

THE BRITISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

Contrary to popular belief, there is an education system in the United Kingdom. Even in Wales. Whilst the curriculum is broadly very similar to most, there's a selection of terminology which isn't. First off, "school" in the U.K. is never used to describe higher education institutions.

Public Schools

The term "public school" is something of a confusing one. In the U.S., somewhat reasonably, this applies to schools supported by the state. In the U.K., these are known as "state schools." The term "public school" is used in England and Wales (not as much in Scotland) to describe the more expensive of the private schools.

The curious name arose in the days before state-funded education, when public schools were open to anyone (with cash) whilst the "private" schools were run by guilds or churches and as such only available for the children of people belonging to a particular profession or religion.

Stages and Exams

I don't want to write too much about this, partly because I'm lazy and partly because the exam system seems to change every year. Schooling in the U.K. is broken into two segments, much the same as the U.S. Children arrive at school at the age of five or six, and are in "primary school" until the age of around eleven. They then move to "senior school" (usually this will be another school entirely, but some schools feature a combined junior and senior school) and stay there until they are around sixteen. Here ends the compulsory education required for all children. To go to university, kids will usually stay on at the same school past the age of sixteen into an extra year or two (a "sixth form" department) during which they sit the exams they need for university.

Regional Variations

The Scottish exam system is not the same as the English one. It's pretty similar, but different enough that both Scotland and England think theirs is secretly superior. They differ in fairly dull ways that I now can't be bothered trying to enumerate.