**Site -** [**https://www.theschoolrun.com/overview-scottish-education-system**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/overview-scottish-education-system)

**An overview of the Scottish education system**



How does the school education system work in Scotland? What are the differences between the National Curriculum and the Curriculum for Excellence? We explain how students are assessed within both systems in the UK.

Scotland has its own qualification framework that is separate from the one set for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but each one is recognised around the UK. [England](https://www.theschoolrun.com/overview-english-education-system) and [Wales](https://www.theschoolrun.com/overview-welsh-education-system) follow the National Curriculum (with the exception of the Foundation Phase in Wales), [Northern Ireland](https://www.theschoolrun.com/northern-irish-educational-system-overview) follows the Northern Ireland Curriculum and Scotland follows the [Curriculum for Excellence](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/learninginscotland/about.asp) (also known as the CfE) for nursery, primary and secondary schools.

Children in Scotland complete seven years of primary school, starting in P1 (the equivalent of Reception classes in England), going up to P7 (the equivalent of Year 7 in England). After this, they do six years of secondary school from S1 to S6 (equivalent to Y8 to Y13 in England). Secondary schools in Scotland are also known as high schools or academies.

## What is the Curriculum for Excellence?

The Curriculum for Excellence is a major educational reform with the aim of providing a wider, more flexible range of courses and subjects. As the Scottish government only sets guidelines about the school curriculum, schools needn’t stick to rigid learning paths and can make their own decisions on what to teach pupils.

There are three core subjects that schools must ensure are taught: health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. Other than that, they’re free to:

* introduce projects that use skills and knowledge from more than one subject, leading to joined-up learning
* teach about people and places from their local area
* ask pupils about areas they’re interested in studying

## What qualifications are there in Scotland?

Between 2013 and 2016, three new qualifications were introduced: Nationals, Highers and Advanced Highers. This is what they’re replacing:

* **National 1** and **National 2** replacing Access 1 and Access 2
* **National 3** replacing Access 3 and Standard Grade (Foundation Level)
* **National 4** replacing Standard Grade (General Level) and Intermediate 1
* **National 5** replacing Standard Grade (Credit Level) and Intermediate 2
* **Higher (new)** replacing Higher
* **Advanced Higher (new)** replacing Advanced Higher

Most children will be around 15 when they take Nationals. They can opt to stay in secondary school for two more years to take exams for Higher qualifications – which they’ll need to apply for university – and Advanced Highers – equivalent to the first year of university and used for applying to enter the second year of university.

Since 2017 children in Scotland have completed [**Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs) in literacy and numeracy in P1, P4, P7 and S3**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/primary-school-assessment-in-scotland-explained).

There are five defined levels within the Scottish educational system. Each is reached based on the teacher’s assessment of a student’s abilities and readiness to progress, but general year guidelines are as follows:

* Early (pre-school years and P1);
* First (to the end of P4);
* Second (to the end of P7);
* Third and Fourth (S1 to S3);
* Senior phase (S4 to S6, college, etc.).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Age during school year** | [**England**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/overview-english-education-system) **and** [**Wales**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/overview-welsh-education-system)**:*National Curriculum (plus Foundation Phase in Wales)*** | [**Northern Ireland**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/northern-irish-educational-system-overview)**:*Northern Ireland Curriculum*** | [**Scotland**](https://www.theschoolrun.com/overview-scottish-education-system)**:*Curriculum for Excellence*** |
| 4-5 | Reception | Year 1 | P1 (Early level) |
| 5-6 | Year 1 | Year 2 | P2 (First level) |
| 6-7 | Year 2 | Year 3 | P3 (First level) |
| 7-8 | Year 3 | Year 4 | P4 (First level) |
| 8-9 | Year 4 | Year 5 | P5 (Second level) |
| 9-10 | Year 5 | Year 6 | P6 (Second level) |
| 10-11 | Year 6 | Year 7 | P7 (Second level) |
| 11-12 | Year 7 | Year 8 | S1 (Third/Fourth level) |
| 12-13 | Year 8 | Year 9 | S2 (Third/Fourth level) |
| 13-14 | Year 9 | Year 10 | S3 (Third/Fourth level) |
| 14-15 | Year 10 | Year 11 | S4 (Senior phase) |
| 15-16 | Year 11 | Year 12 | S5 (Senior phase) |
| **A-Levels and SCE Highers – not compulsory** |
| 16-17 | Year 12 | Year 13 | S6 (Senior phase) |
| 17-18 | Year 13 | Year 14 |   |