

Taking GCSEs: Advice for Families of Home Educated Children

What is a private candidate?

A private candidate is someone who is not in full-time education either in a school, college or a similar institution. A private candidate can be:

- A part time student
- Someone studying evening courses
- Someone following a correspondence course
- Someone who is studying by means of private or self-tuition

A private candidate is solely responsible for entering themselves for their chosen subject(s)/examinations and paying their own fees and administrative costs incurred.

How does a private candidate study for examinations?

Exams can be taken at any age, usually they are taken between 16 and 16 years of age, but these can be taken earlier, or spread over a number of years. It will take between 1 and 3 years to study for an exam.

There are a number of ways exams can be studied:

1. **Using a correspondence course/tutor service on-line**, where a tutor is usually assigned to the student to give advice and mark work.

A tutor may be able to give specialist subject help, but there is a cost attached to this option. You may have to enter the exams yourself.

2. **Enrolling in a local college or adult education class**
Each college has different courses; some colleges offer GCSE courses to year 11 students, part-time, The College will charge for this. The advantage of using a college is that they will usually arrange the exam entries and mark any coursework or assessments. Weston College do not run a post 16 GCSE course.
3. **Enrolling in a Tutor Service** on one or more part-time courses developed for home-educated students by specialist providers e.g. 3A Tutors Ltd in Bristol, where tutorials are available in many subjects at many levels. Small group based tuition is available to prepare candidates for their formal examinations.
4. **Working independently**, either appointing a specialist home tutor or parental teaching to teach the entire courses using text books, exam board past papers etc.

Which examination board should I use?

There are many exam boards; they all have websites with useful information of the specifications and a bank of past papers and answers.

www.aqa.org.uk (GCSEs)

www.ocr.org.uk (GCSEs)
www.wjec.co.uk (GCSEs)
www.edexcel.com (GCSEs and IGCSEs)
www.cie.org.uk (GCSEs and IGCSEs)

GCSE or IGCSE?

GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) are the exams taken in most U.K schools. Most of these require Controlled Assessment Tasks to be completed. These are a type of coursework that is taken under test conditions. Any such assessment will need to be marked by a qualified teacher (not a parent) and authenticated by the centre that enters the candidate. GCSEs are an option if you opt to use a tutor service such as '3ATutors', a correspondence course or attend college. It is much more difficult if the child is being taught purely by parents as there is no one to mark the assessments.

If students are not following a college course or correspondence course it is probably easier to sit exams that have no coursework or controlled assessment. Some exams are modular and have several exams spread over the year, or sit IGCSEs which can have no coursework element.

IGCSEs (international GCSEs)

Many IGCSEs involve no coursework so can be studied independently; these costs are approximately £150 per subject. An extra exam paper is taken instead of controlled assessments. Tutor services such as '3A Tutors Ltd' will enter students for IGCSEs and other schools may be prepared to enter private candidates, but it is the responsibility of the parent to find a school which will enter their child.

When and where can exams be taken?

Most GCSE sittings are in May or June; IGCSE sittings are in May and November and January. Make sure that the child is entered before the dead-line dates, as this will be many months before the exam date.

Entry for assessment can only be made through a centre. It is the responsibility of private candidates to make their own arrangements with a centre. Exams normally cannot be taken in the home.

At a local school

Examination centres are not obliged to take private candidates, but some schools may accept home schooled children. If you wish your child to sit exams at a local school it is worth contacting them well in advance, to ensure the same exam board is used. If you find a school who will accept your child they will enter him/her for the exams. The cost should be about £50 per subject plus any registration fees and school administration fees. If there is any continual assessments discuss the arrangements with the exams officer before hand so it is clear who is marking and authenticating any work.

At a specialist examination centre

'3A Tutors' based in Bristol specialises in the provision of private candidate examination entry (GCSE, IGCSE, A/S, A2, ALAN, Functional Skills and many other levels). The cost is approximately £150 per GCSE or IGCSE subject. Exams can be taken in Bristol. In addition they can provide a tutoring service if required, and marking of coursework.

Contact them at:

Tuition: 0117 9109931

Tuition: tuition@3atutors.co.uk, tuition@3at.org.uk,

Examination Entry: 0117 9564637

Examination Entry: exams@examentry.co.uk

Head Office

3A Tutors Ltd / Exams UK
1A High Street
Staple Hill
Bristol
BS16 5HA

Websites

www.3atutors.co.uk

www.3at.org.uk

www.examentry.co.uk

www.igcseexams.co.uk

Where can I find out about correspondence/long distance learning courses?

Oxford Home Schooling

GCSEs offered via correspondence, specifically for students educated at home. There's a student advisor, and a personal tutor who marks work and assists in any way needed.

National Extension College (NEC)

This offers a wide variety of distance learning opportunities, including GCSEs, with tutors to help with problems and mark assignments. They can sometimes offer facilities to take the exams in Cambridge. www.nec.ac.uk

InterHigh

Online tuition in National Curriculum subjects for students aged 11-16, including IGCSE provision in the final year. Anyone wanting to take GCSE exams would have to find a centre themselves.

Briteschool

Online virtual classrooms in up to eight subjects to IGCSE level.

First College UK

Online learning community with live classes for students aged 11 -17. Prepares them for IGCSE exams (which do not require graded coursework). Classes are held live four days a week, 09.30 - 14.00 GMT (UK time) for between 5 to 15 students.

Northstar UK

This is a Christian college set up specifically for online courses for home educated students, both in Key Stage 3 and GCSEs. Assignments are completed and graded via email and a tutor is available to help, also via email. There are no age limitations, and any number of courses may be taken. Parents or students are responsible for finding an exam centre.

Christian Education Europe

A different option for Christian families is to use a curriculum such as ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) which, although American in origin, is now adapted for European students.

International Correspondence Schools Ltd

Skypar 5, 1st Floor
45 Finnieston Street
Glasgow G3 8JU
Tel: 0500 30 33 33
www.icslearn.co.uk

Please note these companies are examples of tuition services only and further research should be undertaken to decide which option would be best for your child.

FINALLY.....consider the following:

1. Choose between IGCSE and GCSE. Consider whether it is practical to sit normal GCSEs because of the controlled assessment element. This option is not practical if parents alone are teaching the child
2. Decide which subjects are to be taken and over how long. In school 2 years is a normal time to prepare, but they can be done in one year.
3. Choose an exam board and/or contact a tutor service/correspondence service and discuss options available/costs/timescales/deadlines etc
4. Decide whether foundation or higher tier is to be taken, if you look at past papers you will see the different standards.
5. Check specifications and past papers for each subject on-line

If you have any further questions about your child taking exam, would like to discuss options, or if your child has any special needs please contact Cathy Plummer at EOTAS 01934 622341 or email cathy.plummer@n-somerset.gov.uk