landfall

LANDFALL GUIDE · SCOTLAND

How do schools work in Scotland?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Scotland has its own system. Children start primary school (P1) in August, aged about four and a half to five and a half, and spend seven years in primary and up to six in secondary. They take Nationals, Highers and Advanced Highers rather than GCSEs and A levels. Places are allocated by catchment area, so where you live decides your school.

For US citizens and green card holders moving to the UK. Build your free, personal move plan at **yourlandfall.com/plan**.

General information, not personal tax, financial, legal or immigration advice.

Stages and ages

Stage	Years	Rough age	Rough US equivalent
Nursery (early learning and childcare)	—	3–5	Preschool
Primary	P1–P7	4½–12	Kindergarten to 6th grade
Secondary	S1–S6	11–18	6th/7th to 12th grade

The school year starts in **mid-August**. Children usually start **P1** in the August when they're between about **4½ and 5½**. Children born in the autumn and winter months can usually **defer** starting for a year, with a funded nursery place.

Exams

- **National 4 and 5**, usually in S4 (age 15–16)
- **Highers**, usually in S5, typically four or five subjects. They're the main qualification for Scottish universities.
- **Advanced Highers**, in S6, for some subjects

Students can leave school at 16, but most going to university stay to S5 or S6.

Getting a place

- State schools are **free** and run by local councils.
- Each address has a **catchment** primary and secondary school. Living in the catchment usually guarantees a place.
- You can make a **placing request** for a school outside your catchment, but it isn't guaranteed.
- If schools matter to you, **check the catchment before you rent or buy**. Councils publish catchment maps.

Other options

- **Independent schools** charge fees, now including VAT.
- **Gaelic-medium education** is available in some areas.
- Some schools offer the **International Baccalaureate**.

University in Scotland

Most undergraduate degrees take **four years**, similar to the US. Students with Scottish "home" fee status don't pay tuition fees, but eligibility depends on **residence and immigration status**, so check before applying.

What to do next

See the full guide to UK schools, or build your move plan with Scotland and “A family with children”.

See every step for your move. Answer five questions and get a free plan in the right order: yourlandfall.com/plan