

A photograph of two young women in a chemistry laboratory. They are both wearing white lab coats. The woman on the left is smiling and holding a test tube, while the woman on the right is looking down at a piece of glassware. In the foreground, there is a large graduated cylinder held by a metal clamp on a stand. The background shows a typical lab setting with wooden cabinets and a bulletin board.

PRIVATE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE GUIDE

CHELSEA EDUCATION
consultancy and concierge

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, we at Chelsea Education have received numerous questions from prospective clients requesting more information about private Sixth form colleges. It seems that this topic is not very well explained and we would like to take the time to help our clients understand it more.

While international families with children of the required age approach us to place their children into senior schools, most of them have never heard about these private colleges. This is a real shame as we believe that these educational institutions, if carefully chosen, are a great place for students to thrive in preparation for university entry. They are a good alternative to studying in a traditional private senior school and might appeal to many categories of students looking for other options.

In this guide we will try to familiarize you with private colleges by presenting both their advantages and weaknesses (all our own professional opinion), to show you the difference between these colleges and Sixth form departments in private senior schools.

We are also happy to announce that we are now running a free placement service for those families who would like their children to enter private sixth form colleges in London, Oxford and Cambridge. This is a limited time offer and we encourage you to get in touch with us to find out how we can help you.

We hope you find this guide helpful!

*From the team at
Chelsea Education.*

2. WHAT IS SIXTH FORM?

In the United Kingdom and some Commonwealth countries, Sixth Form represents the final years of secondary education (senior school), where students typically between 16 and 18 years of age prepare for their A-level or equivalent examinations.

These are:

- A-Levels
- Vocational A-levels
- National Qualification in Scotland
- The International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Pre-U

All of these examinations are valid qualifications and can be used as a means of entry to British Universities or Further Education Colleges. The majority of senior schools here in the UK have Sixth Form departments, where students move to after they have finished their GCSE course at the end of year 11. The most traditional route is for students to stay at the same school to continue with their A-levels or IB after completing their GCSEs. However, there are also occasions where students need to move schools for variety of reasons.



3. WHAT IS A SIXTH FORM PRIVATE COLLEGE?

A Private Sixth Form college is an educational establishment that offers GCSE, A-level, IB, University foundation and other courses for fee-paying local and international students.



4. WHO STUDIES AT PRIVATE 6TH FORM COLLEGES?

The demand for private Sixth Form colleges continues to rise year after year. This need greatly reflects the increasing number of private colleges that have opened in the last couple of past years, especially in London. In order to attract more students, mainly from abroad, most of these colleges have started to offer GCSE/iGCSE and University foundation courses, as well as the traditional A-Level/IB courses.

There are 5 main categories of students that will thrive at a private college in comparison to a traditional senior school.

CATEGORY 1:

Students who do not meet the minimum exam grade requirements of their current school.

These are some private schools, especially those at the top of the leagues table that have rigorous entrance requirements for their Sixth form departments. These are in place to attract clever students from other schools to maintain their high ranking status.

In this case, students who do not get the required minimum exam grades are forced to move to other schools or a Sixth Form college with lower entrance requirements.

CATEGORY 2:

Students who fail or want to increase the grade of a particular subject.

While studying in a schools' Sixth Form department, (in both Lower 6th or Upper 6th), students who fail a subject or who simply wish to increase their grade by redoing the year are likely to be forced to leave the school.

Traditional Sixth Form departments very rarely allow students to repeat a whole year.

CATEGORY 3:

Students who want to feel better prepared for adult life.

Nowadays, there are many 16 year olds who move from their schools to Sixth Form colleges as they want to feel more independent.

As Sixth Form colleges are their own independent institutions, with no younger school children on the premises, the atmosphere of a college can feel more mature and liberating and a step up towards a more adult life.

CATEGORY 4:

International students who want to apply for British Universities

There are thousands of international students who arrive in the UK at the ages of 15 or 16 who are eager to get the best possible marks to be able to apply for UK Universities.

CATEGORY 5:

Younger international students who need to improve their English before being accepted on an A-Level course.

Younger students from abroad, whose level of English is not sufficient enough to join mainstream senior schools accept places at these colleges for the GCSE level.

After they have completed their GCSEs, they tend to stay at the same private college or move to a more competitive senior school to complete their A-levels.



5. LEAGUE TABLE/ EXAMINATION RESULTS

League tables are considered to be one of the main indicators of how a school or a college performs academically. It's a very practical tool to use when you need to compare a few educational establishments and should not be underestimated.

As you can see from the table below, some private colleges show great academic achievements from their leavers. Cardiff Sixth Form college for example, remains at the top not only in this league table, but also at the top of all senior schools in the country according to its A-level results, and it attracts the brightest students from both the UK and abroad.

Naturally, this particular college as well as other schools and colleges at the top of leagues tables are very selective. This way, they can ensure that their A level results are always highly ranking, making it very difficult for students to get into these particular colleges.

A*/A	College	Location	Day/Board	Fees, day	Fees, board
91.9	Cardiff Sixth Form College	Cardiff	Both	15,500	41,000
85.38	Concord College	Shrewsbury	Both	14,000	37,800
71.43	Oxford International College	Oxford	Both	21,000	42,000
68.93	Abbey College	Cambridge	Both	29,000	
62.38	d'Overbroeck's	Oxford	Both	23,025	36,375
60.53	CATS College	Canterbury	Both	20,520	37,980
58.04	Bellerbys College	Cambridge	Both	27,060	38,940
57.81	Hurtwood House	Dorking	Both	28,179	42,267
54.23	Bellerbys College	Brighton	Both	27,060	74,140
48.67	Brampton College	Hendon	Day	19,235	
43.22	Bosworth Independent College	Northampton	Both	12,000	29,900
41.73	CATS College	Cambridge	Both	34,720	43,500
41.21	DLD College	London	Both	22,000	49,000
40	Cambridge Tutors College	Greater London	Both	15,600	37,800
39.19	Bath Academy	Bath	Both	16,225	35,000
38.82	Welbeck	Loughborough	Boarding	19,500	
35.24	Mander Portman Woodward	Cambridge	Day	27,225	
35.12	Mander Portman Woodward	London	Day	29,499	
34.56	Cambridge Centre For Sixth Form Studies (CCSS)	Cambridge	Both	21,000	46,700
33.84	Mander Portman Woodward	Birmingham	Day	19,278	
32.13	Rochester Independent College	Rochester	Both	17,500	34,700
31.78	Albemarle Independent College	London	Day	19,750	
31	David Game College	London	Both	19,360	
29.13	Abbey College	Manchester	Both	12,500	
26.22	Kensington Park School Sixth Form	London	Day	22,500	38,400
22.84	Collingham	London	Both	20,850	
19.67	Padworth College	Reading	Both		
15	Ealing Independent College	London	Both		
14.15	Fine Arts College Hampstead	Greater London	Day		

Learning style

We have noticed with our clients that some children who received top marks in their home countries, when transferred to a school or a college here in the UK did not maintain their top marks, even if their English was perfect. At the same time students with average marks back home became high achievers.

We think that there is a link to how students with top marks in their previous schools were studying, many of these students were used to learning and remembering subject material by heart, but this approach is not what is expected from a good student in the UK. British schools and colleges value open minded thinking, rigorous approaches to solving problems and great research skills which is the opposite of simply memorizing information.

All of these factors should be considered when moving to study in a different country, as teaching and learning approaches might be different and serious adjustments must be made in order to do well.

High Pressure Environments

Additionally, before selecting a college on the basis of its academic achievements, it should be considered whether or not the student will thrive in such a highly pressured academic environment, as these competitive settings are not for everyone.

Many bright students do well and receive straight As, but in comparison, in the less competitive colleges, it is greatly down to the personality of the student who would individually need to push themselves more to do well. This factor should always be taken into consideration when choosing a college.

How to make the right choice?

Regardless of league tables, many Sixth Form private colleges are not selective in their intake and take almost everyone who applies. This should not put you off, as many students can improve their grades by two levels in these colleges.

This is very important and is one of the main reason why families look for professional advice for finding a suitable college. From their websites and glossy brochures every educational establishment positions itself as one of the best.

We do understand that it is very difficult to make a true judgment without asking for advice from people who know the industry very well and who could direct you towards a suitable college where your child could demonstrate their full academic potential.

6. CURRICULUM

As we established earlier, Sixth Form colleges mainly cater for 16 – 18-year-old students. These are individuals who are taking their A-levels or equivalent in order to obtain qualifications to join universities straight after the completion of their courses at college.

The main qualifications that are taught at these private colleges are:

- A-level (2 years)
- A-level (1 year intensive)
(not available at traditional Private Senior schools)
- International Baccalaureate
- BTEC diploma (some stages are equivalent to A-levels)
- A-level subject retakes

With an increased demand from the international market who value British education, the following courses are also common for most private colleges:

- GCSE (2 years)
- GCSE (1 year intensive)
(not available at traditional Private Senior schools)
- University Foundation (usually 1 year)
- Preparation for IELTS
- Extra English language tuition



GCSE Courses

In recent years, increasing numbers of colleges are starting to offer GCSE courses either over 1 or 2 years with an emphasis on international students so that they are able to compete in the school market.

It is fair to say that currently their GCSE results do not rival independent schools, mostly because they are taking on international students that need to adapt to the British curriculum or have a low level of English or those who have struggled with GCSEs already.

However, students at these colleges often have remarkable transformations, turning their Ds and Es into As and Bs.

Subject Choice

In terms of offering courses/subjects there is often a rule - the smaller the college, the smaller the range of A level courses on offer. Most small colleges offer the basic courses like English, Maths and Sciences, but the larger colleges usually have a wider range of subjects available as timetable constraints are not as rigid as they would be in a traditional school.

Often, they add a range of vocational courses to the curriculum, which relate to specific careers. It should be noted though that the International Baccalaureate is limited in its availability in these colleges.

Private colleges that have a large intake of international students usually focus on subjects which are in high demand by them, such as Maths, English, Sciences and Business Studies and pay less attention to subjects like Art, Theatre Studies or Modern languages.

There are still exceptional colleges for performing arts, languages and arts/textiles and if you require further guidance on these please let us know.

A-Level System Reform

Under the new linear system that the government introduced in 2015, all A-level exams will take place at the end of Year 13, with no marks from AS-levels (if you take these) contributing to the overall final grade.

Across the board, there will also be less coursework and fewer practical assessments under the new system - making exam revision even more important. Grades will continue to be awarded on an A*-E scale.

Many people ask why they need to work hard at AS if the result doesn't count towards the final A-Level grade? Well, taking an AS exam will help students to measure how they're progressing in their studies and how well suited they are to continue the subject into Year 13. An externally marked AS-level grade can also carry more weight with universities and help teachers to more accurately set the student's predicted grades for University applications.

Studying Skills

In general, private colleges are less formal, but academically they are just as demanding as any good school. Special attention is given to studying skills such as exam technique, essay-writing and note-taking – everything in fact that is needed to ensure that students are fully prepared for the demands of the exam system.

Intensive one year A-Level

Another huge advantage of private colleges is that they offer an Intensive one year A-level course what caters to bright students. There is no such option in traditional Private Senior schools as A-levels are always taught as a 2 year course. Sometimes, instead of joining a university foundation course, brighter students from abroad take a one year A-level course to maximize their chances to get into the best UK Universities such as Oxford and Cambridge.

7. CARRIER GUIDANCE AND UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS

Because the majority of their students go onto universities, Sixth Form private colleges are very good at providing advice, such as help with choosing universities, finding suitable courses and writing UCAS applications. Some colleges also offer more specific advice on university entry, for example for those who want to apply for Oxford/ Cambridge and medical or dentistry schools. They help with preparations for the BMAT or similar exams required for medical students, as well as preparation for mock interviews and various aptitude tests.

Another great advantage when compared to traditional senior schools is that many private colleges offer extra private tuition for the subjects they teach. This is very convenient as a student can have extra one-to-one lessons without leaving the college, so there is no need to find external tutors and take time to travel there for lessons.



8. LOCATION & ACCOMMODATION

One of the first decisions to make is the location of the college and whether or not the student will need to live at home and commute (local students) or will need boarding accommodation (international students). With local students, the decision-making can be quite straightforward and you will be looking within a certain distance of your home. For example, the majority of private colleges in London are located in Central London hence local students from all parts of London and the suburbs can easily commute on a daily basis.

For international students, colleges have options to accommodate them at their own residence (either on site or off site) or with a local family. There is a lot of variety and price flexibility, though it is often cheaper to live with a local family. It is essential to mention that all students under 18 years of age who study in the UK and whose parents live abroad must have an appointed guardian as this is a legal requirement.

As many private colleges continue to focus on accepting international students, their accommodation is usually at a high quality and they are able to provide the desired single en-suite rooms that students look for.

The majority of independent Sixth Form colleges are centrally based in major cities like London, Oxford, Cambridge and some others. In general, city based colleges do not have as much activity infrastructure on-site such as swimming pools, sports facilities and arts / drama centers in comparison to most Private Senior schools. Though, they will usually make up for this by partnering with external locations in the city to provide access to the necessary facilities.

Many of these larger colleges also offer sports facilities and have a program of extra-curricular activities. Pastoral welfare is not forgotten and many colleges have a well organised system of personal tutors who monitor the academic progress and general well-being of the students in their care on a regular basis.

To ensure that quality is maintained, there are usually regular inspections by bodies such as the Independent Schools Council (ISC) the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the British Accreditation Council (BAC).

9. TYPICAL SIZE OF PRIVATE 6TH FORM COLLEGES

Sixth Form colleges in the state sector (free) are often very large with around 1,000 to 3,000 students in total. In the independent sector it is more likely to be between 100 to 400 students. A larger size usually means a greater range of subjects and often a greater choice of vocational courses. However, what you are paying for in the private sector is individual attention as class sizes would typically be 5 to 10 students in an A-level course subject.

There is a limited number of tutorial colleges that specialize in 1:1 tuition with a personal tutor. This would mean that there is only one student in a class with one teacher for the whole duration of the A-level program. The teaching style and program length would be tailored according to the student's needs which is great, but as you can imagine, very costly.

10. MIX OF STUDENTS

Socially, Sixth Form colleges have a mixture of both day and residential students, with some having more day students than boarders, or vice versa. You should be aware that some colleges have more than 90 per cent international admissions and if so your child needs to be comfortable in such a multi-cultural environment, where sometimes all students are boarders. If you prefer a college with a balanced mix of UK Nationals and Foreign students or day with boarding, then we suggest to use our consultancy service where we can provide recommendations tailored to your needs.

While local British students usually move to private Sixth Form colleges to seek more independence or to repeat a year/ retake subjects, most international students choose Sixth Form colleges in order to gain entry to a UK University. Often the college will combine the A level or university foundation courses with English Language tuition for the IELTS examination of the British Council or sometimes the TOEFL of the Language Testing Service of the USA.

In good colleges, different categories of students benefit from studying and living together as they become more culturally enriched and open minded.

11. STUDY HOURS AND ENROLMENT TIME

The number of study hours greatly depends on the chosen course. For example, on an A-level course the students should receive at least 6 hours of course tuition per subject per week. At that level, a great deal of studying is done by students on their own. This is the same for all A-level students at both traditional senior schools and private colleges.

Unlike senior schools, private colleges offer the flexibility of starting in January, April or September.

11. COLLEGE FEES

The final factor to be considered is the financial cost. All Sixth-Form colleges have a scale of charges that depends on the courses taken. Fees are always published on their websites and it would be advisable to look at them as a start to ensure that the costs are within your budget. There is a great variety in price that depends mainly on the location and type of accommodation provided. Sixth Form private college fees are comparable with those at Private Senior schools but this is also an important factor that differentiates them.

The average day tuition fees for a student taking 4 ASs or 3 A2s is going to be in the range of £15,000 to £35,000 per annum in Central London, Cambridge or Oxford. Some colleges set their price as low as £12,000 per annum, though these colleges are usually outside of major city centers. You can also join and pay for just one single AS or A2 subject (usually if you want to retake it), though it would cost you on average around £4,000 per year.

Remember that accommodation costs are going to add between £6,000 and £14,000 on top of the tuition fees, if boarding is required. Studying at traditional school, you would pay one flat fee for the full boarding and you would not be able to choose the accommodation type (single, en-suite etc) as it usually varies depending on the school year. You simply would not be able to pay more or less to have a particular type of accommodation. On the other hand, most Sixth Form colleges do encourage you to choose your preferred type of accommodation and will charge you according to its quality and comfort level.

12. PROS & CONS

We truly believe that British private Sixth Form colleges are great educational establishments and there is no surprise that their number increases every year.

Below, you will find the summary of the main points discussed in this guide to help you make a more informed choice. We understand that there are many different pros and cons and they can vary on opinion, though we as Chelsea Education, based on our years of expertise believe these are the crucial elements to focus on.

CONS

Sixth Form colleges have a lot international students.

Some colleges in order to attract international students have not noticed that they have converted to 'international schools' themselves. Obviously we are in support of international schools; they are great for certain categories of students but in general we believe that there should be a greater mix of both local and international students to interact with and learn from, which is beneficial for everyone.

PROS

Sixth Form colleges offer less extra curriculum activities.

Some colleges do not provide a good activities program and students can feel like they do not belong to a college as a whole if they are not encouraged to take part in shared activities. In this situation, they would only interact with their class peers and after classes leave for their boarding houses or back home. Some students are happy with these arrangements and it is exactly what they were wishing for before joining, however we think that in some colleges this is a shame as they do not create a sense of community.

Sixth Form colleges offer an intensive one year GCSE and A-level course.

It is impossible to take this short-cut in a traditional senior school, as these courses are specifically designed to be taught over a two-year period. However, brighter students or those with special circumstances, (both local and international) can benefit from the intense time-scale and can do very well. Though, it is important to bear in mind that this option is not for everyone and should be considered very carefully.

Sixth Form colleges offer better choice and quality of accommodation.

Unlike traditional boarding schools where all their infrastructure is on-site, most colleges have their accommodation facilities within walking distance, or short commutes in London. The variety of the different types of rooms and facilities to choose from are great, especially in newly built accommodation. If on budget, most colleges are also able to place students with local host families.

Sixth Form colleges have good academic results with often lower entrance requirements.

Many private colleges show excellent academic results and attract ambitious students from the UK and abroad. Apart from a select few at the very top of the league tables, their entrance requirements are usually not that rigorous compared to similar performing Private Senior schools.

Sixth Form colleges offer repeat years and retakes.

Even though some students might want to retake some of their A Level subjects if they are not happy with their results at the end of year 13 - this option is almost impossible in a Private Senior school hence school leavers wishing to have this option move to private colleges. Sixth Form colleges are great for retaking one or a few subjects and many local and international students who were educated in senior schools do benefit from this option.

Sixth Form colleges offer independence/different settings compared to traditional schools.

Everyone matures in their own time, but there are many 16 year olds who want a change of scenery, such as changing from the school they have been attending since childhood. This shift allows them to be immersed in a more adult-like life, to feel more independence and have less control from the school. Of course there are still rules at colleges, but the atmosphere feels very different when compared to a traditional school and this attracts many students. Very often their infrastructure such as teaching blocks, accommodation and other facilities are off site, so the students are able to feel more like university students.

Sixth Form colleges start their courses at different times during the year.

The majority of colleges have three intakes per year – in September, January and April. This is a huge advantage and tailors for a great number of students especially for those who move to a different educational establishment in a middle of an academic year or are arriving from abroad.



13. LIMITED TIME FREE PLACEMENT OFFER

We would be extremely happy if this short guide shines a light on a topic that you were uncertain of previously and we hope that it has helped you to make a more well informed decision.

However, if you feel that you would need more advice and professional help, we are offering this service for free - for a limited period of time only. Please do contact us on 02071931676 or fill out an enquiry form and we will be glad to give you our best advice.

This free service would be as substantial as our other bespoke services that we charge a fee for. Our ambition is to offer this free service to at least 250 families from all over the world, in celebration of our 10th year in business.