

# Understanding the education system in England

There are plenty of opportunities for employers to get involved at all stages of the education system. The starting point is understanding the landscape.

|                           | Phase                                                                | Institutions                                                                                                                                  | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Age<br><b>18+</b>         | <b>Higher Education</b>                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Colleges</li> <li>– Universities</li> <li>– Training companies</li> <li>– Employers</li> </ul>       | Higher education (HE) is education and training that is at a standard beyond that of A Levels and other Level 3 qualifications (including technical courses in a wide range of fields). HE programmes are often offered by universities or colleges, and vary in size and type, including apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications (at Levels 4 and 5, eg HNC/HND), Foundation Degrees, undergraduate degrees (Level 6), and postgraduate courses (Level 7 and above). Many adults also continue to improve their skills by studying Further Education courses – from basic skills to technical courses (FE for 19+).                                                                    |
| Key stage<br><b>Five</b>  | Age<br><b>19</b><br><b>Upper Secondary Further Education for 16+</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Colleges</li> <li>– School sixth-forms</li> <li>– Training companies</li> <li>– Employers</li> </ul> | Education or training is compulsory until the age of 18 in England. After age 16 young people may undertake a full-time course* at college or school sixth-form, or start an apprenticeship or traineeship. They can also combine work or volunteering with part-time study or training. This phase of education, between 16–19, may be called Upper Secondary, and is part of further education (FE) in England. FE is a general term that covers all education and training after the age of 16 that is not higher education (HE). FE is offered by colleges, schools with sixth-forms, and a range of other institutions – including charities, commercial training companies, and employers. |
| Key stage<br><b>Four</b>  | Age<br><b>16</b><br><b>Secondary Education</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Secondary schools</li> </ul>                                                                         | Secondary education starts at age 11–14 (Key stage Three). There are national tests (SATs) at age 14. Secondary education continues until age 16 – students are usually studying GCSE courses, and/or other courses as appropriate (eg a vocational qualification).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Key stage<br><b>Three</b> | Age<br><b>14</b>                                                     |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Key stage<br><b>Two</b>   | Age<br><b>11</b><br><b>Primary Education</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Primary schools</li> </ul>                                                                           | Primary education covers nursery (under age 5), infant (age 5 to 7 or 8) known as Key stage One, and junior (up to age 11) or Key stage Two. Primary schools generally have pupils aged 4–11 years. There are national tests (known as SATs) at the end of both Key stage One and Two. Government has set out a national curriculum for all subjects across Key stages One to Four. Children move to secondary school at age 11.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Key stage<br><b>One</b>   | Age<br><b>7</b>                                                      |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Age<br><b>5</b>           | <b>Early Years</b>                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Nurseries</li> <li>– Primary schools</li> </ul>                                                      | Early Years education takes place from age 3 in state nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes within primary schools, but also in voluntary pre-schools, privately run nurseries and with childminders. Government sets standards for learning, development and care of young children to age 5 in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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\* Including supported programmes in the classroom and work place