



An introduction to the British curriculum

A guide for international
schools

pearsoninternational-schools.com/britishcurriculum



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About this Guide

Introducing a British curriculum pathway to your school

If you're thinking about offering a British curriculum pathway at your international school, this guide contains all you need to know about the British system and how it compares to the US and IB curricula.

It includes an easy-to-understand guide to the subjects taught, the qualifications learners take at different stages and the awarding organisations that offer them.

As the UK's largest awarding body, we believe the British education system offers learners the very best education experience and qualifications that are highly respected around the world and accepted by the world's top universities.

We would be delighted to support you in adding a British curriculum track to your school.

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Why choose a British education?

An enduring and deserved reputation for excellence

When you choose a British education, you join millions of international students around the world in opting for a flexible, respected learning pathway based on British education principles, and leading to globally recognised qualifications that open doors to the world's top universities.

The British system is the most popular curriculum in the world, offered at 30% of international schools globally and the most popular curriculum offered in Asia, the location of 58% of the world's international schools.

You can be confident that choosing a British education will set your learners on a pathway to global success.



Chosen more than any other curriculum

Over 160 countries worldwide offer their learners a British international curriculum pathway.

UK and International A levels are the most popular qualifications in the world, recognised globally and offered by 34% of international schools with a 16 to 18 provision, compared to just 26% who offer an IB pathway.¹

A worldwide reputation for quality

British qualifications are assessed by exams at GCSE and A level and regulated according to national standards to ensure learners have in-depth knowledge of each subject at each stage.

It is this rigour that leads to the British system being widely recognised as the gold standard for education by universities, employers and educators around the world.

A passport to the world's top universities

University admissions officers consistently rate A levels best for developing in-depth subject knowledge and expertise (81% compared to 79% for the IB Diploma).

Learners with British qualifications are highly valued, not only by British universities, but by universities worldwide. British qualifications are recognised and accepted for entry by more leading universities than the IB Diploma programme.

What is a British curriculum?

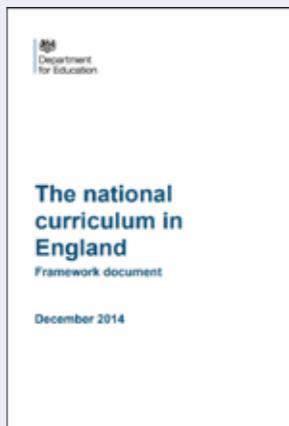
The most widely taught educational system in the world

A British curriculum is broadly based on the national curriculum for England (ENC), the statutory programme of study used in state schools in the UK, and is designed to ensure all learners receive a broad and balanced education. The ENC was established in 1988 and is the most widely taught educational system in the world.

It is an education system framework, created by the ministerial Department for Education in the UK, that outlines the statutory requirements primary and secondary schools should follow including programmes of study for all national curriculum subjects and the standards children should reach in each subject.

It includes organised and well-defined stages to provide plenty of opportunities for students to achieve their full potential and development checks to build solid foundations for progression.

The ENC is one example of a British curriculum – others include the Scottish and Welsh National Curricula and, for international schools, our own Pearson Edexcel iPrimary and iLowerSecondary curriculum. All of these curricula are based on the principles of a British curriculum.



A broad and balanced curriculum

The ENC framework is described as broad and balanced, because the national curriculum is one element of the overall school curriculum; there is time and space in the school day for educators to go beyond national curriculum specifications, giving schools the freedom to offer additional subjects and inject their own creativity to bring the curriculum to life.

Good to know

Pearson Edexcel's British international curriculum is based on these sound, proven principles but with academic content and assessments designed specifically for international learners.



ENC statutory programmes of study

The Department for Education in England is required to publish programmes of study which provide more detail and attainment targets each stage and subject. Programmes of study are statutory, making it a legal requirement to follow the national curriculum.

Schools can organise their timetable however they wish so long as the content of the curriculum is taught but they are required to publish their curriculum by subject and academic year.

The stages, statutory subjects and other subjects that make up the English national curriculum are detailed below:



Curriculum by Key Stages

- Early years foundation stage (EYFS)
- Framework for Key Stages 1 to 4
- Primary curriculum
- Secondary curriculum

Programmes of Study

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Art & Citizenship
- Computing
- Design & Technology
- Geography
- History
- Languages
- Music
- Physical education

Other subjects

- PSHE (personal, social, health & economic education)
- Religious education (in local authority-maintained schools)

A British curriculum by ages and stages

Comparison with the US and IB curricula

The British system is organised by year and age like the US and International Baccalaureate curricula but with the addition of Key Stages.

These Key Stages allow the curriculum to be broken down into manageable chunks and are useful for teachers and schools, as they allow them to monitor children's progress at each stage and assess any areas where they may need extra help. For learners, clear Key Stages help them gain a sense of achievement as they progress through each stage, keeping them motivated and on track with their learning.

Age	British curriculum	US curriculum	International Baccalaureate
3 to 5	Reception	Foundation Stage	Pre-K
5 to 6	Year 1	Key Stage 1	Kindergarten
6 to 7	Year 2		Grade 1
7 to 8	Year 3		Grade 2
8 to 9	Year 4		Grade 3
9 to 10	Year 5		Grade 4
10 to 11	Year 6		Grade 5
11 to 12	Year 7		Grade 6
12 to 13	Year 8		Grade 7
13 to 14	Year 9		Grade 8
14 to 15	Year 10	Key Stage 4	Grade 9
15 to 16	Year 11		Grade 10
16 to 17	Year 12	Key Stage 5	Grade 11
17 to 18	Year 13		Grade 12

Good to know

Some international schools choose to offer the IB curriculum alongside a British curriculum to provide a dual track for their learners - for example, International GCSEs are a great lead-in to the IB Diploma, as well as International A level, for schools who offer these routes for their 16-18-year-old learners.

British curriculum subjects

Core and foundation options at each stage

In state schools in England, where the English National Curriculum is compulsory, learners study a different mix of subjects at each stage of their British curriculum journey.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) caters to the very specific early learning needs of 3-5-year-olds in a pre-school or nursery setting and prepares them for moving onto primary school.

Across Key Stages 1 to 4 are core and foundation subjects. Core subjects have programmes of study and are compulsory at each stage, as indicated by the solid dots in the table below. Foundation subjects have programmes of study and must be offered by schools, but they are not always compulsory at each stage, as indicated by the hollow dots.

At Key Stage 4, learners follow GCSE courses culminating in high stakes assessments at the end of Year 11. Learners usually choose a mix of 10 compulsory and optional GCSEs and study these throughout years 10 and 11.

At Key Stage 5, learners specialise and take A levels or BTECs, culminating in high stakes assessments at the end of Year 13. Throughout all Key Stages, teachers are encouraged to stretch the brightest learners and provide differentiated support to those who need it.

Age	Ages 3-5
Year Group	Reception
Stage	Foundation Stage
Communication and language	●
Personal, social and emotional	●
Understanding the World	●
Expressive Arts & Design	●
Literacy	●
Mathematics	●

Age	Ages 5-7	Ages 7-11	Ages 11-14	Ages 14-16	Ages 16-18
Year Group	Years 1-2	Years 3-6	Years 7-9	Years 10-11	Years 12-13
Stage	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Key Stage 5
Core subjects					
English	●	●	●	●	
Mathematics	●	●	●	●	
Science	●	●	●	●	
Foundation subjects					
Art & Design	●	●	●	○	
Citizenship		●	●	●	
Computing	●	●	●	●	
Design & Technology	●	●	●	○	
Languages*		●	●	○	
Geography	●	●	●	○	
History	●	●	●	○	
Music	●	●	●	○	
Physical Education (PE)	●	●	●	●	
Foundation subjects					
Relationship and health education			●	●	
Religious Education (RE)	○	○	●	●	

From 16-18, learners specialise with A level / International A Level or other Level 3 qualifications such as BTEC qualifications in their chosen areas of study.

*At Key Stage 2 the subject title is 'foreign language'; at Key Stage 3 it is 'modern foreign language'.

● Compulsory ○ Offered/options

Curriculum regulatory organisations in England

Rigorous and high-quality assessments

British qualifications are assessed by exams at GCSE and A level and regulated according to national standards to ensure learners have in-depth knowledge of each subject at each stage. The rigour and quality of these assessments ensure learners with British qualifications are highly valued by universities and employers worldwide.



The Department for Education

The Department for Education is the ministerial department in England responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills.



The Department for Education

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) is an independent, non-ministerial department that regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. These include GCSEs, AS and A levels and vocational qualifications.



Ofsted

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It is a non-ministerial department that inspects services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.



British curriculum awarding bodies

Approved and accredited qualifications

For a qualification to be recognised as part of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) in England and Northern Ireland, it must be awarded by an awarding body, or qualifications provider, that is recognised by Ofqual in England.

There are hundreds of awarding bodies on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (covering England and Northern Ireland). Some specialise in specific subjects; others specialise in types of qualifications.

An awarding organisation does not always provide the courses that lead to a qualification but will provide an approval process for providers to be able to award qualifications that are accredited by that awarding body.

The table below shows the main awarding organisations for GCSE and A level qualifications.

The solid ticks indicate the regulated GCSE and A level qualifications providers, and the lighter ticks denote the international approach.



	Primary	Lower secondary	GCSE	International GCSE	BTEC	International A level	BTEC
Pearson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
OCR Oxford Cambridge and RSA			✓		✓		
Cambridge Assessment International Education	✓	✓		✓		✓	
AQA Questions matter			✓		✓		
OXFORD AQA INTERNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	✓	✓		✓		✓	
wjec cbac			✓		✓		

Good to know

As the UK's largest awarding organisation, Pearson provides all options, offering qualifications that are most closely aligned to the British curriculum.

British curriculum qualifications and assessments

Renowned for academic excellence

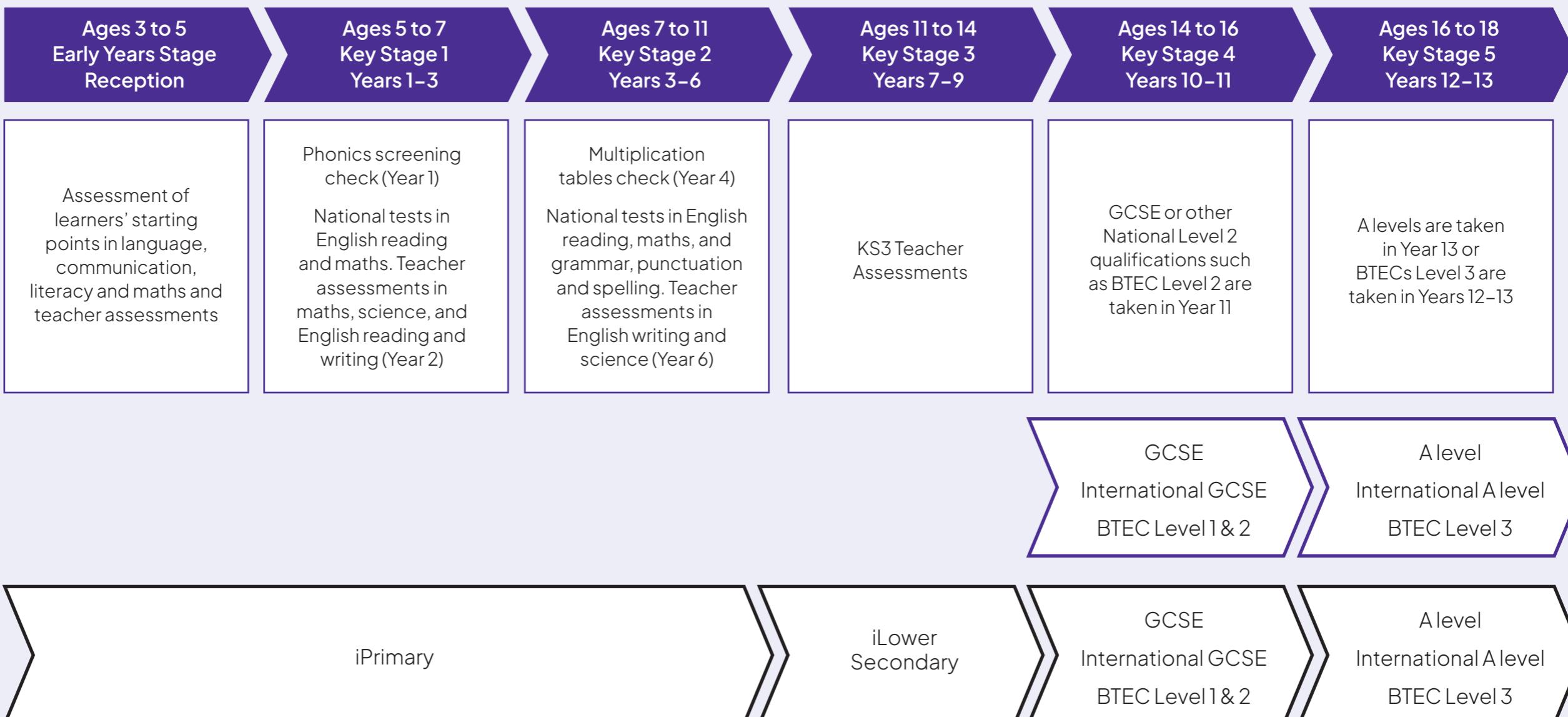
Renowned globally for academic excellence, British qualifications provide a passport to the most prestigious universities around the world, preparing students in the best way possible for their future career success and ensuring they leave school with the qualifications, skills and knowledge that universities and employers are looking for.

The well-defined Key Stages allow for assessments at regular points to ensure educators have a clear understanding of learners' progress. The assessments learners take at these various checkpoints vary according to age and focus, with high stakes external assessments only introduced in the later key stages.

Good to know

At Pearson, our specifically designed international academic pathway based on British curriculum principles is called iProgress.

It delivers a consistent learning journey for learners aged 3 to 18 through our iPrimary, iLower Secondary, Pearson Edexcel International GCSE and International A level qualifications, along with fully integrated curriculum support, teaching and learning resources and assessment at each stage.





UK and International GCSEs

UK GCSEs

GCSEs (General Certificates of Secondary Education) are globally recognised, subject-specific qualifications taken by 14- to 16-year-olds in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They have been used as a benchmark to judge student ability for more than 25 years and follow the 9–1 grading scale, with 120 Guided Learning Hours per qualification.

GCSE courses mainly involve studying the theory of a subject combined with some investigative work. Highly valued by schools, universities and employers, GCSEs are the first step towards further study at A level or direct entry into a range of careers.

International GCSEs

International GCSEs are globally recognised subject-specific qualifications with academic content and assessment designed specifically for international learners.

Like UK GCSEs, International GCSEs provide learners with the skills and knowledge they need to progress onto A levels, International A levels, onto university and into global careers.

This table shows the subject availability of UK and International GCSE qualifications using Pearson Edexcel qualifications as a representative example.

Age	UK GCSE	International GCSE
Subjects	Ages 14–16	
Accounting		●
Art and Design	●	●
Astronomy	●	
Bangladesh Studies		●
Business	●	●
Commerce		●
Computer Science	●	●
Design and Technology	●	
Drama	●	
Economics		●
English as a Second Language		●
English Language	●	●
English Literature	●	●
Geography	●	●
Global Citizenship / Citizenship Studies (UK)	●	●
History	●	●
ICT/Information Technology		●
Islamic Studies		●
Languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek and Spanish as separate qualifications	●	●
Languages: Italian, Japanese, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish and Urdu as separate qualifications	●	
Languages: Bangla, Sinhala, Swahili and Tamil as separate qualifications		●
Languages: Biblical Hebrew and Gujarati as separate qualifications	●	
Maths (including Further Pure Mathematics as separate qualification at IG)	●	●
Music	●	
Pakistan Studies		●
Physical Education	●	
Psychology	●	
RE/Religious Studies	●	●
Sciences (individual qualifications for Biology, Chemistry & Physics plus Combined Science (UK GCSE) and Science Double Award and Single Award (IG). Human Biology at IG only.	●	●
Statistics	●	

UK and International A levels

UK A levels

UK A levels, known as General Certificates of Education (GCE) or Advanced Levels are globally recognised, subject-specific qualifications taken by 16- to 18-year-olds, usually after Key Stage 4 GCSEs or BTEC Level 2 qualifications. They involve studying the theory of a subject combined with some investigative work and are designed to give learners the opportunity to develop intellectually and deepen their knowledge as they explore a subject in great depth. They comprise 360 Guided Learning Hours per qualification.

Learners typically choose to study 3 or 4 subjects: AS levels generally take one year to complete, and A levels are studied across two years. They are highly valued by universities and employers worldwide.

International A levels

Like International GCSEs, International A levels are globally recognised subject-specific qualifications with academic content and assessment designed specifically for international learners. They provide learners with the international outlook, skills and knowledge that university admissions teams and employers are looking for, and rigorous qualifications that are recognised globally as comparable to UK A levels.



This table shows the subject availability of UK and International A level qualifications using Pearson Edexcel qualifications as a representative example.

Age	UK A level	International A level
Subjects	Ages 16–18	
Accounting		●
Art and Design	●	
Business	●	●
Design and Technology	●	
Drama	●	
Economics	●	●
English Language	●	●
English Literature	●	●
English Language and Literature	●	
Geography	●	●
History	●	●
History of Art	●	
ICT/Information Technology		●
Languages: Arabic, French, German, Greek and Spanish as separate qualifications	●	●
Languages: Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish and Urdu as separate qualifications	●	
Maths (including Further Pure Mathematics as separate qualification at IG)	●	●
Music (plus Music Technology as a separate qualification at UK A level)	●	
Physical Education	●	
Politics	●	
Psychology	●	●
RE/Religious Studies	●	●
Sciences (individual qualifications for Biology, Chemistry and Physics)	●	●
Statistics	●	

Good to know

Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs and International A levels (IAL)[®] are studied in over 100 countries worldwide and in independent schools in the UK. They are comparable to UK GCSEs and A levels, equivalent, grade for grade, and recognised and accepted by universities all over the world. They embed the skills that help learners grow into resilient, curious and globally connected young adults, such as problem solving, critical thinking, leadership and collaboration.

Pearson Edexcel is the only awarding body to offer a choice of modular or linear routes at International GCSE as well as a choice of onscreen or paper-based assessments for many subjects at International GCSE and International A Level.

Project qualifications

Unique, self-directed learning qualifications

Project Qualifications (PQs) are unique to the British education pathway, offering a suite of qualifications through which learners carry out self-directed learning related to their current studies, or a topic that they are personally interested in, to earn an additional qualification alongside their UK or international GCSEs and A levels.

Highly recommended by schools, universities and employers, the Project helps students to develop as inquisitive, independent learners and encourages them to demonstrate a range of transferable skills including critical thinking and analysis, creativity, initiative, resilience, and problem solving. Through a flexible, study-based approach, learners work independently and with a tutor-assessor to plan, manage, complete and evaluate a single piece of work, which can take the form of a dissertation; a field study or investigation, an artefact, or a performance.

Project Qualifications enable learners to develop skills in self-management, project management, and academic writing and focus their learning on topics beyond their existing course content.



Good to know

Pearson Edexcel's Extended Project Qualification, taken in conjunction with Pearson Edexcel International A levels (IAL)[®] provides an excellent alternative to the IB's Extended Essay, developing similar skills and requiring comparable rigour and outcomes.

IAL is a registered trademark of Pearson Edexcel Ltd in the UK and other countries.

Level 1 Foundation Project and Level 2 Higher Project

Level 1 & 2 Project Qualifications can be taken at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 alongside UK and International GCSEs.

The Project is graded A* to B at Level 1 and A* to C at Level 2 and is equivalent to half a GCSE.

Both levels require 60 guided learning hours, and there is a single unit entry for the Foundation and Higher Projects, which covers all potential outcomes.

Level 3 Extended Project

The Level 3 Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) can be taken at Key Stage 5 alongside UK and International A Levels.

It supports learners with the transition to higher education or into the world of work, giving them the opportunity to develop higher level critical, reflective, problem-solving and independent learning skills through the planning, research and evaluation of a self-selected project.

The EPQ is graded A* to E. It requires 120 guided learning hours and is equivalent to half an A level.

BTECs

Career-focused qualifications

Established in 1984, Pearson BTEC (Business Technology and Education Council) is a progressive framework of vocational courses and globally renowned qualifications developed and validated in partnership with educators, employers and government to ensure their content reflects the needs of the modern workforce.

Offering an alternative to academic education with practical, hands-on learning experiences and available in over 15 sectors, BTECs are high-quality, career-focused qualifications that ensure learners develop and apply the knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers and universities are looking for.

Taken every year by over 1 million learners and recognised in more than 70 countries worldwide, BTEC offers an alternative vocational pathway to British academic (UK and International GCSE and A level) qualifications at a range of levels.

Good to know

Pearson BTEC qualifications are recognised by employers, universities and Ministries of Education around the world and are accepted by an increasing number of UK and international universities for entry onto undergraduate degree programmes.

	BTEC International Level 2	BTEC International Level 3
Age	Ages 14+	Ages 16+
Year Group	From Year 9	From Year 11
Subjects		
Applied Science	●	●
Art and Design	●	●
Business	●	●
Business and Hospitality		●
Construction	●	●
Creative Media Production	●	●
Engineering	●	●
Esports		●
Health and Social Care	●	
Hospitality	●	●
Information Technology	●	●
Land-based		●
Marketing		●
Music	●	●
Performing Arts	●	●
Production Arts		●
Sport	●	●
Travel and Tourism	●	●

The benefits of a British curriculum

Ensuring learners make progress in their lives

Choosing an international curriculum based on the British system means choosing a respected learning pathway with a deserved and enduring reputation for excellence.

A British curriculum pathway offers a very different learning experience to the US or International Baccalaureate curricula; it is steeped in the overarching aim that a British education is – and will always be – about making sure learners make the best progress they can in their lives, that they have the skills and knowledge they need to progress onto university and into global careers, and they have the acumen and outlook to make valuable contributions to society and their country's economy.

By these measures and others, the British system is widely recognised as the gold standard for education by universities, employers and educators, around the world.

But what makes it unique and the best pathway for your international school?



1

A globally recognised education system

The British system is the most popular educational system in the world. When you choose a British education, your students will join millions of international learners around the world that have opted for a flexible, respected learning pathway leading to globally recognised qualifications that open doors to the world's top universities.

Taught in over 160 countries worldwide, UK and International A levels are the most popular qualifications in the world; they are offered by more international schools than other curricula, enjoy global recognition and are accepted by more than 650 universities worldwide. In comparison, the IB curriculum is currently recognised for entry by around 500 universities only.

2 A focus on breadth and depth

The British system places the student at the heart of learning and is well-balanced, to provide both breadth and depth of subject matter. Unlike the more generalist US and International Baccalaureate curricula, British curriculum learners can specialise and focus their learning with UK and International A levels.

As part of the IB Diploma programme, students study six subjects from six subject groups, taking three, or occasionally four, subjects at higher level (240 teaching hours) and the other three, or two, at standard level (150 teaching hours). In comparison, students following a British international curriculum study between five and ten subjects at International GCSE and then typically progress to study three or four subjects at International A level, from a choice of over 20 subjects. Each International A level comprises a total of 360 teaching hours.

With a far wider subject choice and a greater depth of study within those subjects, British curriculum learners can decide whether they want to develop deep specialist knowledge by studying International A levels within a single discipline, or remain as generalists, by studying a broader choice of International A level subjects spanning multiple disciplines.



3 Clear and well-defined stages

Unlike the US curriculum, which doesn't explicitly define the stages of education, the British education system is organised into well-defined Key Stage blocks and learners are assessed at the end of each stage. This provides educators with a simple and clear overview of the progress each learner makes, and regular benchmarking ensures they have mastered the subject content at each stage, preparing them for high stakes assessments at UK and International GCSE and A level at Key Stages 4 and 5.

This clear understanding of progress allows for differentiation – stretch and core teaching – to ensure all students are able to achieve their full potential at each stage of learning.

4 Growth beyond the classroom

The British system aims to develop well-rounded individuals who understand the core principles of their subjects as well as how to use this knowledge in real-world situations. It places a high emphasis on sports, performing arts and music, which help students develop leadership and teamworking skills.

Like the IB curriculum, which at Diploma level includes a compulsory 'creativity, action, service' component where IB students take part in over 150 hours of non-academic activity, UK and international schools offering A levels will also include sporting, cultural and volunteering activities within their curriculum – such as the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award which at gold level requires 12–18 months' participation and a significant voluntary service element alongside physical and skills development components.

Good to know

Pearson Edexcel's Extended Project Qualification, taken in conjunction with Pearson Edexcel International A levels (IAL)[®] provides an excellent alternative to the IB's Extended Essay, developing similar skills and requiring comparable rigour and outcomes.

IAL is a registered trademark of Pearson Edexcel Ltd in the UK and other countries.



Why choose Pearson Edexcel as your British curriculum partner?

Our qualifications heritage stretches back over 150 years

As the world's leading learning company and the UK's largest exam board, Pearson's qualifications heritage stretches back over 150 years, our modular and linear qualifications are offered in more than 100 countries worldwide with a choice of paper-based and onscreen assessments, and we mark over 10 million exam scripts per year on behalf of the UK Department for Education.

Today, we partner with more than 6,500 schools, universities, and employers worldwide:

- at school level, to offer Pearson Edexcel International and UK qualifications to over 3.5 million students annually;
- at university level, to ensure Pearson Edexcel qualifications are recognised and accepted by universities all over the world;
- and with employers, by building 21st century skills into our qualifications at the outset, to ensure learners have transferable skills alongside the knowledge they need to progress into the careers of their choice.

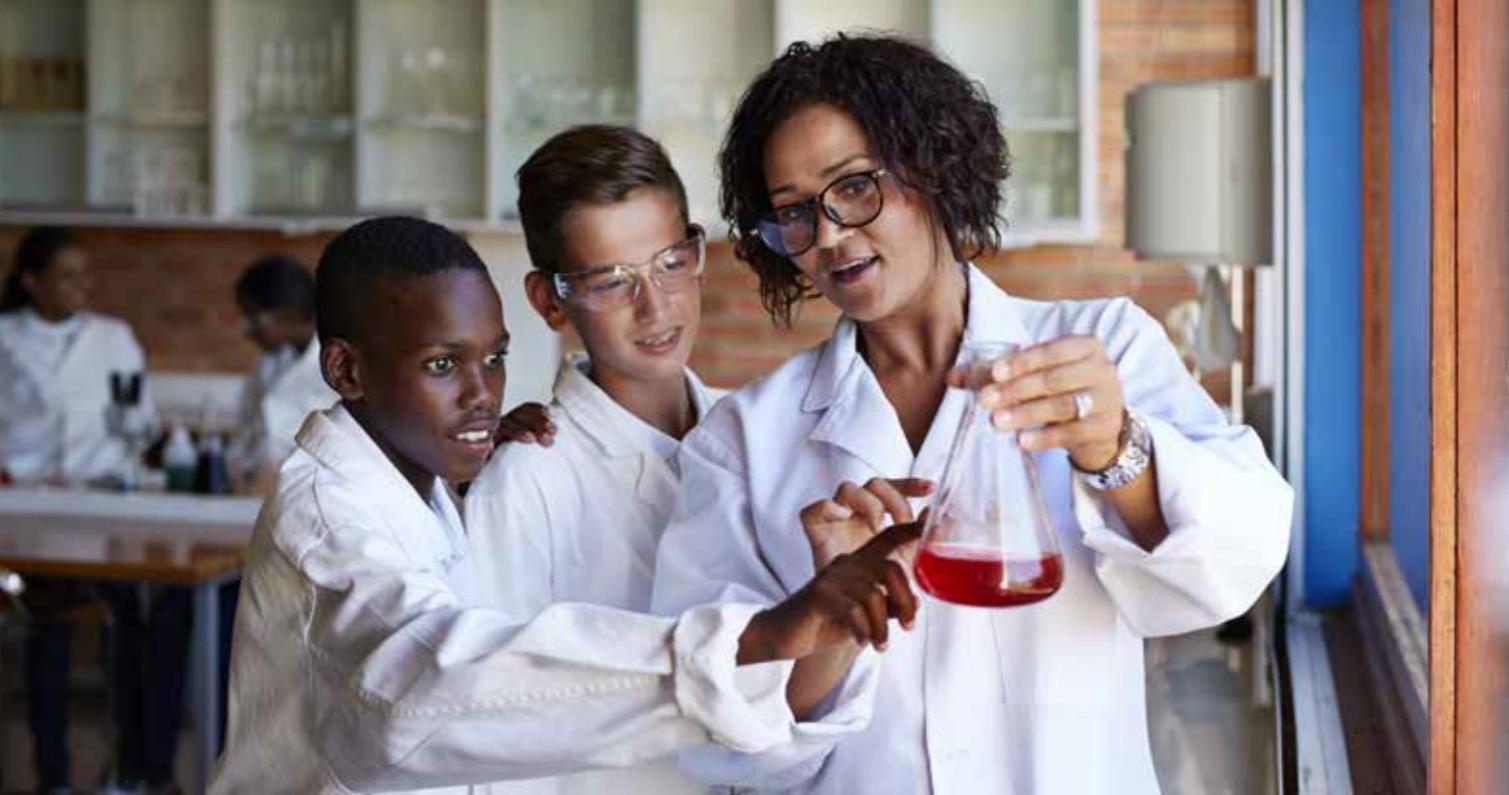
Pearson Edexcel is regulated by Ofqual, ensuring our curricula meet the highest standards and our exams follow carefully controlled procedures at every stage of development, delivery, marking and reporting. As the largest exam board in the UK, Pearson Edexcel regularly achieves the highest marking accuracy of all UK boards.

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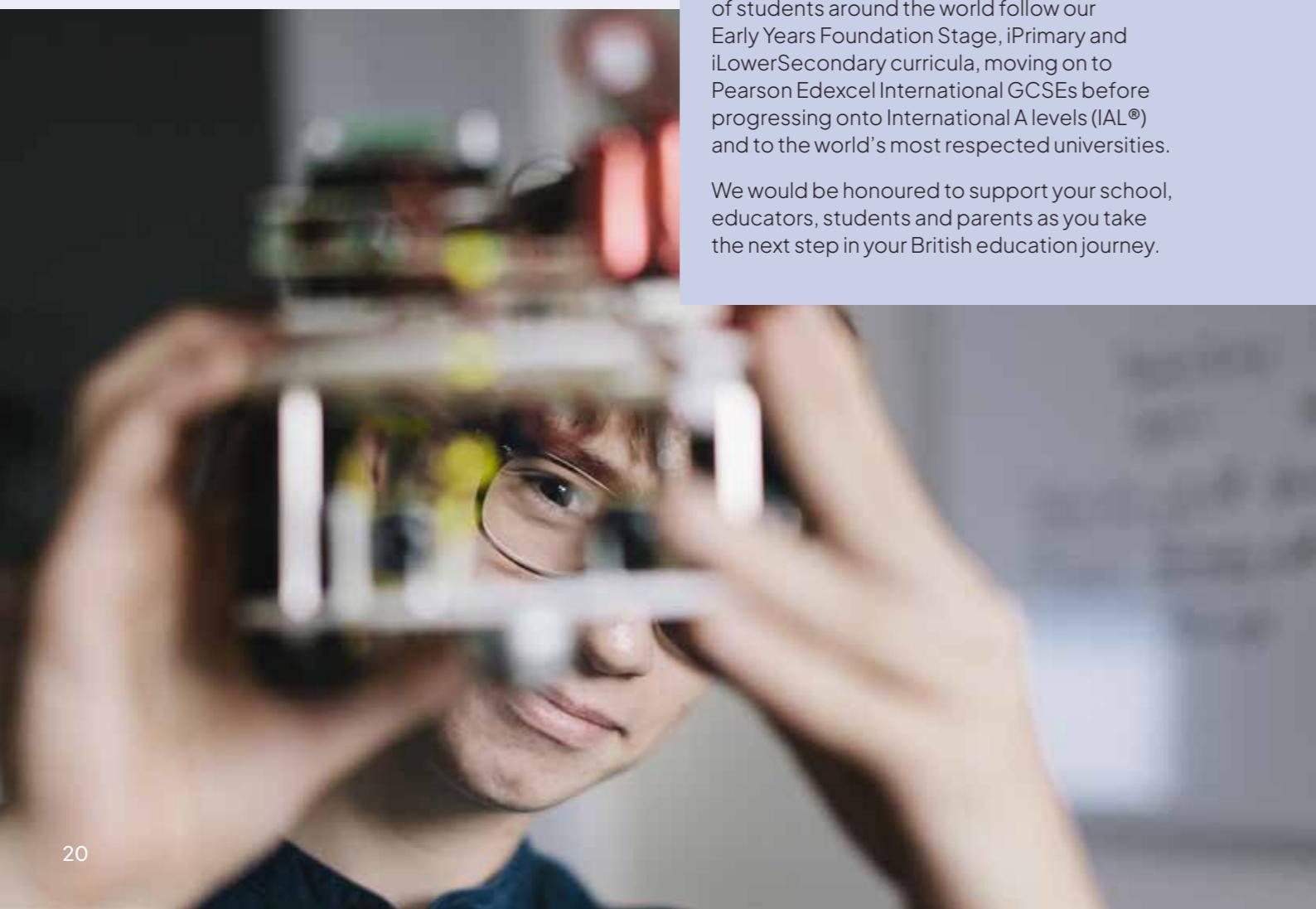
What this means for you

You can trust Pearson Edexcel's international qualifications and curricula; thousands of students around the world follow our Early Years Foundation Stage, iPrimary and iLowerSecondary curricula, moving on to Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs before progressing onto International A levels (IAL®) and to the world's most respected universities.

We would be honoured to support your school, educators, students and parents as you take the next step in your British education journey.



Notes:





Interested in Pearson Edexcel as
your British curriculum partner?

Contact us

Your in-county Pearson representative is on hand to help. Find
your local team at pearsoninternational-schools.com/contact

Find out more about us

- W For qualifications: quals.pearson.com
- W For international schools: pearson.com/international-schools
- W For more on the British curriculum:
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