

GCSE Information for Home Educators

When can my child take GCSEs?

If you wish your child to sit exams, as a home educator you can start GCSE courses with your child at any age. Some parents begin early so that their child can take just one or two at a time. Others wait until their child is in Year 10 and 11, and a few may decide to enrol their child at college after they turn 16, to take GCSE subjects in line with their child's future career.

How can I make sure my child is taught GCSE courses?

There are five main ways of arranging for your child to study towards GCSEs:

- Working at home with one to one tuition from a parent, choosing appropriate text books and past exam papers, where the parent is responsible for marking the work and helping them improve.
- Using a private tutor (either in person or online) to teach the relevant course(s), mark work, support the child in making progress and prepare them for the exam.
- Subscribing your child to an online school, where GCSE courses are offered.
- Correspondence courses where a tutor is assigned to set work, give guidance and mark work.
- Enrolling in a local college or adult education class (please note: some colleges will not admit students under 16 due to safeguarding or oversubscription) .

How will my child and I decide which subjects/courses to study?

As with other aspects of home education, you have a lot of flexibility and you and your child may wish to consider their interests, passions, ambitions (e.g. future career) and their strengths when choosing which subjects they wish to study.

Some GCSEs include a significant amount of graded coursework which counts towards the final exam. Parents may find it very difficult to find an independent person qualified by the exam board to mark coursework. For this reason you may choose IGCSE courses (International GCSE) which rely solely on exams.

You should also be aware that some exams, especially practical subjects such as art, technology, drama, dance and music, are not available for private candidates and alternative qualifications should be investigated (such as Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College).

Once you have decided on the subjects you will need to decide which exam board(s).

There are 3 main exam boards in the UK: AQA, Edexcel (Pearson) and OCR. Each exam board follows the set syllabus so that students are studying similar content, but there may be slight differences in the way the exams are set. While you can select courses from each of the boards, you may wish to choose the same exam board for all subjects. You will need to do your own research and select the board which is right for your child.

AQA: <https://www.aqa.org.uk/>

Edexcel: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/home.html>

OCR: <https://ocr.org.uk/>

Where will my child take the exams?

Although your child may be studying at home or at a tuition centre, they will need to sit the exams at an approved Exam Centre as a private candidate. Choosing the right exam centre will depend on how far you are willing to travel and which exam board you have selected. Some parents select the exam centre first based on distance from their home, and then follow the syllabus from the exam board which the exam centre uses. You may wish to research this well in advance as this may be a factor when selecting exam boards, subjects and syllabuses. Exam centres are usually happy to discuss this with parents and students.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) website has a searchable database of exam centres who are willing to accept private candidates. This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other centres.

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/private-candidates/>

Exam boards also hold information about private candidates including schools, colleges and exam centres who are willing to take private candidates. They will also accept phone calls if you can't find the information that you are looking for on their websites.

AQA - <https://www.aqa.org.uk/student-and-parent-support/private-candidates/finding-a-school-or-college>
0800 1977162

Edexcel (Pearson) - <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/understanding-our-qualifications/where-can-i-take-edexcel-exams.html>
03456 180440

OCR - <https://www.ocr.org.uk/students/private-candidates/>
01223 553998

If you have subscribed to an online school or tuition service they may be able to support you in finding an appropriate exam centre.

You will need to register your child with the exam centre in good time. Each exam centre will have its own timeline and deadlines, but may require registration in January or February of the same year that the student will be taking summer exams. You are advised to check with the exam centre well in advance.

How will I know what needs to be taught?

The syllabus: each exam board sets out what content should be taught for each subject in the course syllabus. Most courses are designed to be taught and revised over two years. Syllabuses can be downloaded from the exam board's website.

What resources will we need?

Each exam board may have a slightly different syllabus, so you need to select which exam board you intend to use before buying books and resources.

To see the resources recommended by exam boards visit the exam board's website and select the relevant subject/course (e.g. GCSE English Language), then select the tab for Teaching Resources (AQA), Teaching and Learning Materials (Edexcel (Pearson)), or Textbooks & endorsed resources (OCR).

The exam specification can also be downloaded from the exam board websites. This sets out the content for each subject and the marks in the exam available for each topic.

You can buy the relevant text books linked to the exam board's syllabus from online retailers such as Amazon, Waterstones, WH Smith, from your local bookshop or directly from the publishers.

It is important to note that revision books and aids are designed to build on work that has already been taught.