Sessioned

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FREE TOOLKIT · GCSE AND INTERNATIONAL GCSE

Plan your GCSE and International GCSE year, your way.

A practical planning and study toolkit for home-educating families, independent learners and private candidates in the UK.

- A plain-English guide to GCSE and International GCSE
- Subject and qualification planner, with a worked example
- Private candidate exam-entry checklist
- Goals, weekly planners and a topic confidence tracker
- Active recall, spaced review and flashcards
- Practice-question log, reviews and a wellbeing check-in
- A page for parents and carers
- Official resources, by category

A planning aid, not an official qualification or exam-entry service. Always confirm current entry requirements directly with your chosen exam centre.

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01

WELCOME

How to use this toolkit

Studying outside school gives you freedom over what, when and how you learn. It also means taking on planning that a school would usually do. This toolkit helps with that planning, at your pace.

Who it is for

- Home-educating families preparing for GCSEs or International GCSEs.
- Independent learners who do most of their studying on their own.
- Private candidates: anyone sitting exams at a centre that is not their own school or college.
- Parents and carers supporting any of the above.

How it works

Use what helps and skip what does not. There is no right order and no fixed timetable: the planners work whether you study in the mornings or the evenings, in short bursts or long blocks.

Each worksheet is also published as its own PDF, so you can print a fresh copy whenever you need one. A low-ink version with white pages is available too.

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Quick-start checklist

- [ ] List your subjects and, for each, whether it would be a GCSE or an International GCSE. p. 5
- [ ] Contact exam centres early and write down what each one tells you. p. 7
- [ ] Note the exact specification code for each subject and download that specification from the awarding body's own website. p. 3
- [ ] Set one long-term goal per subject, then break it into monthly and weekly goals. p. 9
- [ ] Choose a weekly planner: structured or flexible. p. 10
- [ ] Turn each specification into a topic list and rate your confidence. p. 12
- [ ] Start a review schedule and a practice-question log. p. 13
- [ ] Pause once a week, and once a month, to look back and adjust. p. 17

A planning aid, not an official service

This toolkit is a free planning aid written by Sessioned, an online tutoring platform. It is not an official qualification, an awarding body publication or an exam-entry service, and Sessioned is not an exam centre. Awarding bodies and exam centres set the rules, fees and dates, and these change. Always check the current specification, and confirm entry requirements directly with your chosen exam centre.

Facts in this toolkit come from official pages, checked on 21 and 22 November 2026. Section 12 lists them.

02

UNDERSTANDING THE QUALIFICATIONS

GCSE and International GCSE are not the same thing

Their names are similar, but they are different qualifications with their own specifications, assessments and exam series. Make the choice subject by subject, not once for everything.

Three names you will come across

GCSE. In England, GCSEs are offered by several awarding bodies (exam boards), including AQA, OCR, Pearson Edexcel and WJEC Eduqas. Ofqual regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England.

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE. Pearson's own international qualification, which Pearson calls International GCSE.

Cambridge IGCSE. From Cambridge International, which describes it as an international qualification for 14 to 16 year olds, with a choice of over 70 subjects.

So when someone says "IGCSE", ask which awarding body they mean: Pearson and Cambridge set different papers, grading and exam series.

Why the awarding body and specification code matter

Every subject has a specification (Cambridge calls it a syllabus) setting out what is taught and how it is assessed. Each has a code: Pearson Edexcel International GCSE Mathematics A is 4MA1, for example, and Cambridge IGCSE Mathematics is 0580.

Two courses both called "Maths" can have different content, papers and tiers. Use the exact code when you buy books, look for past papers, plan topics or talk to a tutor, and check which exam years the specification covers. Cambridge syllabuses state the exam years they are for.

Check exam-centre acceptance before you commit

A private candidate sits exams at a centre that agrees to take them. AQA says that in most cases a centre will only accept you for subjects it already enters its own students for. JCQ says each centre has its own process, including its entry fees and internal deadlines, and Cambridge says private candidates make all their exam arrangements directly with the centre. So before you spend months on a specification, find a centre that will enter you for it.

Coursework, practicals and speaking

Some specifications include work assessed outside the exam room, such as coursework, science practicals, fieldwork or a spoken component. A private candidate needs a centre willing to supervise it. JCQ asks private candidates to check whether a centre will accept and submit coursework or non-exam assessment on their behalf, and Cambridge says some syllabuses or options are not available to private candidates.

Read the assessment section of each specification first, and ask about these components when you first contact a centre.

Living in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland?

This toolkit describes GCSEs as they work in England. Wales has its own qualifications regulator, Qualifications Wales. Scotland has its own National Qualifications, such as National 5, from Qualifications Scotland (formerly SQA). In Northern Ireland, CCEA publishes a booklet for external candidates. Home education guidance also differs by nation: section 12 links each one.

At a glance: what each awarding body's own pages say

Only points we could check on official pages are included. Each subject has its own specification, so read the one for your subject and exam year.

	GCSE (ENGLAND)	PEARSON EDEXCEL INTERNATIONAL GCSE	CAMBRIDGE IGCSE
Offered by	Several awarding bodies, including AQA, OCR, Pearson Edexcel and WJEC Eduqas.	Pearson.	Cambridge International.
Regulation	Ofqual regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England.	Pearson's specifications for Mathematics A, Biology and English Language A each state that the qualification "is not accredited or regulated by any UK regulatory body".	Cambridge says it aligns the standards of Cambridge IGCSE with the GCSE taken in England. Check a syllabus's status on Ofqual's Find a regulated qualification.
Grading	Ofqual: since 2017, GCSEs in England have been graded on a 9 to 1 scale, replacing the previous letter grades.	9 to 1: the specification titles carry "(9-1)".	A* to G around the world. Schools in what Cambridge calls administrative zone 3 can choose 9 to 1 graded versions. Once the entries deadline has passed, a candidate cannot move to the other scale.
Exam series	Varies by board and subject. AQA lists November entries for private candidates only in English Language and Mathematics, with an age condition for Mathematics.	May to June and November each year. Some subjects run in one series only.	June and November, with a March series in India only, according to each syllabus we checked.
Work outside the exam room	Some subjects, such as English Language, sciences, geography and art and design, include non-exam assessment. For GCSE sciences, AQA says the centre must provide for private candidates to carry out the required practicals.	Varies. Biology (4BI1) assesses experimental skills through written exams. English Language A (4EA1) offers a coursework option or an exam, plus an optional spoken language endorsement.	Varies. Biology (0610) adds a Practical Test or an Alternative to Practical paper. First Language English (0500) offers a coursework option, and some components are not available to private candidates.
Finding a centre	JCQ's private candidate centre search.	Pearson's centre search for international qualifications.	Cambridge's Find a Cambridge school search, and its private candidate registration page.

Checked on 21 and 22 November 2026 against Ofqual (GOV.UK), JCQ, AQA, Pearson and Cambridge International pages and specifications, listed in section 12. Specifications are revised, so always read the current one.

Five questions to answer before you commit to a subject

1. Which awarding body and specification code would the centre enter me for?
2. Is there coursework, a practical, fieldwork or a spoken component, and will the centre supervise it?
3. Is the subject tiered, and which tier suits me?
4. Which exam series is it available in, and which will the centre run?
5. If I plan to go on to a sixth form or college, will it accept this qualification and grade scale? Only that institution can answer, so ask it directly.

You do not have to choose one qualification for everything: one subject can be a GCSE and another an International GCSE, if centres will accept those entries. Record what you find on the planner over the page.

03 · WORKSHEET

Subject and qualification planner

Name _____

Updated on _____

One box per subject. Fill it in as you find things out, in pencil at first: a centre's answers often decide the awarding body. Copy the specification code exactly. A worked example follows.

SUBJECT 1

Subject _____ Qualification _____ Awarding body _____

Spec code and exam years _____ Tier, if any _____ Exam series _____

Work outside the exam room _____ Centre that will accept me _____

Next step _____

SUBJECT 2

Subject _____ Qualification _____ Awarding body _____

Spec code and exam years _____ Tier, if any _____ Exam series _____

Work outside the exam room _____ Centre that will accept me _____

Next step _____

SUBJECT 3

Subject _____ Qualification _____ Awarding body _____

Spec code and exam years _____ Tier, if any _____ Exam series _____

Work outside the exam room _____ Centre that will accept me _____

Next step _____

SUBJECT 4

Subject _____ Qualification _____ Awarding body _____

Spec code and exam years _____ Tier, if any _____ Exam series _____

Work outside the exam room _____ Centre that will accept me _____

Next step _____

SUBJECT 5

Subject _____ Qualification _____ Awarding body _____

Spec code and exam years _____ Tier, if any _____ Exam series _____

Work outside the exam room _____ Centre that will accept me _____

Next step _____

Qualification: write GCSE, Pearson Edexcel International GCSE, Cambridge IGCSE or other. Work outside the exam room: coursework, practicals, fieldwork or speaking, or "none". Always confirm current entry requirements directly with your chosen exam centre.

03 · WORKED EXAMPLE

How a filled-in planner might look

Name "Sam" (invented)

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE Sam, both centres and every answer below are invented to show how the planner works. Nothing here is a recommendation about which qualification, awarding body or tier to choose. Subject details are taken from each awarding body's specification as checked on 21 November 2026; check the current version yourself.

SUBJECT 1 · MATHEMATICS

Qualification	*Pearson Edexcel International GCSE, Mathematics A*
Spec code and years	*4MA1. Checked the specification is current for the year Sam plans to sit.*
Tier	*Foundation or Higher. Foundation targets grades 5 to 1, Higher 9 to 4. Deciding after two timed past papers.*
Outside the exam room	*None: two written papers, both taken in the same series.*
Centre and series	*Centre A will take a private candidate for 4MA1 in May to June. Confirmed by email; copy filed.*
Next step	*Ask Centre A for its internal entry deadline and fee in writing.*

SUBJECT 2 · BIOLOGY

Qualification	*Cambridge IGCSE Biology*
Spec code and years	*0610, syllabus for exams in 2026 to 2028. Checked that it covers Sam's exam year.*
Tier	*Core or Extended. Leaning towards Extended.*
Outside the exam room	*Paper 5 (Practical Test) or Paper 6 (Alternative to Practical). Centre A says it would run Paper 6 for Sam.*
Centre and series	*Centre A, June series. Grading scale to confirm with the centre before entry.*
Next step	*Practise Alternative to Practical questions from the official past paper pages.*

SUBJECT 3 · ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Qualification	*GCSE, awarding body not yet known*
Spec code and years	*Waiting for Centre B to say which awarding body it enters for English Language.*
Tier	*Check the specification once the code is known.*
Outside the exam room	*Spoken language endorsement. Asked Centre B how and when it arranges this for private candidates.*
Centre and series	*Centre B, summer. Not yet confirmed.*
Next step	*Chase Centre B's reply. If it cannot help, compare with an International GCSE route at Centre A.*

What the example shows

Mixing qualifications subject by subject can work, as long as a centre will accept each entry. Centres often settle the awarding body. Components outside the exam room need a plan before study starts, and every decision is written down with what still needs confirming.

04 · WORKSHEET

Private candidate exam-entry checklist

Exam series _____

Centre _____

Always confirm current entry requirements directly with your chosen exam centre.

Each centre sets its own process, fees and internal deadlines, and these can change between exam series. So this checklist gives no dates or fees: write down what your centre tells you, and keep it in writing.

Before you contact centres

	DATE DONE / NOTES
☐ For each subject, note the qualification, awarding body, specification code and any tier (worksheet 03).	
☐ List any coursework, practicals, fieldwork or spoken components in each specification.	

Finding a centre

	DATE DONE / NOTES
☐ Search for centres (JCQ for GCSE, Pearson for its International GCSE, Cambridge for Cambridge IGCSE) and contact them well before their closing date. Record each one on the next page.	
☐ Ask whether the centre accepts private candidates for your exact awarding body, specification and tier.	
☐ Ask whether it will supervise and submit any coursework, practical or spoken component.	
☐ Ask for every fee in writing, including any administration, supervision or late-entry fee.	
☐ Ask for the centre's own entry deadline, which may be earlier than the awarding body's.	
☐ If access arrangements may be needed, ask early how to request them and what evidence the centre needs.	
☐ Ask what identification you need to bring on exam days.	

Making and checking the entry

	DATE DONE / NOTES
☐ Confirm your entries in writing and pay fees as the centre directs.	
☐ Check every line of your statement of entry: name, awarding body, specification code, tier and components. Report any mistake straight away.	
☐ Find each paper in the awarding body's timetable, then confirm dates, times and venue with the centre.	
☐ Ask which equipment is allowed in the exam room, and read JCQ's information for candidates.	
☐ Ask how and when the centre will give you your results, and who to contact with a question about them.	

Based on JCQ, AQA, OCR, Pearson and Cambridge International private candidate pages, checked 20 to 22 November 2026. Links: section 12 of the toolkit.

Exam centre contact record

Exam series _____

Compare up to three centres side by side. Write down who you spoke to and when, and ask for important answers by email so you have them in writing.

QUESTION	CENTRE 1	CENTRE 2	CENTRE 3
Centre name and contact			
Date contacted, and who I spoke to			
Accepts private candidates for my subjects? Which awarding bodies and codes?			
Tiers or options it will enter			
Coursework, practicals or speaking: will it supervise them?			
Fees quoted (entry, admin, supervision, late)			
Its own entry deadline			
Access arrangements: process and evidence			
Identification needed on exam days			
Venue, arrival time, equipment rules			
How results are given			
Answers confirmed in writing?			
Decision and next step			

Always confirm current entry requirements directly with your chosen exam centre.

05 · WORKSHEET

Long-term, monthly and weekly goals

Name _____

Date _____

Start with where you want to be, then work backwards. Goals you control work best: "complete and mark two past papers" is clearer than "get better at maths". Review monthly goals at the end of each month and set weekly goals every week.

Long-term goals: by the end of the course or exam series

SUBJECT

By the exams, I want to be able to...

SUBJECT

By the exams, I want to be able to...

SUBJECT

By the exams, I want to be able to...

Monthly goals

MONTH	GOAL	HOW I WILL KNOW I HAVE DONE IT	DONE?

This week's goals

WEEK STARTING	GOAL	LINKS TO WHICH MONTHLY GOAL?	DONE?

IF A GOAL SLIPS

What got in the way, and what is the smallest next step? A goal can be moved without being dropped.

Weekly planner

Week starting _____

Name _____

For weeks that suit a regular rhythm. Decide what a "block" means for you, such as 30, 45 or 90 minutes, and write your own times. Leave blocks empty on purpose: rest is part of the plan. Prefer more freedom? Use the flexible version on the next page.

DAY	BLOCK 1 time:	BLOCK 2 time:	BLOCK 3 time:	OTHER LEARNING, ACTIVITIES, COMMITMENTS
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

TUTOR SESSION (OPTIONAL)

Day and time · subject · what to bring or ask

ADJUSTMENTS

What changed this week, what moved, and where it went

06 · WORKSHEET · FLEXIBLE VERSION

Weekly planner

Week starting _____

Name _____

For weeks that do not follow a pattern. List what you want to get done, roughly how long each task takes, and tick it off whenever you do it. No days, no fixed times.

FIXED COMMITMENTS THIS WEEK

Appointments, work, clubs, trips, exam-centre deadlines: anything the plan has to fit around

This week's tasks

PRIORITY	SUBJECT	TASK	TIME IT MAY TAKE	DONE
1				
2				
3				

SHORT TASKS FOR LOW-ENERGY MOMENTS

Flashcards, a few questions, tidying notes

TUTOR SESSION (OPTIONAL)

When · subject · what to bring or ask

ADJUSTMENTS

What changed, and what moved to next week

END OF WEEK: HOW DID THE BALANCE FEEL?

Too much | About right | Room for more

07 · WORKSHEET

Topic confidence tracker

Subject _____

Spec code _____

Copy topics in the order the specification lists them, with its reference number, so nothing is missed. Rate each topic with a number from the key, and add the date. Re-rate after you review it. Use numbers or words rather than colours, so the sheet still reads clearly when photocopied.

1 · Not started
Not covered yet.

2 · Shaky
I need my notes to answer questions.

3 · Getting there
I can answer most questions, with some mistakes.

4 · Secure
I can answer from memory, under time.

SPEC REF	TOPIC	RATING · DATE	RATING · DATE	RATING · DATE	EVIDENCE AND NEXT STEP

Evidence: for example, a mark on past-paper questions for that topic, or "explained it from memory". Next step: the one thing to do before rating it again.

Active recall and spaced review

Subject _____

Spec code _____

Active recall: test yourself before you reread

1. Close your notes and book.
2. Write down, say aloud or sketch everything you can remember about the topic, or answer a few questions on it.
3. Open your notes and check. Correct mistakes in a different pen, so the gaps stand out.
4. Turn the gaps into flashcards or questions for next time.

Spaced review: come back at widening gaps

Rather than revising a topic once for a long time, return to it several times with longer gaps in between. One pattern to start from: the next day, after 3 days, after a week, after 2 weeks, then after a month. It is a suggestion, not a rule: shorten the gap if a review went badly, and lengthen it if it went well.

Each review can be short: ten minutes of active recall is enough.

Review schedule

TOPIC	FIRST LEARNED	REVIEW 1 next day	REVIEW 2 3 days	REVIEW 3 1 week	REVIEW 4 2 weeks	REVIEW 5 1 month

In each review box, write the date planned. When you have done it, add a tick and a word for how it went: "easy", "OK" or "hard".

Flashcard template

Subject _____

Topic _____

Write a question on the left and its answer on the right. Cut along the dashed lines, then fold each card along the dotted line so the answer is on the back. Sort your cards into three piles as you use them: "again tomorrow", "in a few days" and "next week". One idea per card works best.

Cut along dashed lines — Fold along the dotted line

QUESTION	ANSWER
QUESTION	ANSWER
QUESTION	ANSWER
QUESTION	ANSWER

Practice-question and past-paper log

Subject _____

Spec code _____

Match every paper to your exact course

Before you use a paper, check it is for the same:

- **qualification**: GCSE, Pearson Edexcel International GCSE or Cambridge IGCSE;
- **awarding body and specification code**, including the version for your exam years: papers for an older specification can cover different content;
- **tier or option**, such as Foundation or Higher, Core or Extended;
- **paper or component number**, and use the mark scheme for that same paper and series.

Use legitimate sources

Download papers and mark schemes from the awarding body's own website. A free finder that links straight to each board's official past paper pages is at sessioned.co.uk/revision/tools/past-papers.

Some papers are not public. Pearson says some past papers are available to teachers only, and that private candidates entered for a series can request locked materials, ideally through the centre that accepted their entry.

Papers and mark schemes belong to the awarding bodies: use them for your own study rather than copying or sharing them.

DATE	PAPER, SERIES AND TIER	TIMED?	MARK	WHERE I LOST MARKS	NEXT ACTION
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		

Pearson statement checked 22 November 2026 on its private candidates page. Continue the log on the next page.

Practice-question log

Subject _____

Spec code _____

DATE	PAPER, SERIES AND TIER	TIMED?	MARK	WHERE I LOST MARKS	NEXT ACTION
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		
		Yes / No	/		

PATTERNS I NOTICE

Topics that keep costing marks, question types that take too long, instructions I misread. Add them to your topic tracker.

10 · WORKSHEET

Weekly reflection

Week starting _____

Name _____

Ten minutes at the end of each week. Be honest and kind to yourself: the point is to plan a better next week, not to judge this one.

WHAT WENT WELL

WHAT WAS HARDER THAN EXPECTED

WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT HOW I LEARN

A time of day, a method or a place that worked, or did not

TOPICS TO COME BACK TO

NEXT WEEK'S TOP THREE

_____

_____

_____

THIS WEEK FELT

Too busy | About right | Too quiet

Circle one, then note why.

A NOTE FOR MY PARENT, CARER OR TUTOR

10 · WORKSHEET

Monthly review

Month _____

Name _____

THIS MONTH'S GOALS: DONE, PARTLY DONE, MOVED?

TOPIC RATINGS THAT CHANGED

From your topic confidence tracker

PRACTICE PAPERS OR QUESTIONS COMPLETED

From your practice log

EXAM ADMIN DUE NEXT MONTH

Centre emails, fees, entry checks, access arrangements

WHAT I WILL CHANGE, AND NEXT MONTH'S GOALS

Questions to ask a tutor

Useful whether you are choosing a tutor or preparing for a session with one. Tick the ones you want to ask and add your own.

- [ ] Do you know my awarding body and specification code, and have you taught it, or one like it, before?
- [ ] Have you worked with home-educated learners or private candidates?
- [ ] How will we decide what to cover in each session, and how will you know it is helping?
- [ ] How would you use past papers and mark schemes with me?
- [ ] Can you help me think through a tier or option decision?
- [ ] What should I do between sessions?
- [ ] For learners under 18: what background check do you hold, and has anyone verified it?

MY OWN QUESTIONS

10 · WORKSHEET

Wellbeing check-in

Date _____

Name _____

A quick, private look at how things are going outside the work itself. It is a prompt for noticing and talking, not a test or an assessment, and there are no right answers. You choose whether to share it.

THIS WEEK, HOW HAVE I BEEN WITH...	CIRCLE THE WORDS THAT FIT
Sleep	Not great · Up and down · Mostly fine · Good
Energy	Not great · Up and down · Mostly fine · Good
Eating and drinking regularly	Not great · Up and down · Mostly fine · Good
Moving, or getting outside	Not great · Up and down · Mostly fine · Good
Time with people I like	Not great · Up and down · Mostly fine · Good
Time for things I enjoy	Not great · Up and down · Mostly fine · Good
Feeling about my studies	Worried · A bit unsure · OK · Confident

SOMETHING THAT WENT WELL, OR THAT I ENJOYED

SOMETHING ON MY MIND

ONE SMALL THING THAT WOULD HELP NEXT WEEK

WHO I COULD TALK TO

A parent or carer, a friend, a relative, a tutor, a GP

If things feel like too much

If worry, stress or low mood starts to affect sleep, eating or everyday life, talk to someone you trust, and think about contacting your GP. NHS pages on mental health for children, teenagers and young adults, including dealing with exam stress, are at nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults. If you think someone is in immediate danger, call 999.

11

FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Supporting without taking over

You do not need to be a subject expert to help. Much of your support is about structure, encouragement and admin, while your child gradually takes charge of their own learning.

Building independence

- Hand over the planning a step at a time: start by planning the week together, then let your child draft it and talk it through with you.
- Let the worksheets belong to the learner. Your role is to ask about them, not to fill them in.
- Agree one regular check-in, such as the weekly reflection, rather than checking in every day.

Useful questions

- What are you working on this week?
- What is going well, and where are you stuck?
- What would help: time, a quiet space, a resource, a conversation?
- Is there anything you need me to do, such as contacting the exam centre?

Avoiding pressure

- Praise effort, strategy and persistence rather than marks alone.
- Avoid comparing your child with siblings, friends or school peers.
- Protect rest, sleep and time for things they enjoy, especially near exams.
- Exam dates are fixed; plans can change. Moving a goal is not failing it.

Spotting when extra subject support might help

- Progress in one subject has stalled for several weeks, despite trying different approaches.
- Practice papers keep losing marks on the same topics.
- Your child has reached topics that nobody at home feels able to explain.
- A component needs feedback you cannot give, such as on extended writing or practical methods.
- Your child asks for it.

Extra support can come from many places: free resources, a study group, a relative or friend, an online course or a tutor for one subject. A tutor is one option, not a requirement, and many independent learners manage some or all subjects without one.

Organising materials

- One folder per subject: the specification, topic tracker, notes and practice log, labelled with the specification code.
- One admin folder for the exam centre: emails, fee receipts, the statement of entry and timetables.
- Keep digital copies of anything important.

Communicating with exam centres

- Make contact early, and keep to one named contact if you can.
- Put important questions in writing, and keep every reply.
- Raise access arrangements at the start, not close to the exams.
- Remember a centre taking a private candidate is doing extra work: clear, polite questions get the best answers.

12

OFFICIAL RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS

Where to check the facts

Go to the source for anything that decides an entry, a fee or a date. Every link below was checked on 22 November 2026.

Qualification information

Find a regulated qualification, Ofqual. Search qualifications regulated in England.
find-a-qualification.services.ofqual.gov.uk

GCSE 9 to 1 grade scale explained, Ofqual. How GCSE grades work in England.
gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-grade-scale-explained

Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs. Subjects, specifications and which exam series each runs in.
qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-international-gcses.html

Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge International. Subjects and syllabuses.
cambridgeinternational.org

Cambridge IGCSE grading choice. A* to G and 9 to 1 versions explained.
cambridgeinternational.org

WALES **Qualifications Wales**. Qualifications regulator for Wales.
qualifications.wales

SCOTLAND **National Qualifications**, Qualifications Scotland (formerly SQA). National 5, Higher and more.
sqa.org.uk/sqa/58062.html

Home education guidance, by nation

ENGLAND **Educating your child at home** (GOV.UK) and **elective home education guidance** (Department for Education).
gov.uk/home-education

WALES **Elective home education**, Welsh Government.
gov.wales/elective-home-education

SCOTLAND **Home education guidance**, Scottish Government.
gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance-2

NORTHERN IRELAND **Educating your child at home**, nidirect.
nidirect.gov.uk/articles/educating-your-child-home

Exam entry and private candidates

Private candidates, JCQ. Centre search for GCSE, AS and A-level, and what centres decide.
jcq.org.uk/private-candidates

Finding a school or college, AQA.
aqa.org.uk/student-and-parent-support/private-candidates

Private candidates, OCR.
ocr.org.uk/students/private-candidates

Private candidates, Pearson. Centres, fees and requesting locked past papers.
qualifications.pearson.com

Find an international centre, Pearson. For International GCSE.
qualifications.pearson.com

Private candidates, Eduqas (WJEC).
eduqas.co.uk/home/student-support/private-candidates

Register as a private candidate, Cambridge International.
cambridgeinternational.org

Find a Cambridge school. Shows schools that accept private candidates.
cambridgeinternational.org

NORTHERN IRELAND **External candidate booklet, 2026 to 2027**, CCEA.
ccea.org.uk

Exam arrangements

Access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special consideration, JCQ.
jcq.org.uk/exams-office

A guide to the special consideration process, JCQ. What happens if illness or other circumstances affect an exam.
jcq.org.uk/knowledge-hub

Information for candidates, JCQ. Rules for written exams, coursework and non-exam assessment.
jcq.org.uk/exams-office/information-for-candidates-documents

Exam timetables: **Pearson**, **Cambridge International** and **OCR**. For other awarding bodies, search their websites for "timetable", and always confirm your own dates with your centre.
qualifications.pearson.com · cambridgeinternational.org · ocr.org.uk

Awarding bodies

Specifications, sample assessments, past papers, timetables and private candidate pages.

AQA. GCSEs, AS and A-levels.
aqa.org.uk

OCR. GCSEs, AS and A-levels.
ocr.org.uk

Pearson. Edexcel GCSEs and International GCSEs.
qualifications.pearson.com

Eduqas, part of WJEC. GCSEs and A-levels.
eduqas.co.uk

WJEC. Qualifications, including GCSEs, in Wales.
wjec.co.uk

CCEA. Qualifications in Northern Ireland.
ccea.org.uk

Cambridge International. Cambridge IGCSE.
cambridgeinternational.org

Wellbeing

Mental health for children, teenagers and young adults, NHS. Includes exam stress and where to get help.
nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults

Sessioned's free tools

Free, no account needed.

Past paper and specification finder. Links to official GCSE, International GCSE and A-level pages.
sessioned.co.uk/revision/tools/past-papers

Revision timetable builder, **topic review planner**, **flashcards**, **marks tracker** and **exam countdown with an exam-day checklist**.
sessioned.co.uk/revision/tools

Home education guides, including a **printable independent study checklist**.
sessioned.co.uk/home-education/resources

About this toolkit

Version 1, last reviewed 22 November 2026. Facts were checked against the official pages above on 21 and 22 November 2026; specifications, rules and fees change, so always check the current version and confirm entry requirements with your exam centre. You are welcome to print and share this toolkit, free of charge, for personal and non-commercial educational use. Spotted something out of date? Email hello@sessioned.co.uk.

Next steps

1. **Choose, subject by subject**
   Fill in the subject and qualification planner, using the five questions on page 4.
2. **Talk to centres early**
   Use the exam-entry checklist and contact record, and keep answers in writing.
3. **Download each specification**
   From the awarding body's own website, using the exact code.
4. **Plan, then adjust**
   Set goals, pick a weekly planner and review every week and month.
5. **Practise with the right papers**
   Match each paper to your qualification, code and tier, and log the results.

Words you will meet

Awarding body	Also called an exam board: the organisation that sets the exams and awards the qualification.
Specification	The document setting out the content and assessment of one qualification in one subject. Cambridge calls it a syllabus. Each has a code.
Tier	A level of entry in some subjects, such as Foundation or Higher, or Core or Extended. It limits the grades available.
Component	A separately assessed part of a qualification, such as a paper, coursework or a practical test.
Non-exam assessment	Work assessed outside a timed written exam, such as coursework, practicals or a spoken component.
Private candidate	A learner who sits exams at an approved centre that is not their own school or college.
Entry	Registering a candidate for a qualification, tier and exam series. Your centre makes it.
Statement of entry	The centre's record of what you have been entered for. Check every line.
Access arrangements	Agreed adjustments made before an exam, such as extra time, for a candidate with a need.
Special consideration	An adjustment after an exam for a candidate affected by illness or other circumstances at the time.

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