GCSE planner for home-educating families

The steps, deadlines and costs for sitting GCSEs and International GCSEs as a private candidate, in one plan you can print. Start 18 to 24 months before the exams and work through it in order.

IN SHORT

Home-educated children sit GCSEs and International GCSEs as private candidates. You find an exam centre that accepts external candidates, the centre enters your child with the exam board before its deadline, and your child sits the same papers as school candidates, in person at the centre. Parents pay the entry and centre fees. In England there is no state funding for exam fees; a council may choose to help, but it does not have to.

21 Feb 2027
Board entry deadline for summer 2027, UK centres

10 May 2027
First GCSE and International GCSE exams

19 Aug 2027
GCSE and International GCSE results day

Eight steps, from choosing subjects to results day

A timeline that starts 18 to 24 months before the exams. Most families work on steps 1 to 3 together, then book the centre a full year ahead.

1 — 18 to 24 months before

Choose GCSE or International GCSE

Both lead to the same college and sixth form courses. GCSEs from AQA and Pearson Edexcel are sat in May and June (with a November resit series for GCSE maths and English Language at 16 and over), and some include parts a private candidate has to arrange: the spoken language endorsement in GCSE English Language, required practicals in the sciences and non-exam assessment in some subjects. Most Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs are assessed by written exams only. International GCSEs can be sat in January, June and November: Pearson publishes the June and November series, and Lift College enters January series candidates through its exam partner Tutors & Exams, with the centre confirming dates and deadlines.

- [ ] Decide GCSE or International GCSE subject by subject
- [ ] Read the specification on the exam board website
- [ ] Check what your target college asks for

2 — 18 to 24 months before

Choose subjects and how many

Most home-educated learners take five or six subjects. Work back from what the target college or sixth form asks for: most Level 3 courses want four or five passes at grade 4 or above, including English and maths. Subjects do not all have to be sat in the same summer.

- [ ] List the subjects and the grade each one needs
- [ ] Put English and maths first
- [ ] Spread subjects across two or more series if that helps

3 — 12 to 18 months before

Plan study time

Work out the hours per subject per week and when each subject will be finished. As a guide, Lift College plans its courses around 6 to 8 hours a week per subject. Leave the last two months for past papers and timed practice under exam conditions.

- [ ] Block out weekly hours for each subject
- [ ] Set a finish date for teaching, then a revision window
- [ ] Download past papers from the exam board

4 — 12 months before

Find an exam centre early

Not every school or centre takes private candidates, and many only accept subjects they already enter their own students for. AQA points private candidates to the JCQ list of centres, and Lift College lists private-candidate exam centres by city (liftcollege.co.uk/locations). Book a year ahead if you can: places fill, and the centre needs time to process the entry.

- [ ] Confirm the centre takes private candidates for each subject and board
- [ ] Ask for its fee list and its own entry deadline
- [ ] Ask how it handles endorsements, practicals and access arrangements

The plan, continued

5 Autumn before the exams

Check entry deadlines and fees

For summer 2027 the AQA and Pearson Edexcel entry deadline is 21 February 2027 for UK centres, with late fees from 22 February. Centres close earlier than the board so they can check and submit entries: Tutors & Exams, for example, sets 7 February 2027 as its standard-fee deadline for summer 2027. Pay the centre and keep the receipt.

- [ ] Write down the centre deadline, not just the board deadline
- [ ] Send the booking with payment and any evidence
- [ ] Keep the receipt and the booking reference

6 As soon as you book

Plan access arrangements early

Extra time, rest breaks, a reader, a scribe or a separate room have to be approved before the exams, on evidence of your child's normal way of working. The centre decides what it can provide. For June 2027 the last date for centres to process applications is 21 March 2027, and centres ask for evidence well before that: Tutors & Exams asks for it by 10 January 2027.

- [ ] Collect evidence of your child's normal way of working
- [ ] Ask the centre what evidence it accepts and by when
- [ ] Get written confirmation of what is approved

7 May and June 2027

Sit the exams

Summer 2027 GCSE and International GCSE exams run from 10 May to 18 June 2027, with 23 June 2027 held as a contingency day in case of national disruption. Check every detail on the entry confirmation the centre sends: subject, specification, tier and the date and time of each paper.

- [ ] Check the entry confirmation against this planner
- [ ] Mark every paper on a calendar, with start times
- [ ] Keep 23 June 2027 free

8 August 2027

Results day

GCSE and International GCSE results for summer 2027 are released to candidates on 19 August 2027. Results come through the centre that entered your child, so ask in advance how it releases them. If a grade is a near miss, ask the centre about reviews of marking straight away, because the deadlines are short.

- [ ] Ask the centre how and when results are released
- [ ] Note the deadline for reviews of marking
- [ ] Ask how certificates will reach you

Key dates for the summer 2027 series

The exam boards set the dates below. Each centre sets its own earlier deadline and its own fees, so check both with the centre you book.

DATE	WHAT HAPPENS	APPLIES TO
21 November 2026	Exam boards open entries for June 2027 (Pearson issues its entry data on 20 November)	AQA and Pearson Edexcel
21 February 2027	Entry deadline for June 2027	AQA GCSE; Pearson Edexcel GCSE and International GCSE at UK centres
22 February 2027	Late entry fees start	AQA and Pearson Edexcel, UK centres
21 March 2027	Last date for centres to process access arrangement applications for June 2027	AQA key dates (JCQ)
21 March 2027	Entry deadline for June 2027 at centres outside the UK	Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
22 April 2027	Very late (high late) entry fees start	AQA and Pearson Edexcel
10 May 2027	First exams of the summer series	GCSE and International GCSE
18 June 2027	Last exams of the summer series	GCSE and International GCSE
23 June 2027	Contingency day, used only if exams are disrupted nationally or locally	AQA key dates (JCQ)
19 August 2027	Results released to candidates	GCSE and International GCSE

Dates checked: 3 November 2026

Centre deadlines come first

The board dates are the latest possible. The centre you book sets earlier ones.

One centre's earlier deadlines, as an example

10 January 2027	Evidence for access arrangements, summer 2027
7 February 2027	Standard-fee entry deadline, summer 2027 (late fees from 8 February)
14 March 2027	Entries close for languages and subjects with practicals or non-exam assessment
4 April 2027	All summer 2027 entries close

Tutors & Exams 2026/27 fee list, read 3 November 2026. Other centres set their own dates.

Each centre sets its own earlier deadline and its own fees. Book with the centre, not the board, and use the centre's date.

International GCSEs also run in January and November. January series entries are arranged through the centre (Tutors & Exams on Lift College's +Exams option), and the centre confirms the dates and deadlines. Pearson has not yet published dates for November 2027, so none are shown.

Dates checked: 3 November 2026

What sitting a GCSE costs, per subject

You pay the exam centre for each subject. Its fee covers the exam board entry, the administration and the invigilated seat. Prices vary by centre, subject and how early you book.

COST	TYPICAL RANGE	WHERE THE FIGURE COMES FROM
GCSE Maths or English Language, standard fee	**£225 to £325**	Centres with published prices in our comparison, retrieved 26 September 2026
Combined Science (two GCSEs)	**£375 to £523.20**	Same comparison; science entries can depend on practical work
Languages with a speaking exam	**£300 to £495**	Same comparison
Most written International GCSEs	**£286 to £309**	Tutors & Exams standard fees, 2026/27 fee list
The exam board's own entry fee	**About £51**	Paid by the centre and included in its fee; not what you pay
Late entry	**£60 to £180 extra in our comparison**	After the deadline Pearson doubles its entry fee, and trebles it from the high late date

For a budget, multiply by the number of subjects: five written GCSEs at £225 to £325 each comes to £1,125 to £1,625 in centre fees, before any late fees.

Teaching is a separate cost: books, a tutor or an online course.

There is no state funding for exam fees in England. The government confirmed in March 2025 that parents who home educate bear the cost, and that any help is for each council to decide. Some councils in Wales reimburse fees.

Centre-by-centre figures are in the cost of resitting GCSEs in 2026 (liftcollege.co.uk/resources/cost-of-resitting-gcses-2026).

Common questions

Answers to the questions families ask most, including whether exams can be sat at home, GCSE or International GCSE, and the English Language spoken endorsement and science practicals, are at liftcollege.co.uk/homeschooling/gcse-planner.

HOW LIFT COLLEGE CAN HELP

Lift College teaches GCSE, A Level, International GCSE and International A Level courses online from age 14, with a named UK tutor who marks your child's work. The parent holds the account. On the +Exams option Lift College enters your child and books the seat at a Tutors & Exams centre; on Study you book with a centre of your choice. More at liftcollege.co.uk/homeschooling.

Your exam checklist

Tick these off as you go, then fill in one row per subject. Print this page or the PDF and keep it with your booking receipts.

- [ ] GCSE or International GCSE chosen for each subject
- [ ] Specification code checked with the exam centre
- [ ] Centre confirmed it accepts private candidates for each subject and board
- [ ] Speaking endorsement, practicals or non-exam assessment arranged, if the subject has them
- [ ] Centre's own entry deadline written down
- [ ] Access arrangement evidence sent and approval confirmed
- [ ] Fees paid and receipt kept
- [ ] Entry confirmation checked: subject, tier, dates and times
- [ ] Journey to the centre planned for each exam day
- [ ] Results day arrangements confirmed with the centre

One row per subject

Subject	Board	Spec code	Series	Centre	Entry deadline	Fee paid	Access arrangements	Candidate number
EXAMPLE *Mathematics A*	*Pearson Edexcel*	*4MA1*	*June 2027*				*None needed*	

Sources

AQA, key dates calendar: November 2026, January and summer 2027 (PDF) www.aqa.org.uk/files/484469aa-17a1-4f96-8159-bd8960716f96/2ddb39944fb900ac43c6e0fe20d4bb3ae70d2657.pdf

AQA, exam timetable May/June 2027: GCSE (PDF) www.aqa.org.uk/files/449f89fe-eb10-43c4-9f7f-d94906b16007/8dfe25454c7bcaa686393e07ade5d2f194bc7fa0.pdf

AQA, dates and timetables www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/dates-and-timetables

AQA, private candidates www.aqa.org.uk/student-and-parent-support/private-candidates

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

JCQ, private candidates (list of centres) www.jcq.org.uk/private-candidates/

Pearson, key dates 2026 to 2027 (PDF) qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/Support/Information-manual/1-key-dates-2026-2027.pdf

Pearson, International GCSE summer 2027 final timetable (PDF) qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/Support/Examination-timetables-for-Edexcel-International-GCSE/int-gcse-summer-2027-final.pdf

Pearson, GCSE summer 2027 final timetable (PDF) qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/Support/Examination-timetables-for-UK-Edexcel-GCSE/gcse-summer-2027final.pdf

Pearson, exam timetables qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/exams/exam-timetables.html

UK Parliament petitions, government response of 11 March 2025 on GCSE exam fees for home-educated children petition.parliament.uk/petitions/700413

GOV.UK, elective home education guidance www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education

Tutors & Exams, fee list and key deadlines 2026/27 (September 2026), read 3 November 2026.

Lift College, the cost of resitting GCSEs in 2026 (centre fees retrieved 26 September 2026).