per student in 2022–23). Funding per student aged 16–18 in Further Education colleges is higher at £6,800 per student.

## Chapter 4. Higher Education

Higher Education (HE) in England is provided by Higher Education colleges, university colleges, universities and private colleges. Students normally enter HE as undergraduates from age 18 onwards and can study vocational and academic qualifications. In 2021 there were 2,862,620 students in higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate)

Undergraduate degrees, such as a Bachelor's degree, are obtained through undergraduate courses that typically take three years. Classifications include Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc), Bachelor of Education (Bed), Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) Bachelor of Law (LLB) and Bachelor of Medicine (MB).

Other undergraduate courses include all other higher education courses such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND).

Postgraduate education taught courses and research degrees. The taught courses can give a postgraduate certificate, diploma or Master's qualification. You can get a Master's or PhD from a research degree.

As a result of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, former polytechnics and some other HE institutes were designated as universities in 1992/93. Students normally attend HE courses at HE institutions, but some attend FE colleges.

There is a perceived hierarchy among universities, with the Russell Group composed of the UK's more prestigious research universities. University rankings and league tables are produced by private companies and generally cover the whole UK.

## Funding & regulation

The Higher Education (HE) system in England is funded primarily through tuition fees. Due to binding caps on tuition fees that HE institutions can charge, nearly all courses cost between £9,000 and £9,250 per year. Direct teaching grants for universities only amount to around £1,100 per student per year on average. Only a few 'high-cost' subjects attract a substantially higher level of direct government funding. For most courses, total teaching resources per student amount to around £10,000 per year.

Next to student tuition fees, universities also receive income from government grants and research grants and generate income through charitable fundraising, investments and business activities such as 'spin-out' companies.

The state does not control university syllabuses, but it does influence admission procedures through the Office for Students (OfS), which approves and monitors access agreements to safeguard and promote fair access to higher education. Unlike most degrees, the state has control over teacher training courses, and standards are monitored by Ofsted inspectors.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent expert quality body with a remit to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in tertiary education in England.

## International Students

In 2021-22, there were 679,970 international students studying at UK Higher Education institutions: 120,140 of these were from the EU and 559,825 were non-EU students.

Chinese students made up the largest group of international students with 151,690 studying in the UK in 2021-22. China was followed by 126,535 students from India and 32,945 from Nigeria (up from 14,270 students in 2020-21).

## Chapter 5. EdTech in the UK

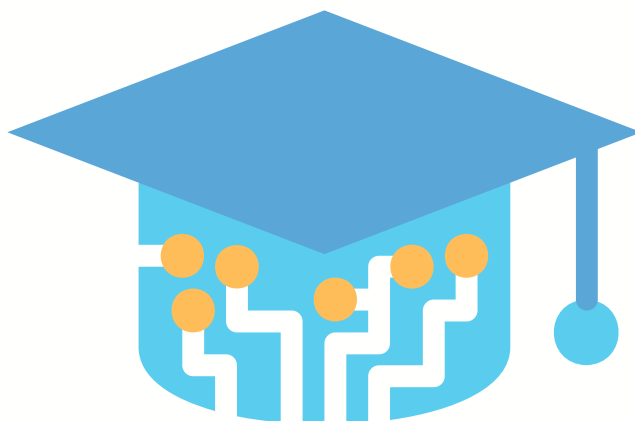
The UK is the top spot for EdTech in Europe. In 2022 there was investment of \$583 million in 81 deals.

The EdTech market in England accounts for almost 4% and 3% of the English educational (£101 billion in 2021) and digital markets (£148 billion). It is estimated that the EdTech companies generated between £3.7 billion and £4 billion of gross value added to the UK economy(GVA).

The largest investors in the EdTech sector from 2011 -2021 were Scottish Enterprise, Seedrs, Crowdcube and Development Bank of Wales. The biggest UK VCs are Brighteye Ventures, BGF and Emerge Education.

The biggest market segments within the UK EdTech ecosystem are management systems, learning content and resources, STEAM, tutoring and homework help and assessment and verification.

For more specific information about the use of EdTech products in schools and the process within institutes to choose EdTech products, we recommend reading the research report of the Department for Education, [The education technology market in England.](#)



# Links and definitions

Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. This is the English Inspectorate for Education.

GCSE's: General Certificate of Secondary Education, which a student does exams for after the 4th year of secondary school in various subjects. On the basis of the results of these exams the student can continue in school working towards A-levels, or study via another type of further education.

A-Levels: Advanced Level qualifications. These are comparable to the Dutch HAVO or VWO final exams, depending on the grade achieved.

Academy schools: state funded schools, independent from local authorities

Further Education Colleges: General further education colleges offer high-quality academic, technical and vocational education to people of all ages. There are 163 further education colleges in England, educating hundreds of thousands of students each year.

School leaving age in the UK: The age a student is officially allowed to stop going to school – this age differs per area in the UK. In some areas it is required to continue (and other kind of) education, or start working or volunteering after this age till the student is 18.

Qualifications: There a wide range of qualifications students can attain via further or higher education. Some of these qualifications have been developed together with the relevant industries.

HND's/HNC's: HND stands for Higher National Diploma, and HNC stands for Higher National Certificate. They are both forms of higher education qualifications that you can study for in the UK and some other countries.

## Contact Information



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*"In this day and age, it is impossible to have high-quality education and research without looking across borders. It is about joining forces with students, teachers and institutions from different countries. As an Education and Science Attaché, it is my role to strengthen the relationship between the UK and the Netherlands in these fields,"*

Says Laura van Voorst Vader - who started at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in London in 2021 after having worked in various senior policy advisor roles at the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science since 2013.

Since 2011, Lieke has worked within the Economic Cluster at the Embassy in London and took on the role of dedicated Startup Liaison in 2018. In the role, Lieke can play to her strengths of connecting people, thinking out of the box and bringing policies to life through activities and events. She loves the informal character of the startup ecosystem and is always ready to help startups and scale-ups.



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Start-up Liaison

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