

Beginning to learn: school starting ages

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By Channel 4 News

Today's primary education review says children should begin school learning at six. How does Britain's primary school starting age compare to that of other European countries?

Children should delay starting formal school learning until the age of six, the most comprehensive [review of primary education](#) in England for 40 years has found.

Instead children should get an extra year of play-based learning, according to the Cambridge Primary Review.

Ministers have rejected the proposals, but the reports' authors say there is no evidence to suggest that delaying formal schooling would harm children in later life.

In the UK, children start schooling earlier than in many other European countries:

- Formal schooling starts at **four**: Northern Ireland
- Formal schooling starts at **five**: England, Malta, Netherlands, Scotland, Wales
- Formal schooling starts at **six**: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey
- Formal schooling starts at **seven**: Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden



Source: [Eurydice](#)

Children in several countries start school before these ages. For example, schooling in the Netherlands is compulsory from the age of five, although virtually all children start at the age of four.

In England and Wales most children start at four; in Scotland children do not usually start before the age of four and a half.

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