

Table 5

Schooling: duration, phases**Table 5.1 Compulsory education**

	Starting age	Minimum school leaving age	Duration in years
England	5	16	11
Ireland	6	16	10
Northern Ireland	4	16	12
Scotland	4/5	16	11
Wales	5	16	11
France	6	16	10
• Germany	6	15/16+	9/10 Full time + 3 Part time
Hungary	6	18	12
Italy	6	15	9
Netherlands	4/5	18	13
Spain	6	16	10
Sweden	7	16	9
• Switzerland	6/7	15/16	9
• Australia	5/6	15/16/17	9-10
• Canada	6/7	15/16	9-10
Japan	6	15	9
Korea	6	15	9
New Zealand	6	16	10
Singapore	6/7	16/17	10
• South Africa	7	15	9
• USA	6	16	10

Notes

- England** Although children must start school the term after they reach the age of 5 years, many children start school at age 4. The Education and Skills Act 2008 introduced a requirement for all young people to participate in (at least part-time) education and training until their 18th birthday. The first cohort to be affected by the changes began secondary education (Year 7, age 11) in September 2008. The minimum age at which young people can leave learning will be raised in two stages – to 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015.
- Ireland** Although compulsory education does not begin until age 6, more than 50 per cent of 4-year-olds and almost all 5-year-olds are in publicly-funded provision in the infant classes of primary schools.
- Scotland** A child is of school age between 5 and 16; depending on when they are born in the school year they may start at age 4.
- Wales** Although children must start school the term after they reach the age of 5, many children start school at age 4.
- **Germany** Students must complete at least 9 or 10 years of full-time education, followed by 3 years of part-time education (dependent on the jurisdiction).
- Hungary** All 5-year-olds must also attend kindergarten for up to four hours per day to prepare for compulsory school. Since 1998, all students commencing compulsory education have had to remain in education until the age of 18. Previously the upper limit was 16. In principle, there are 8 years' basic education, plus 4 years' upper secondary education.
- Italy** Legislation passed in late 2006 makes provision for compulsory education to last 10 years from age 6 to 16.
- Netherlands** Most (99 per cent) children start school at age 4 although it is not compulsory until the age of 5. Children must attend school full-time until age 16 and must continue learning until they have obtained a basic qualification up to age 18
- Sweden** Although compulsory education begins at age 7, municipalities must allow 6-year-olds to commence compulsory education. Entry may also be deferred to age 8. Children who commence compulsory education at age 6 complete the nine years of compulsory education at age 15; entry at age 8 means completion of compulsory education at age 17.
- **Switzerland** Currently, starting and leaving ages and the duration of compulsory education vary from canton to canton, with nine years being the norm. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education has approved a draft agreement to standardise school starting and leaving ages across Switzerland. In line with this agreement, pre-school education would also be compulsory from age 4. The agreement is currently subject to ratification by each canton.

- **Australia** Although 6 is the usual compulsory starting age, most children start school at age 5. In Tasmania, every child who is at least 5 years old on 1 January must be enrolled in the Preparatory Year in a school or be provided with home education. The minimum school leaving age is 15 in most States/Territories, 16 in Tasmania. In Queensland, since January 2006, it has been compulsory for young people to remain in school until they finish year 10 or reach age 16. Unless in full time work, they must then stay in education or training for a further two years or until they have a senior certificate, vocational certificate or have reached the age of 17. Similar arrangements were introduced in Tasmania in January 2008, where, after leaving Year 10, young people must now continue in education or training for two years or until they turn 17.
- **Canada** Although, in most Canadian provinces, education is compulsory to around age 16, in some it is compulsory to 17 or 18. Legislation passed in December 2006, in Ontario, for example, which came into force on the 1 July 2008, extends the length of time a student must attend school to the age of 18, or the completion of secondary school.
- **New Zealand** Although education does not become compulsory until age 6, children almost universally start school at age 5.
- **Singapore** 6 years' primary education is compulsory. The remaining 4 years' formal general education is universal, not compulsory. Children start primary school in January of the year in which they are 7.
- **South Africa** Children normally begin school at age 5, turning 6, for admission into Grade R (reception), or 6 turning 7, for admission into Grade 1. It is intended that, by 2011, all children will attend Grade R.
- **USA** These figures/ages are generalisations. In some states, the kindergarten year (children aged 5-6) is compulsory; in others, students may be expected to stay in compulsory education until the age of 18.

Table 5.2 Educational phases (not necessarily involving transfer from one school to another)

	Pre-school	Primary/basic	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
England	0-5	5-11	11-16	16-18
Ireland	3-4/5/6	4/5/6-12	12-15	15-16/17/18
Northern Ireland	2-4	4-11	11-16	16-18
Scotland	3-5	5-12	12-16	16-18+
Wales	3-5	5-11	11-16	16-18
France	2-6	6-11	11-15	15-18
• Germany	3-6	6-10/12	10/12-15/16	15/16-18/19
Hungary	3-6 (compulsory at age 5)	6-10/12/14	6-10/12/14	10/12/14-18/19
Italy	3-6	6-11	11-14	14-18/19
Netherlands	0-5	5-12	12-15	15-18
Spain	0-6	6-12	12-16	16-18
Sweden	0-6/7	6/7-15/16	6/7-15/16	15-18/16-19
• Switzerland	4/5-6/7	6/7-10,11,12+	10,11,12+-15/16	15/16-18/19
• Australia	3-5/6	5/6-12/13	12/13-15/16	15/16-18+
• Canada	4/5-6/7	6/7-11/12/13	11/12/13-15/16	15/16-17/18+
Japan	3-6	6-12	12-15	15-18
Korea	3-6	6-12	12-15	15-18
New Zealand	3-5/6	5/6-12/13	12/13-16	16-18+
Singapore	3-6/7	6/7-12	12-16/17	16/17-18/19+
• South Africa	0 to 4/5	5/6-12	12-15	15-18
• USA	3-5/6	5/6-13/14	5/6-13/14	13/14-17/18

Notes

- England** The period of education from birth to the end of the academic year in which a child has his/her fifth birthday is known as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Compulsory education begins the term after a child reaches the age of 5. However, many children begin school at 4+. There are current plans to raise the compulsory age of leaving education and training to 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015. Those children entering secondary education (Year 7, age 11) in September 2008 were the first cohort to be expected to remain in (at least part-time) education and training until the age of 17.
- Ireland** Although compulsory education does not formally begin until age 6, the majority of 4- and 5-year-old children are in publicly-funded provision in primary school education. At age 15+, students follow either a one-year Transition Year course; three types of two-year Leaving Certificate course; or a three-year course (Transition Year followed by a two-year Leaving Certificate course).
- Wales** The phased introduction of a foundation phase of education for 3- to 7-year-olds began in September 2008. Compulsory education begins the term after a child reaches the age of 5. However, many children begin school at 4+.
- France** Compulsory education ends at age 16. Students must therefore spend at least one year in the upper secondary phase.
- **Germany** Primary education ends at age 10 in 14 of the 16 Länder, and at age 12 in the remaining two (Berlin and Brandenburg).
 - **Hungary** Attendance in the kindergarten year, age 5-6, is compulsory. Traditionally, Hungarian secondary education admitted general school leavers aged 14+. It is now increasingly common for secondary schools to admit students aged 10+ or 12+.
 - **Italy** Primary and lower secondary education compose the first cycle of education in Italy (6- to 14-year-olds). Compulsory education currently ends at 15; students must spend at least one year in the upper secondary phase. Under legislation introduced in 2006, education is to become compulsory until age 16 from the 2009/10 school year. In addition, under new plans for vocational/technical schools to be introduced from 2010/11, the first two years of upper secondary phase education (14- to 16-year-olds) in these schools will be dedicated to general education (maths, Italian etc).
 - **Sweden** Compulsory phase education is provided in the all-through compulsory school (grundskola) and usually begins at age 7. Children who start earlier (age 6) may finish earlier (age 15) after nine years' compulsory education.
 - **Switzerland** Starting and leaving ages and the duration of compulsory education vary from canton to canton. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education has, however, approved a draft agreement to make these the same across Switzerland. In August 2009, an agreement to 'harmonise' education systems came into force in 10 of the 26 cantons, making pre-school education compulsory for two years (4-6) rather than one (5-6) as is currently the case in most cantons.
 - **South Africa** The Reception Year (Grade R) (age 5-6) is not yet compulsory but it is intended that it will be available to all by 2011. Upper secondary provision (15- to 18-year-olds) is not compulsory.
 - **USA** Phases vary dependent on the individual state. The INCA Archive reflects the system of eight-year elementary school, followed by four-year high school. Other jurisdictions have a three-year primary school (includes a kindergarten year), four-year intermediate school, three-year junior high school and three-year senior high; others a five-year elementary school, three-year middle school and four-year high school.

Sources/Further information

For further information – see the following sections and their subsections of the full archive.

Table 5.1 Compulsory education:

Education Structure (ages 3-19) ⇒ 3.1 Compulsory education

Table 5.2 Educational phases:

Education Structure (ages 3-19) ⇒ 3.2 Educational phases (ages 3 - 19)