

# Boarding School lingo you need to know

Boarding Schools in the UK use unique language and terms which you may be unfamiliar with. Whether you're a student starting at a Boarding School in the UK or you are a parent or host family listening to all the new lingo, it can be very confusing. Sometimes it might feel like a completely different language! We've put together a useful list of the most common Boarding School terms to help you get to grips with it.

# GCSEs, A levels, BTEC, IB qualifications, Highers... oh my!

## Let's start off with the most daunting... exams!

Most Boarding School students in the UK will sit GCSEs and A levels, but others might sit IB qualifications, and some in Scotland might study Highers.



### GCSEs

General Certificate of Secondary Education exams are usually taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and will be the first set of important exams for students to sit. Don't panic! Students have lots of time to prepare for the GCSEs as studies start in Year 9 or 10 and the final GCSE exams are not until Year 11.



### A levels

If students have the required grades from their GCSE exams, they will move on to study A levels. Students will normally study at least three over a period of two years. A levels are the last set of school exams and are a requirement for attending university.



### BTEC

A BTEC is a vocational qualification, so they tend to be work-related and are ideal for students who prefer a more hands-on, practical approach to learning. Rather than final exams at the end of the course like most qualifications, BTECs are assessed continually through projects and smaller assessments. BTEC qualifications will allow a student to attend university or enter the workforce.



### International Baccalaureate

The IB is a two-year pre-university course that is a good alternative to A levels as it aims to equip students with the skills required for university. As well as being a rigorous academic programme, the IB also focuses on developing compassion and intercultural understanding and respect. There are six subject groups in the curriculum; students will study three at Higher Level and three at Standard Level. In addition, students will complete compulsory studies in theory of knowledge, CAS (Creativity, Activity and Service) and complete an extended essay. Assessment is by exams at the end of the second year as well as continuous coursework throughout. As of October 2021, the IB is available in 145 countries and the qualification is highly sought after by universities around the world.



### Highers

Higher qualifications are offered in some boarding schools in Scotland and can lead to university. Students normally take 4-5 Highers and the course is for one year. In the second year of their 6th form students can sit Advance Highers which are an additional qualification. Higher qualifications are less common in Boarding Schools, even in Scotland you might still sit A levels instead.

# General Terms



## Boarding House

The boarding house is where the students sleep at school and it will often be a separate building from the school with bedrooms, bathrooms, a lounge area and sometimes a dining area. The House Parent will also live in the boarding house. Some students say that living in a boarding house is just like having a big sleepover!




## Buddies

Lots of Boarding Schools will assign buddies to new students. Your school buddy is someone who looks out for you and will be a friendly face whilst you adjust to the new school. They are likely to be a student from an older year group.



## Exeat/Leave Weekend


Pronounced Ex-e-at (as opposed to ex-eat). Exeat weekends are when the school closes for the weekend. Students love exeats because it means there is no school on Saturday! Sometimes the holiday will extend over to the Monday too.

Some schools make it compulsory for students to leave the school grounds over an exeat weekend, and this is usually when they will stay with a host family. Exeat weekends are a great time for students to participate in lots of [fun activities with their host families.](#) 



## Half-term

Half-term is a short holiday halfway through the school term when students normally return home. There are three half-terms throughout the year usually in the months of October, February, and May. The October half-term is the longest half-term and can be up to two weeks long.

During these holidays, students can stay with host families or participate in [one of Academic Families' fun-filled trips to Europe or the Middle East.](#) 



## Horizontal Boarding

In horizontal boarding, each house is organised to cater for students who are all in the same year group. This style of living allows students to bond with their classmates and means that house staff can focus on the needs of a specific age group.



## Host Family

During school exets or half-term holidays, students might stay with a local family who will offer room and board.

[A host family](#) is different from a guardian; the latter acts more like a problem solver and helper, whereas host families provide a welcoming and caring place for students to enjoy their time away from school. All our host families are different so they could be a couple, or grandparents, or have children of their own for students to make friends with.



## House Parent or Housemaster

These terms refer to the adult or married couple who oversee the boarding house. They live in the house or in a section at the side of the boarding house with their own family. Many House Parents have a pet, such as a friendly dog, which students love!



## Guardian

... of the Galaxy! Well, almost. Although the concept of a guardian might be foreign to those not living in the UK, in the boarding school world, it's a requirement.

A guardian is an adult or company in the UK who is appointed by a parent to be their representative whilst their child studies abroad. Academic Families offer [AEGIS certified guardianship](#) which gives parents peace of mind that their child will be fully supported throughout their time at school in the UK. To keep it simple, you should think of Academic Families as a second parent!



## Kitty or House Bank

Often parents will give the House Parent some money that they will keep safe for the students. The students can ask the House Parent for it when they need to buy anything or want to go to the shops. You might want to allocate approximately £50 for your child to keep in their Kitty each term.

As your guardian, Academic Families can also make a Kitty available to your child through an Expense Deposit Fund (EDF) which they can use throughout the year. You can top it up any time and at the end of the guardianship, the remaining balance will be credited back to you.



## Matron

The school Matron is responsible for the health and wellbeing of students whilst they are at school. They ensure the smooth running of the domestic side of the boarding house, such as making sure laundry gets done on the correct day!

The role of the school Matron is to support the House Parent. They will supervise the day-to-day running of the house, including ensuring that the students are tidy and organised, and making sure everyone is happy and healthy.



## Pastoral Care

If you think this relates to pastures and rolling hills, then think again! Pastoral care actually refers to the wellbeing of students and ensuring that they feel happy, safe, involved, and able to perform to their best. If students feel lonely or worried about anything, they can always talk to their House Parent, Tutor, or the Pastoral Head.



## Prep

Nope, this isn't what you do to get ready in the morning! Instead, Prep usually takes place after dinner because it's designated time set aside for students to do their homework. Everyone will be doing Prep at the same time, but the older students may finish later since their bedtime is also later. As a parent, it's very important that you don't contact your child during Prep time so that they can focus on their schoolwork.



## Sick-bay

If a student is not feeling very well, they will be sent to see the nurse in the sick-bay, which is a little bit like a doctor's office. If a student requires more urgent medical attention such as going to hospital, the correct staff will arrange this.



## Tuck

Probably one of the most unusual but best loved terms, tuck refers to food treats such as candy or sweets which students can bring from home. They can also buy tuck once a week at school, usually from the 'tuck shop' which is run by the housemaster. At some schools, students can store treats in their own Tuck Box, which they will guard with their life! Don't be surprised if you find them under lock and key!



## Tutor

Students will be allocated a tutor at school who will support them with academic studies and provide pastoral care. Tutors are members of staff who will discuss any problems the students are having with their studies and help to resolve them. When students are older, a tutor will help and guide them with university choices and applications.



## Vertical Boarding

Vertical boarding is when a boarding house caters for students from different year groups. This allows older pupils to support the younger students and means that boarding staff can closely monitor how a student progresses throughout their years in the house, since they will stay with the same Housemaster for their entire time at Boarding School.

## This is just the beginning!

We've shared a few terms to get you started, and we're looking forward to helping you and your child on your educational journey to a UK boarding school. Our team are experts at matching students with schools and can support you throughout your search to find the best fit for you, and to look after your child while they're in the UK. **To discuss your boarding school requirements with a member of our team, [book a free private consultation.](#)** 