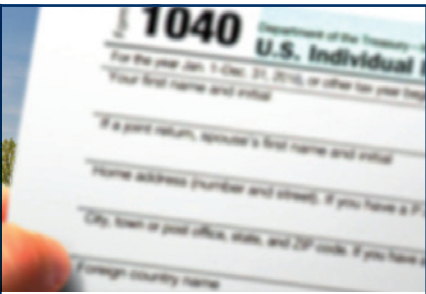


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Expatriate Essentials: A British Education

by Rachel Breckner of Gabbitas Education

Boasting some of the oldest and most prestigious education institutions in the world, the UK remains a key destination for parents and students looking for the best global education on offer. The British Education System is renowned for developing well-rounded individuals, nurturing each child and their own unique talents, as well as engaging and challenging them academically. It is important to remember that in every country there are schools that suit certain children and schools that do not, so rather than focus on the country's system, the priority should always be finding the individual school that is perfect for your son or daughter. Families who are moving to the UK from the USA, or indeed from any country, will have a myriad of questions as they seek to find the optimum education solution for their children. There has always been speculation over the UK vs. US school system with different beliefs on which one is 'further ahead', which better prepares students for university, and which curriculum is more varied and challenging. I do not believe it is fair or accurate to place one system above the other. Instead, parents should think about how best to prepare their child so they can transition smoothly from one to the other.

"When is the right time to move my child?"

This is one of the most frequently-asked questions amongst online parent forums and a regular topic of discussion for educational consultants. I would avoid moving your child into Year 11 or Year 13 (10th grade or 12th grade). Not only is this half-way through the 2-year GCSE, A Level or IB programme – meaning a huge amount of work to catch up on in the space of a year – but many schools will not even consider a new student in these year groups, giving you a very limited pool of options. If you have a daughter, you might want to avoid moving her into Year 6 (5th grade) as this will be the final year of 'Junior' school in which there is a real focus on passing the 11+ exams to get into their choice of senior schools. The same goes for boys in Year 8 (7th grade), who will shortly be entering senior schools at 13+. Other than these entry points, I believe any time can work as long as the student is prepared both mentally and academically for what lies ahead.

"How do I prepare my child for a new curriculum?"

This is another common concern for parents who are relocating. It is a good idea to contact your son's or daughter's new school and ask for the previous and upcoming years' curriculum plans. This way you can easily compare what has and hasn't been learned by your child so far. If you are worried about any gaping holes in key subjects, a private tutor may be worthwhile: to boost self-esteem prior to their new start and to tackle these missing topics.



"Should I consider boarding?"

Boarding is a much more popular option on this side of the pond, with around 2,500 such schools in the UK compared with approximately 300 in the USA. For children entering boarding for the first time, parents should try to quash any preconceptions their child might have. There are plenty of engaging ways to create positive impressions of UK boarding schools, including the ever-popular summer programs, where children can experience the stunning English countryside and make lifelong friends whilst sailing, horse-riding, cooking, playing sports and of course, having midnight feasts. Reading or watching Harry Potter is another way that, although cliché, can drum up some excitement for features such as the House competitions, school trips and dormitory life. If your son or daughter will be attending a day school, there is an equal amount of confidence-building you can do. Meeting up with new classmates during the holidays, or making trips past the school whilst pointing out exciting facilities and features that their previous school may not have had are all good ideas. You could even create some fun quizzes or activities to show differences in language, such as 'rubber vs. eraser' and 'caretaker vs. janitor'.

Trust the experts

Finally, the aforementioned popularity of UK education means that schools are becoming more and more accustomed to welcoming international students, and have developed a multitude of approaches to tackle issues. An estimated 28,000 international students are currently studying here. Ultimately the schools are the experts, so trust them and relax! ★

Rachel Breckner is a consultant for Gabbitas Education and helps support families and students worldwide in making the right decisions relating to education, ensuring the advice is always tailored to their needs and aspirations. Tel: +44 (0) 207 734 0161 www.gabbitas.com