

Guide to the British Education System

The diagram below illustrates typical progression routes taken through the British education system by students in the UK. Student who want to study at university have a choice of academic or vocational (i.e. career based) routes to their chosen degree.

Academic qualifications

Students following the academic route typically take GCSEs at year 10, followed by A Levels at Year 12, then enter university on a three year bachelor's degree course. This route is usually taken without a break, so students graduate from university at age 21 or 22 years. The material taught is academic in nature and qualifications are typically awarded by examination.

Vocational qualifications

Students following a vocational route may take BTEC qualifications at high school, then take a 2 year foundation degree, or a HNC followed by a HND (one year each). Alternatively, students may gain professional qualifications while they are in employment. These qualifications can be awarded by professional bodies (e.g. AEP, CIPD) or by employers (e.g. Virgin Atlantic). Vocational qualifications are modular and are typically acquired over the course of the student's career. Modules are typically awarded through a combination of assessment and examination.

BRITISH QUALIFICATIONS				NVQ Level	FHEQ Level
Year 10 (GCSE, iGCSE)		Year 10 (BTEC Firsts)		1-2	
Year 12 (A Level, IB)		Year 12 (BTEC Nationals)			
Bachelor's Degree Years 1 & 2	Professional & Employer Awards	Foundation Degree	Higher National Certificate (HNC)	4	C
			Higher National Diploma (HND)		
Bachelor's (Honours) Degree - Final Year				6	H
Master's Degree (MSc, MA, MBA)				7	M
Doctoral Degree (PhD)				8	D

National qualification frameworks

Vocational qualifications are measured on a scale of 1 to 8 levels, called NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Levels. Academic qualifications are measured using the FHEQ (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications). The levels are C (certificate), I (intermediate), H (honours), M (masters), D (doctoral). Taken together, these frameworks allow different qualifications to be compared.

International Qualifications

It is important for international students to understand the British education system and progression options for two reasons. Firstly, your qualifications from your own country will need to be benchmarked against the UK frameworks, so you can enter the British education system at the appropriate level. Secondly, you will need select a course that gives you the progression options you desire.

If you have any questions about the British education system, or need to know where your own qualifications fit in, please contact your student advisor for free advice and assistance.